

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

Department of African Literature

**HYDRO-COLONIALISM: A HYDRO-CRITICAL READING
OF THREE TEXTS ON KARIBA**

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Declaration

I, Luck Makuyana declare that this research report is my own original work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in African Literature in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

Signature.....Luck Makuyana

Dedication

In dedication to Lacey Makuyana, Philemon Makuyana, Margaret Makuyana and Oliver Makuyana.

Abstract

This research report offers a hydro-critical reading of three texts on Kariba dam. Kariba dam becomes a source of narrative temporality that reminds us that colonization was as much a struggle for water as it was for land, a realisation that helps us to reimagine Southern African colonization and decolonization discourse from almost exclusively land-based perspectives. Although the texts I have selected are largely binary and are informed by colonial schemas, my watery analysis aims to lay bare these structures and highlight the points at which these binaries become unsustainable. I argue that immersing colonialism in water underscores the paradoxes of colonization and decolonization more sharply. The theoretical framework for this research draws on Isabel Hofmeyr's concept of hydro-colonialism (2019) and Rob Nixon's notion of slow violence (2011), a combination of theories that offers ways to think about water and hydrological themes from an ecological and post-colonial perspective. The research report considers the use of water as a weapon of political terror, explores colonization of water, examines the colonization of the idea of water, critiques colonial constructions of water and reads water as a narrative technique.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief historical context on the construction of Kariba dam before turning to the aims and arguments of the research. The subsequent two sections motivate the study and the three chosen texts. Thereafter, focus turns to the theoretical section where the concepts of hydro-colonialism (Isabel Hofmeyr) and ‘slow violence’ (Rob Nixon) are unpacked. The next section provides an overview of Kariba scholarship drawing on the following areas: literary histories of Kariba, Kariba dam and the politics of decolonization and the related socio-political and ecological concerns. The methodological section follows before the chapter concludes with a delineation of the chapters.

The Rhodesian Federation government constructed the Kariba dam wall across Zambezi river at Kariba Gorge from 1955 to 1959 and deepened British colonial rule in Southern Africa. The initial 1889 Pioneer Column-led colonization process had left Tonga people undisturbed in their riverine lives. David Howarth (1961: 24) states that their location was “...so hot and so useless, and the Tonga so insignificant, that the British did not bother to conquer it or make a treaty with its owners.” The situation changed in 1956 when the Rhodesian Federation government decided to exploit the hydroelectrical potential of the Zambezi river through building Kariba dam. Nixon (2014: 189) suggests that such “[b]ig dams are ... diversionary in a triple sense. They divert water-and through water, land-from the powerless to the powerful. But they also divert attention, their glistening enchantments throwing into shadow unimagined communities.” This research report explores depictions of that tri-diversion in three texts which draw on Rhodesia’s Kariba dam project. It considers the portrayal of Tonga people, Zambezi river’s inspirited waters and how water becomes an innovative narrative tool for capturing colonial themes through its material properties such as color, state, movement and type.

The three texts I consider are Frank Clements’s *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God* (1959), David Howarth’s *The Shadow of the Dam* (1961) and Bob Nyanja’s ‘Nyaminyami: The River God’ (2017). I anchor the research in Isabel Hofmeyr’s concept of hydro-colonialism (2019) which complicates the traditional post-colonial frame through introducing an aquatic dimension, useful for my purposes since the idea underscores the discourse of the mega-dam. Hydro-colonialism connotes colonization of water and colonisation by means of water. I

argue that through colonizing water, the Rhodesian government drew attention to the prominence of water rather than land in the process of colonization. The Zambezi river taming project fulfilled at least four colonial goals: subduing Africa's 'wild' nature, generating 'cheap' electricity, recreating nature in the image of the metropole and displacing human and non-human life from the Zambezi river basin. Concerning the first objective, the installation of Kariba dam hydro-electric power plant fueled colonialist "triumphalist discourse" (JoAnn McGregor, 2009: 15) arising from the subjugation of 'untamed' Zambezi river and 'monstrous' Nyaminyami, its god. In relation to the second goal, Lake Kariba helped satiate the British settler's craving for spacious waterscapes in a land-locked colony and "...demonstrate that their languages-and implicitly their entire way of life-belonged in the Zambezi Basin" (David McDermott Hughes, 2006: 838). Concerning the third objective, booming Rhodesian industries, mines and farms benefited from a 'cheap' source of electrical power. The last goal captures the ruination of Tonga lives-material and spiritual-and incalculable animal/plant species as the rising waters of the human-made lake Kariba inundated Gwembe Valley basin.

Through the lens of hydro-colonialism that reads for and through water, I seek to unmoor Southern African literary studies from almost exclusively land-based narratives and complicate well-known colonial and post-colonial discourse on the British colonization of Zambia and Zimbabwe. If post-colonialism champions decolonization, what possibilities and complications of decolonization inhere within Hydrocolonialism? I argue that immersing colonialism in water underscores the paradoxes of colonization and decolonization more sharply.

Justification

The hydro-colonialism framework enables us to reinscribe, re-read and re-articulate the narratives of landlocked Zimbabwe and Zambia through the waters of Zambezi river that links the two nations to the Indian Ocean. This famous river is the longest and largest in Southern Africa and the fourth longest and largest on the African continent after the Nile, Congo and Niger rivers. Zambezi river meanders through six countries-Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique and Angola-before it feeds into the Indian Ocean. It demarcates the political borders between Zambia and Namibia; Botswana and Zambia; and Zimbabwe and Zambia. I use political borders to draw attention to their porous nature at social levels. The Zambezi river also houses *Mosi-oa-Tunya* (re-named Victoria Falls by David Livingstone after the British Queen Victoria), one of the seven natural wonders of the world according to the

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It also supplies forty percent of Southern African electrical power needs through Cahora Bassa (in Mozambique) and Kariba (Zambia and Zimbabwe) power plants. It is no surprise that Zambezi river has been a source of interest to Tonga people, European explorers/settlers, politicians, tourists, academics and writers. In consequence, scholarship on this river and Kariba dam across diverse academic disciplines abounds.

It is curious that most scholarship on Rhodesian hydro-colonialism stems from white male writers whose prejudices and silences inspire this research. The submerged narrative of indigenous Tonga people invite attention. That narrative seems to flow in the waters of Zambezi river and Nyaminyami, its guardian. Nyaminyami's palpable influence upon Zambezi river imaginaries-both Tonga people's and Rhodesians'-problematizes the derision of indigenous cosmological beliefs in colonial narratives. Such condescension manifests in *The Shadow of the Dam* where the author ridicules that:

It was widely believed, and reported in the Press, that the Tonga worshiped a river god in the form of a huge serpent which lived in the Zambesi, and that they had witch doctors who comically predicted that the serpent would be angry with the white men's wall and knock it down. In short, the Tonga became a laughingstock. But these stories told by city people about the Tonga were as far from the truth as any told by the Tonga about the city people, and sympathy for the Tonga, however sincere, could hardly cross such gulfs of misunderstanding.
[1961: 73]

On the other hand, and nearer to the Tonga conceptualization of Nyaminyami, Clements writes in *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God* (1959: 76) that the Kariba dam project endured a "...three-year battle against the most violent if not the most powerful river in Africa". Through Clements' intervention, Nyanja's text and other sources that this project will consider, I argue that Nyaminyami resembles venerable deities from other global cultures. This research project

reads the Zambezi river as a deep and informative cultural text which inspires liquid and intricate insights into the British colonization of Southern Africa.

Primary Texts

The three main texts for this research project are: *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God* by Clements (1959), *The Shadow of the Dam* by Howarth (1961); and an audio-visual documentary ‘Nyaminyami: The River God’ (2017) directed by Bob Nyanja for China Global Television Network News (CGTN)¹. Clements was a prominent Rhodesian journalist, broadcaster, author, farmer, naval commander and politician who rose to become the mayor of Salisbury before returning to Britain. He brings to this research insights into Rhodesian colonial discourse, Zambezi river and Nyaminyami-based Tonga religious beliefs. Clements’ other notable works include *Arab Regional Organizations* (1992), a text which reflects his interest in international relations, and *A Bike Ride Through My Life* (2011), a memoir that recounts his lifelong fascination with bicycles. On the other hand, Howarth was a prominent British journalist, author, naval commander and historian whose text provides a classical colonial perspective on the construction of the Kariba dam. A prolific writer, Howarth produced more than two dozen books-mostly works of history but also novels and an autobiography². Finally, ‘Nyaminyami: The River God’ provides a Tonga insider perspective-historical and current-on the Kariba dam construction narrative through interviews with local Kariba community members. It is this perspective that is marginalized in colonial narratives which enables the comparative approach I pursue in rereading Rhodesian and Tonga discourse on the colonization of the Zambezi river and basin. I now turn to explore some narrative devices of these texts.

To begin with, the three texts are journalistic, and this impacts how we read them. For instance, an insertion in the copyright page of *The Shadow of the Dam* states that “Chapters 1 and 19 of

¹ Countless books and documentaries have been written and made on Kariba Dam spanning a wide range of disciplines and genres that include tourism, hunting, conservationism, anthropology, policy studies, fantasy, travelogues, journalism, film and fiction. Some of these texts include *The Old Drift* (2019) by Namwali Serpell, *In the Shadow of Nyaminyami* (2012) by Ron Thomson, *Whispers from the Depths: The Kariba story* (2015) by Liz Wickins and Mike Wickins, *Crocodile Fever* (2019) by Lawrence Earl and *Kariba* by Daniel Clarke.

² Some of Howarth’s texts are *We Die Alone: A WWII Epic of Escape and Endurance* (1954), *The Shetland Bus* (1951), *The Sledge Patrol: A WWII Epic of Escape, Survival, and Victory* (1957), *Waterloo: A Near Run Thing* (1968) and *The Voyage of the Armada: The Spanish Story* (1981).

this book are based on articles which were written for the Saturday Evening Post and the Sunday Times of London” (iii). In the same vein, “Nyaminyami: The River God” is an audio-visual documentary that was produced for CGTN broadcasting. Similarly, the biographical section of *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God* mentions that Clements is a journalist. These journalists bring into their works conventions of their trade that include fairness, balance, objectivity and rigorous research. These claims to ‘truthful’ or objective narrativization validate and promote the texts as factual non-fiction works that draw on the building of Kariba Dam. Dorrit Cohn (2000) notes that nonfiction works should be read in dialogue with real-life events and their documentation. The reader’s knowledge of the journalistic standards mentioned above and the historical event in question invites one to measure their manifestation in the chosen works. This is in line with Suzanne Keen’s (2003: 13) reminder that:

[t]hough readers are flexible, they bring expectations and knowledge with them when they read. Their experience and judgment of a narrative in part stems from their successfully recognizing the position that the text asks them to assume, whether they collaborate by joining the authorial audience, or whether they dissent by deliberately reading against the grain.

Where I read against the grain, it matters to me what, how and why the texts focalize and marginalize certain information.

The three texts also make use of the third person narrative technique that renders the crafters omniscient and in total control of the telling process. As Keen (2003: 2) observes, “the mediation of a narrator becomes a core characteristic of narrative.” The omniscience and omnipotence of the third person narrator again comes with promises of fair, ‘truthful’ and objective representation of the issues at hand. This omniscient narrator stands outside and above the narration “...and freely informs the reader about any and all details about a host of characters” (ibid: 36) and the concerns raised in the text with purported detachment and neutrality. Put differently, the qualities that are associated with the third person narrator suggest to the reader that the chosen texts are reliable and credible, unlike the case with first person

narration. These conventions of narrative technique inform my close reading in this Research Report. I consider those points at which the promises of neutrality, multivocality and veracity crumble and hold up.

The above narrative conventions can mislead the reader into thinking that the three non-fiction texts are comprehensive, ‘truthful’ and believable. However, when we consider the ideological conventions that inform each text, we realize that there are greater forces that challenge the narratives’ claims to truth. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle note that “the telling of a story is always bound up with power, with questions of authority, property, and domination” (2009: 54). The three texts I explore in this study exhibit colonial epistemes around nature, politics, economics, religion and civilization either in legitimation-as appears to be the case with *The Shadow of the Dam* and *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God*-or in renunciation as seems to be the case with Nyanja’s documentary. In a way, the texts are mired in colonial and anti-colonial binaries in a troubling manner that makes them two sides of the same coin. I problematize those binaries through underscoring areas of convergence between the two worlds. All the same, the combination of two written texts and an audio-visual narrative enables me to explore the artistic representation of southern African mega-dam discourse. Both mediums make use of aquatic narrativization aesthetics that I read through the following theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

In constructing a framework for this research, I have drawn on Hofmeyr’s *Hydro-colonialism* (forthcoming) and Nixon’s *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), a combination of texts that offers ways to think about water and hydrological themes from an ecological and post-colonial perspective.

Hydro-colonialism combines ‘hydro’ and ‘colonialism’ to produce an innovative tool for interrogating colonial control of water, people and the non-human. Hofmeyr coins the neologism indicating that:

hydro-colonialism riffs off the term “postcolonialism” and like that concept, has a wide potential remit which could include colonization by way of water (various forms of maritime imperialism), colonization of water (occupation of land with water resources, the declaration of territorial waters, the militarization and geopoliticization of oceans), a colony on (or in) water (the ship as a miniature colony or a penal island) and colonization of the idea of water (establishing water as a secular resource). [forthcoming; 1]

From its wide scope, I build on the following aspects: colonization by way of water as white Rhodesians create lake Kariba and displace Tonga people and non-human organisms from the Zambezi basin; colonization of water as Rhodesians re-channel and control the river through the Kariba dam wall; and colonization of the idea of water through human imaginaries of water. The last aspect enables the reconsideration of indigenous Tonga water cosmologies (Nyaminyami-based) misconstrued and derided in classical Rhodesian texts. For as Hofmeyr explains:

hydro-colonialism seeks to critique colonial constructions and representations of water and to undo these. One method for relativizing such constructions is to examine older indigenous epistemologies around water and the oceans while paying attention to the ways in which these pre-colonial and colonial hydro-epistemologies interact and creolize. [ibid: 14]

I explore the interaction and creolization between what Manichean (post)colonialism considers irreconcilable ideologies such as black versus white, rationalism versus superstition and Jehovah versus Nyaminyami. Moreover, the last aspect permits comparison of white Rhodesia’s (European) conception of water as an exploitable resource and the Tonga conception of water as a sacred source of life. A hydro-colonial framework enables fluid slippages and seepages in subject positions between human and non-human, colonizer and colonized and related epistemological formulations. Foregrounding water as both a subject

of/for history and a tool for analysis makes it possible to recognize symbiotic vulnerabilities, responsibilities, benefits and ideologies between Tonga and British people.

The hydro-methodological approach for this project opens two possibilities. Hofmeyr (ibid) suggests that the first constitutes:

reading-for-water, paying careful attention to what water does in any text. Does it institute the plot (a mermaid emerges from a river), facilitate romance, destroy and erode, surface a dead body, institute family feuds, does it dry up, is it used for torture and as a weapon of political terror (drowning of political prisoners), does it irrigate the suburban garden and uphold class/race/gender hierarchies, does it house the ancestors? [ibid: 17-18]

Besides the materiality of water that Clements and Nyanja manipulate to narrate their concerns, the second aspect considers the notion of inspirited waters that manifests through Nyaminyami's presence in Zambezi river. It thus becomes clear that there are alternative modes of conceptualizing and relating to water apart from the western scientific approach that perceives water as a vacant space that comprises minuscule hydrogen and oxygen molecules.

While Hofmeyr provides a useful framework that helps this research to read for water and critique colonial constructions of water, Nixon's concept of slow violence (2011) offers further insights into the marginalization of indigenous communities by forces of modernization. The notion of slow violence speaks to the deferred and long-term harmful impact that results from the exploitation of the environment and poor people by powerful nations and multinational corporations. Slow violence is less visible and less dramatic and thus tends to escape mainstream media that is more responsive to the melodramatic violence that arises from such phenomenon as wars, cyclones and earthquakes. Nixon demonstrates how the environment and poor people are construed as consumables and disposables under a callous capitalist age. It is capitalist greed that leads to the ruination of the environment and poor people. He deplors

that "...it is those people lacking resources who are the principal casualties of slow violence. Their unseen poverty is compounded by the invisibility of the slow violence that permeates so many of their lives" (2011: 4). One major concern of his book "...is representational: how to devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to capture the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects" (ibid: 3). This research report responds to that crucial question through analyzing three texts on Kariba mega-dam discourse³. Nixon (2011: 179) observes of mega-dam projects that:

a megadam obliterates a flood plain whose ebb and flow has shaped the agricultural, fishing, fruit and nut harvesting-and hence nutritional-rhythms of a community, it also drowns the past: the submergence zone swallows place-based connections to the dead, the dead as living presences who move among past, present, and future, animating time with connective meaning.

Nixon alerts us to the traumatic consequences of transplanting shoreline communities from the source of their livelihoods, affective homes and ancestral histories. I pursue this angle in relation to Tonga people who have failed to adjust to a life removed from the Zambezi river basin. Importantly, Nixon hints at the often-silenced dimension of spiritual and ancestral links with the environment that traumatizes displaced people. He stresses that "[a]vernacular landscape is shaped by the affective, historically textured maps that communities have devised over generations, maps replete with names and routes, maps alive to significant ecological and surface geological features" (2011:4). This study bears this concern on the Tonga people's belief in the animated waters of the Zambezi river which I read as an insightful cultural text on vernacular cosmologies.

Literature Review

³ Mega-dam discourse considers the controversies that arise from the construction of large dams. Issues of human rights abuses, environmental degradation, competing development narratives, politics and multinational finance come to the fore. For more see John Abbink (2012), Rutgerd Boelens (2019), Atif Ansar, Bent Flyvbjerg, Alexander Budzier and Daniel Lunn (2014) and Jeroen Warner et al 2019.

As one of the major global technological and engineering events of the twentieth century, Kariba dam has generated a substantial body of scholarship and popular writing across a range of disciplines that include journalism, tourism, environmentalism, development, anthropology, religion, history, geophysics and engineering. Themes taken up include the role of the dam in decolonization (Julia, Tischler: 2013), the ecological and sociopolitical afterlives of the dam (Christopher, Magadza: 2006), the impact of the dam on Tonga religious beliefs (Lillian, Siwela: 2015), race and landscape (David, Hughes: 2009) and the largely colonial views that dominate popular writing on the topic (JoAnn, Macgregor: 2009).

A comprehensive review of the writing on Kariba is beyond the scope of an MA research report. Instead, this literature review draws out three themes: literary histories of Kariba; Kariba dam and the politics of decolonization; and the socio-political and ecological concerns of Kariba. Each section is primarily anchored around one text, although cross references to cognate works are also made.

Literary Histories of Kariba

Both the Zambezi and the dam built on it have generated vast bodies of writing. These have been comprehensively captured by McGregor in *Crossing the Zambezi: The Politics of Landscape on a Central African Frontier* (2009). For our purposes, the important themes are Zambezi river and human settlement patterns, landscape and belonging, religion, tourism and wildlife.

The monograph explores the predominantly colonial writings on Zambezi. McGregor highlights "...the ways in which the course and flow of the Zambezi have shaped history, the river's shifting role as link, barrier or conduit, the political, economic and cultural uses of the technological projects that have transformed the landscape, and their legacies in the conflicts of today" (ibid: 2). It is a comprehensive contribution to the contentious discourse on landscape, narration and power in Southern Africa.

Just like other major rivers such as the Nile, Zambezi river has shaped human settlements. Useful for this research are the Tonga riverine communities of Gwembe Valley who benefited from the waters of Zambezi. Mobilizing her ideas within the frame of 'crossing', McGregor

transcends the river's contribution to the socio-economic survival of Tonga people-through irrigation agriculture and fishing-as she gestures towards its strategic advantage in protecting them from diverse competing African polities. She notes that the skill of crossing the river distinguished Tonga people as riverine people while inexperience thereof stood as a barrier to trespassers such as the Ndebele and Kololo people. Even in the case of the late British colonizers, *The Shadow of the Dam* depicts that the fierce rapids and turbulence of Zambezi river helped to repel British settler interests until the 1950's when its potential to generate electrical power became irresistible. From this insight we gather at least two factors that help explain the Tonga reverence for Zambezi river and displeasure with colonial borders; the river had prior to British colonization shielded Tonga people from internecine catastrophic raids; and the creation of the border that demarcates Zambia from Zimbabwe separated relatives on opposite shores. Nonetheless, isolation of Tonga people prior to the Kariba project fostered perceptions of their 'otherness' if not 'mysteriousness'. Yet as McGregor observes, although frontier ideas of Tonga people as "different and backward" (2009: 3) persisted, monumental colonial interventions that include "...the Victoria Falls bridge and Kariba dam, which fundamentally transformed the river's strategic role, altered its ecology, redirected its energy, and re-configured access and control" (ibid). To the British, "...environmental conquest provided a moral justification for colonial rule and played a central part in ideas about race and the legitimation of white privilege" (ibid: 5-6).

The pioneering European writings on Zambezi river begin with Portuguese explorers such as Vasco de Gama, Peter Cabrel, Tome Lopes and Pero de Naira who drew maps of Central Africa⁴. De Gama "named the Zambezi 'the river of good omens'... because...the presence of Arab dhows at the delta showed he was nearing the Indo-African trade routes which he sought" (n.p: www.zambezibookcompany.com). Elsewhere, Portuguese missionaries such as Father Silveira also provide scholarship on Zambezi river and the hinterland that was rich in valuable trade items such as gold and ivory. Father Silveira contacted Mwene Mutapa of the Munhumutapa kingdom and by 1560 Portuguese colonization was established. That dominance later suffered catastrophic setbacks that opened the way for British occupation.

⁴ For more on Portuguese incursions into Central Africa see "A short history of Zambia and its people" Facebook page and Malyn Newitt's (2005) *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion 1400-1668*.

In relation to English writings on Zambezi river, David Livingstone⁵ is the reputed pioneer. He relied on Portuguese maps of Zambezi to explore the same territories. Some of his works include; *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (1857) which chronicles his gospel and adventure activities in Southern Africa; and *Dr. Livingstone's Expedition to the Zambesi* (1866) where he describes Zambezi river as savage, sinister and hazardous. His adverse characterization of Zambezi contradicts De Gama's positive portrayal I noted earlier. The difference seems to arise from the disparate motives of the two: whereas De Gama was motivated by trade interests, Livingstone was inspired by the goal of spreading Christianity to 'heathen' territories. As the second chapter of this research report demonstrates, it is Livingstone's characterization of Zambezi river that informs Howarth's representation of the same in *The Shadow of the Dam*. I argue that colonial depictions of Zambezi river as 'wild' and 'sinister' sets the stage for British colonization of the river.

McGregor demonstrates that British technological interventions on Zambezi river satiated the desire to subdue it. From this basis, the 1905 construction of the Victoria Falls bridge across Zambezi river becomes the first momentous step. This bridge was symbolic in "...reshaping geographical connections...the taming of the central African environment... [and as] the highest bridge of its kind in the world, it was the object of a triumphalist discourse, that envisaged 'a new Chicago' on the banks of the Zambezi..." (2009: 15). As I argue in chapter three of this report, the exaltation of British colonization of Southern African nature (Zambezi river) reached its apex during the construction of Kariba dam from 1955 to 1960. The dam became what McGregor aptly terms "...a symbolic initiative that captured the imagination of global publics, fueled an expansionist confidence in Southern Rhodesia and was used to justify late-colonial rule" (ibid: 115).

The dominant colonial discourse on Kariba dam celebrated the 'white man's genius' and "...justified turning the Southern Rhodesian shores into a white playground devoted to conservation and tourism and allowed settlers to monopolize the new multi-million-dollar fishing industry that grew up around the lake" (ibid). This observation shows how Tonga people became casualties of 'progress' and "...an icon of the primitive [that] justified their

⁵ David Livingstone was a pioneer British explorer, medical practitioner, Christian missionary and writer who laid the base for British perceptions and treatment of Africa.

exclusion” (ibid). In chapter two of this research, I demonstrate how Howarth manipulates the supposed primitiveness of Tonga people to vindicate their displacement from their shoreline lands. McGregor also writes that “[m]uch of the tourist literature simply ignored the Tonga and represented the place as an uninhabited wilderness before the dam” (ibid: 123). Where they were not ignored, they became souvenirs of pre-historical time, reminding the ‘modern’ human where (s)he evolved from. I argue in chapter two of this research report that such contemptuous attitudes frame the colonization of Tonga people as a redemptive initiative that unmoors them from stagnation and ushers them into historical time.

Macgregor moreover illustrates that European writers have personified Zambezi river, imbuing it with a supernatural force, represented by a river god, Nyaminyami. She goes on to suggest that “...the white writers whose river stories pitted European science against the forces of a primeval river god appeared to need myths of a powerful, enchanted natural world more than those who lived with or were displaced from the river” (ibid: 121). Focusing on journalistic coverage of the scheme, McGregor notices a consistent “...popularization of the idea of local belief in a river god-once again repeating Livingstone and the nineteenth-century travelers and missionaries who had first popularized the idea but using it to somewhat different ends” (ibid:121). She notes that the trope of Nyaminyami “...was part of a derogatory and cruel caricature of the Tonga developed during the move that made them a ‘laughingstock’” (ibid). Whilst her reading captures the manipulation of Nyaminyami for caricaturing purposes in colonial discourse such as *The Shadow of the Dam*, it becomes problematic in unwittingly dismissing the Tonga river god as a mere fictitious creation of white writers. I demonstrate in chapter three of this study that there is more to Nyaminyami than meets the colonial gaze. It must be remembered that Nyaminyami preceded and outlived the Kariba dam moment. With recourse to Nyanja’s “Nyaminyami: The River God” and Frank Clément’s *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God*, I offer a broader religious conceptualization of Nyaminyami that places him besides reputable deities such as the Judeo-Christian Jehovah.

In my conceptualization of Nyaminyami I also build on Siwila’s work on the encroachment of sacred sites in Zimbabwe (2015) where she argues that “[t]he embedded belief systems of the Tonga people cause them to believe that the Zambezi river is a sacred place for Nyaminyami. This is a very strong belief and once this sacred place is infringed the community feel

accountable to the ancestors” (2015: 149). The construction of the Kariba dam wall infringed upon sacred Tonga religious beliefs. This point explains in part why Tonga people resisted attempts to relocate them. The other part concerns the ancestral graves which could not be abandoned without incurring the wrath of the ‘living’ dead. The Tonga ecosystem hinges on reciprocal coexistence among human beings (both dead and alive), animals and non-animate entities such as water, land and plants. Siwila shows how modernization threatens indigenous sacred sites that “...may not be seen as an issue by development expertise and the policy makers whose interest would be to improve the area in terms of bringing new technology” (2015: 45). She highlights the invisible spiritual violence of colonization, which has significance for this study.

McGregor further delineates colonial writings into wildlife works that again “... evoked a common body of self-justifying stereotypes of the white man in Africa, and of the superiority of European science and technology” (ibid: 120). These wild-life narratives sustained the impression that Europeans cared more for animals and nature than indigenous people who were considered obstacles to colonial development, hence their violent displacements. This perception was bolstered through the Rhodesian government’s commitment of more resources for the rescue of marooned animals than the resettlement of Tonga people. This preferential treatment is also noticeable in the allocation of more fertile land to animals through the creation of game reserves⁶ near Lake Kariba that helped foster animosity between Tonga people and wild animals.

Curiously, the dam became a site for competing ownership claims between various groups in colonial Rhodesian writings. As McGregor notes, white settlers and advocates of British imperialism “...rallied landscape and ancestors to their political cause” (ibid:2). Lake Kariba became an indelible emblem of colonization’s transformation of ‘wild’ territories and manifestation of the visions of British pioneers such as Cecil John Rhodes and David Livingstone. Elsewhere Hughes (2010) explicates that British white settlers sought to re-align Rhodesia’s environment following that of Britain. Landlocked Rhodesia’s parched terrain disoriented British aesthetic sensibilities familiar with vast waterscapes. For “[a]s children of

⁶ There are numerous game reserves that surround Lake Kariba which include Matusadonha, Zambezi National Park, Hwange National Park, Chizarira National Park and Mana Pools National Park.

the glaciers, Britons and other northern Europeans appreciated a well-watered, Wordsworthian topography” (ibid: 29). To compensate for the loss, at first paintings⁷ and novels⁸ provided hydrological images that helped quench the thirst for waterscapes. Nonetheless, “[e]ven the most febrile imagination could not dispel Zimbabwe’s hydrological deficit altogether. If they wanted lakes, white settlers would have to engineer them, and that is precisely what the Rhodesian government did at Kariba” (ibid: XIV). Hughes suggests that Kariba Dam enabled white Rhodesians to create a home away from home. As this section has demonstrated, the dam inspired copious artistic and academic works across multiple disciplines. This research project contributes to the literary work on Kariba.

Kariba dam and the politics of decolonization

As a major technological and engineering intervention in the sub-continent, Kariba had far-reaching political consequences. These have recently been analyzed by Tischler (2013) who considers the role of Kariba dam in Zimbabwe’s decolonization. For the purposes of this project, the important issues in her work are Kariba and late British imperialism, fissures within white Rhodesians and black nationalism in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Tischler submits that the Kariba scheme contributed to Britain’s post World War Two colonial antics as the crumbling empire sought renaissance through promoting megadevelopment projects in their satellite territories. This realisation explains the immense prominence of Britain throughout *The Shadow of the Dam* and contribution towards the construction of Kariba dam. Citing Andersen (1960: 5), Tischler concurs that “...to its supporters, the Kariba Dam project was ‘a lasting impression of great Federal beginnings and a great future promise for our country’” (2013: 2). She goes on to show that the power scheme was crucial in meeting the mounting energy needs of the Federation’s future economic development program that hinged on mining, agriculture and industrial production. So, when Queen Elizabeth officially opened the prestigious project, “...her presence symbolized efforts to reconcile the Federation’s future with its past, technology with nature, the white minority with the black majority, and the aspiring ‘multiracial’ nation with the rest of the world” (ibid: 1). Indeed, the project

⁷ For more on Rhodesian paintings see works of Robert Paul who was an abstract painter and Dinah Beaton.

⁸ Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* (1950) captures the difficulties British settlers encountered in adapting to unfamiliar Savannah climate and environmental conditions.

demonstrated the role of multinational finance, intercontinental cooperation and modern technology in “...marking the transition from late-colonial ‘development’ to international ‘modernization’” (ibid: 10). I focus on the international dimension of Kariba in chapter three of this report where I consider Clements’ claim that through mobilizing workers from numerous European nations that had been at loggerheads during World War Two, the success of the Kariba project reminded Europe of what it could achieve as a united front.

Tischler further highlights the internal fissures within white Rhodesians as those in Zambia opposed the dam while those in Zimbabwe supported the project. These struggles were so serious that the Federation collapsed in 1963, a mere decade after its formation. This reminds us that there was no uniform white or black perspective on development. Perceptions, positions and camps shifted and sometimes overlapped across binaries.

I also build on Tischler’s observation that “...the Kariba Dam complicated the formation of opposition, bringing not only hardship but also opportunities to the area” (5). This is an important intervention that captures the ambivalence of colonization and complications of decolonization in Zimbabwe and Zambia. In her own words, “Kariba rather points to continuities and deep entanglements between the colonial and postcolonial eras” (5). It is from this basis that I conceptualize colonization as water which embraces the contradictions of life and death. This framing makes it possible to avoid simplistic “...postmodern disenchantment with technocratic modernization [that] has often led to a mere reversal of the grand narratives of universal progress” (ibid: 8). Recognizing the positive aspects of Lake Kariba enables us to perceive Tonga resistance not as an atavistic rage against modernization, but as a call for meaningful inclusion and participation.

However, the dream to build a multiracial Rhodesian nation remained elusive because whites happened to be the main beneficiaries from the development project while blacks seemed to be the ultimate casualties. As Tischler reminds us, Kariba had “...serious drawbacks-most centrally the chaotic evictions of 57,000 Gwembe Tonga north and south of the Zambesi River” (ibid: 2). While there is no refuting the benefits of Kariba hydro-electric power plant to Rhodesia’s overall development and the role of class and economic factors behind the venture,

it cannot be overlooked that “...big hydroelectric schemes⁹ have typically inflicted hardship on economically and politically marginalized rural communities, forcing them to resettle and adapt to changing environments” (ibid: 7). In chapter two of this report, I consider how Tonga people have struggled to adapt their riverine lifestyles to upland resettlement areas.

Socio-political and ecological concerns

The socio-political and ecological consequences of Kariba have been extensively documented and discussed. Particularly prominent has been the focus on animals affected by the rising waters and the code-named Operation Noah¹⁰ rescue of some of them that mobilized resources and pro-animal sentiments across the globe. The ecological consequences for Tonga communities were especially far-reaching and have been highlighted by several scholars. Useful for my purposes is the work of Christopher Magadza (2006) who highlights the following themes: the material and psychological cost of the project, the impact of population increase on the ecosystem of the Kariba basin and how the widespread use of pest control chemicals to clear insect disease vectors from areas designated for human resettlement harmed the environment and animals. I find these themes useful for the argument I make that the Kariba project overprivileged ‘larger’ national economic interests above the ‘lesser’ concerns of Tonga people, animals and the environment, all of which bore the full brunt of the move and are yet to recover.

In relation to the losses that Tonga people suffered, Magadza echoes Nixon and argues that “[f]orced relocation of poor communities in the course of water resource development can lead to long-lasting, trans-generational social traumas” (2006: 283). Magadza goes on to note that “...although the displaced Tonga were allocated alternative land, it could not replace their ecological and cultural ties with the Gwembe valley floodplain ecosystem” (ibid: 277). The observation on cultural ties to the environment invites attention to the point that displacement meant more to Tonga people than just the loss of homes and lands which could be measured

⁹ Some major hydroelectric schemes in Africa that witnessed the displacement of local communities are the Inga project of DRC, Akosombo project of Ghana and The Grand Renaissance project of Ethiopia.

¹⁰ A lot of work has been done on Operation Noah that includes documentaries, fiction and non-fictional texts. Examples include *Operation Noah* (1959) by Charles Lagus, *Animal Dunkirk: the Story of Lake Kariba* (1959) by Eric Robbins and Ronald Legge, *‘Operation Noah’, the Greatest Animal Rescue Since the Ark* (1961) by Eric Robbins and ‘Operation Noah Video’ on www.chesterford.co.uk.

and replaced in material terms as Howarth contends was done. There was also an immeasurable, intangible and irreplaceable loss in terms of connections to ancestors whose bones were not relocated to resettlement areas and various worship shrines that were abandoned.

Besides the loss of spiritual ties with their prior environment, Tonga people also lost crucial ecological ties which had sustained their irrigation based agricultural practices and perennial food needs. Magadza demonstrates that the upland resettlement areas were so arid, infertile and sparsely vegetated that it was impossible to sustain irrigation agriculture and hunting activities of Tonga people. Expectedly, most Tonga people were condemned to acute food insecurities that are still evident today. I use this insight in chapter two of this research to counter the claim that Howarth makes in *The Shadow of the Dam* that the relocation of Tonga people was well calculated and as beneficial to them as it was to the entire Federation. Moreover, although Lake Kariba brought massive entrepreneurial opportunities in fishing, tourism and construction industries, most Tonga people could not participate because of inexperience, racial segregation and importation of labor from foreign countries such as Malawi.

It is tragic but symptomatic of most casualties of mega-dam projects that Tonga resettlement areas still lack basic amenities such as water and electricity. Magadza (2006) deplors that the miserable socio-economic circumstances of Tonga people bred moral decadence and social ills such as prostitution that has seen "... Kariba lakeshore settlements...become the highest STD-risk area of Zimbabwe¹¹" (ibid: 278). The above reminds us that mega-dam projects drown the interests of indigenous communities and often render them vulnerable to unforeseen long-term harm, what Nixon aptly terms slow violence. I will attend to this concern at length in Chapter Two.

¹¹ Zimbabwe has one of the highest rates of sexually transmitted diseases in sub-Saharan Africa and the globe. *Avert* website (2020) reports that Zimbabwe has 1.4 million people living with HIV although it is suspected that the number is more. Hot spots for STDs in Zimbabwe include tourist areas such as Kariba and Victoria Falls, mining towns, border towns such as Beitbridge and urban centres. Zimbabwe's worsening economic crisis has been blamed for fuelling prostitution and crippling the public health sector.

The Kariba project also harmed the environment. To begin with, there was a huge population increase due to migrant labor arrivals from foreign nations. Magadza relates that the number of people increased from less than five thousand in the 1960s to thirty thousand by the turn of the millennium (ibid: 275). This six hundred percent increase put more strain on land and infrastructure. For instance, increased unsustainable agricultural practices in resettlement areas “... led to increased erosion, with streams used to store dry season water in pools no longer able to do so because of the siltation of the rivers (e.g., all the former pools in the Nyaodza River are now filled with sand)” (ibid: 278). The already infertile soils and unstable water sources of the resettlement areas have thus continued to worsen.

In the same vein, the pervasive use of agrochemicals for weed and pest control in cotton producing resettlement areas such as Gokwe “has resulted in pesticide accumulation in the lake, as well as indications of heavy metal accumulation” (ibid: 284). Further, the use of DDT¹² for the control of tsetse fly and mosquitoes also harmed “...terrestrial ecosystems surrounding the lake...” (ibid: 279). Ecological categories “...including soil, invertebrates, lizards, birds, mammals and fish communities” (ibid) were negatively affected sometimes resulting in the extinction of entire species such as “...20 species of insectivorous bats” (ibid). Magadza illustrates the broader impact of mega-dam ventures on the environment and non-human life, often forgotten in most human reflections. Although limitations of space will not allow me to explore this strand, it is crucial to remember that the incalculable cost of these mega-projects problematises their very feasibility and desirability.

My literature review framework has drawn on three strands of scholarship¹³: work on Kariba dam literary histories, work on the role of Kariba dam in the decolonization of Rhodesia and work on the socio-political and ecological aftermaths of Kariba. Although the scholarship touches on water in one sense or another, it is such that water remains subordinate to larger human concerns. In departure, I bring a literary lens to bear on the chosen texts where I read

¹² According to the Pesticide Action Network website (2020), DDT was promoted as an effective pest control chemical. It was later banned in numerous countries following reports of its harmful side effects that include increase of breast cancer and elimination of certain bird species such as bald eagles and bats. For more on the impact of DDT see Rachel Carlson’s (1962) *Silent Spring*.

¹³ Additional scholarship on this topic on which I have drawn includes Scudder (2005), Kenmuir (1984), Karege (1995), Bowmaker (1978), Muchuru (2015), Nyandoro (2014), Colson (1971), Mhlanga and Nyikahadzoi (2017), Mashingaidze (1993) and Lancaster (1974).

water as a protagonist, a narrative tool and a technique for analysis. My watery literary approach helps to reimagine Southern African colonisation and decolonization discourse from land- based perspectives that tend to operate in binaries and absolutes.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach to conduct thematic content analysis of selected Southern African texts. Howard Seltman (2015: 3) indicates that the “...basis of qualitative research lies in the interpretative approach to social reality and in the description of the lived experience of human beings.” The notion of interpretation and description invites close textual reading for water and the contact between British and Tonga people in the chosen texts.

The texts I have selected are largely binary and are informed by colonial schemas. This analysis seeks to lay bare these structures and highlight the contradictions and the points at which they become unsustainable. In chapter two I problematize Howarth’s use of colonial stereotypes to represent Tonga people as lawless, savage, superstitious, puerile and self-destructive. I consider the author’s disdainful depiction of their material culture, mental make-up and physical appearance all of which he juxtaposes to ‘superior’ British standards. I however intervene to highlight the areas of convergence between the Tonga and British cultural outlooks. It is in the same vein that chapter three considers Clements’ and Nyanja’s representation of Nyaminyami the God of Tonga people. I compare Nyaminyami’s characteristics to those of Jehovah the Christian God and demonstrate that the two are interchangeable.

In all the three texts water institutes the narrative as the construction of Kariba dam takes center stage. Moreover, the animation of its waters through Nyaminyami in turn inspire a paradoxical romance narrative of British colonial subordination and Tonga anti-colonial resistance. I explore how Howarth and Clements apotheosize Zambezi river and Nyaminyami (like twin Greek tragic heroes) before capturing their inexorable fall with the proverbial thud. Zambezi river and Nyaminyami become props in colonial narratives as metaphorical and literal embodiments of ‘wild’ Africa. On the other hand, and in keeping with the hydro-colonialism lens, I consider how Tonga people’s perceptions of Zambezi river and Nyaminyami complicate

linear colonial narratives. I seek to relativize hierarchical epistemological orders as I gesture towards points of convergence in human/ non-human and metropole/colonial relations. Through foregrounding water as method and subject, I complicate colonial/post-colonial studies and contribute to mega-dam discourse in Southern Africa.

The reading of texts that were published more than five decades ago presents methodological challenges. *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God* was published in 1959 while *The Shadow of the Dam* was published two years later in 1961. The two books belong to both specific historical times but also to future time well after their publication date. It is most probable that readers from different timelines will have different takes on the same texts due to changing material, political, religious and economic conditions. To exemplify this point, one can compare Margaret Cornell's reading of *The Shadow of the Dam* in 1961 to my take in 2021. She writes that the book:

...vividly brings out in human terms the problems of relating simple primitive human beings to the engineering feats of an industrial revolution. In its way, this is an epitome of the problems of Africa and Africans in the second half of the twentieth century and also of their colonial administrators, whose affection and respect for the tribal African and his way of life come into violent collision with their recognition of the inevitability of industrial progress. This book reveals an important light on the social effects of the 'wind of change'. [1961: 427]

While it is true that the book captures the violent collision of cultures-British and Tonga-, some of the claims that Cornell makes are problematic to post-colonial readers. For instance, she takes it as fact that Tonga people are simple and follow their affectionate and respectful colonial administrators into inevitable 'industrial progress'. Cornell's reading within the same colonial timelines and ideological perspectives overlooks the patronizing aspect of Howarth's text in relation to the depiction of Tonga people, something that is more apparent in the post-colonial period. In departure from Cornell, and with the benefit of hindsight, I argue that Howarth

dehumanizes Tonga people in multiple respects and that the promises of industrial progress remain elusive for Tonga people. In my dissident reading, I first situate the texts in their relative historical contexts to familiarize the reader with the dominant ideological and material conditions of the time of publication. Secondly, I attempt the cognitive approach of hypothetical intentionalism where “a narrative’s meaning is established by hypothesizing intentions authors might have had, given the context of creation...” (Gibbs 2005: 248). Lastly, I heed Susan Stanford Friedman’s plea for an accommodative approach that underscores “commonalities and differences across cultures” (2011: 5). This resonates with the hydro-colonial theoretical framework that undergirds this research that also seeks to underline points of convergence between cultures.

Chapter Delineation

The research project is divided into the following four chapters: Introduction; The Representation of Tonga People in *The Shadow of the Dam*; Representation of Nyaminyami, Zambezi river and Kariba Dam in *Kariba: The struggle with the River God* and ‘Nyaminyami: The River God’; and the Conclusion. The introductory chapter presents the aim, argument, rationale, theoretical framework and the literature review. The second chapter offers an enhanced colonial/post-colonial analysis of the representation of Tonga people in Howarth’s *The Shadow of the Dam*. The third chapter underscores the notion of inspirited waters and materiality of water through examining the depiction of Zambezi river, Kariba dam and Nyaminyami in the two chosen texts. Chapter four concludes the research with a summation of the main arguments of the report and suggestions of areas of possible future research.

Chapter Two: The Representation of Tonga People in *The*

Shadow of the Dam

The conquerors write history. They came, they conquered, and they write. You do not expect those who came to invade us to write the truth about us. They will always write negative things about us. And they have to do that because they have to justify their invasion. We do not write our history. It has always been handed down to us orally by our elders. And then the white man came, and he writes history. In fact, you do not know anything about any place until the white men gets there. Until the white man comes to any place, nothing lives. It is only when he comes and says 'Poof, I have discovered you and now you exist'. It is ridiculous. [Miriam Makeba: 1969]

Introduction

This chapter explores the representation of Tonga people in Howarth's *The Shadow of the Dam*, an anthropological narrative that dichotomizes the relationship between British and Tonga people. As the title of the book suggests, Kariba dam is the central structuring device of the whole text that brings together diverse dramatis 'personae' that include Tonga people, British people, white Rhodesians, Zambezi river, *Gwembe* Valley, fauna and flora. This structure invites diverse readings from which I select a postcolonial/colonial discourse analysis. I enhance this model by introducing a hydrocolonial dimension which underscores the paradoxical discourse of the mega-dam. I consider with Nixon the intersection of power and perspective, that is, "[w]ho gets to see, and from where? When and how does such empowered seeing become normative? And what perspectives-not least those of the poor or women or the colonized-do hegemonic sight conventions of visibility obscure?" (2013: 16). In its introduction chapter, *The Shadow of the Dam* sets out "...to inquire what it was like before the flood" (10). What is the concealed cost of this glamorous engineering masterpiece? For purposes of this chapter, I consider the seismic impact of Lake Kariba on the riverine Tonga people. I argue

that the literal damming of Zambezi river waters offers an apt metaphor that captures the Rhodesian government's damming, if not damning of Tonga life.

The analysis also explores the politics of representation (such as authorial and ideological standpoint) that conspire to submerge the Tonga perspective. *The Shadow of the Dam* is an imperial narrative that is framed to sanitize colonisation. Similar works such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1952) portray indigenous people as objects ripe for European redemption and manipulation. As Homi Bhabha (1983: 23) aptly attests, "[t]he objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction." Colonial narratives frame colonization as desirable and beneficial for both the colonizer and the colonized. This is a problematic diagnosis considering the vertical power relations between the colonizer (British) and the colonized (Tonga) people. Mary Louise Pratt reminds us that the contact zone between colonizer and colonized is a "social space where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (1992: 7).

The chapter is organized as follows: it begins with a synopsis of *The Shadow of the Dam* after which it examines the text's depiction of the following: precolonial Tonga life; Tonga people's mental deportment; physical appearance; material culture; social customs; voices; Chisamu Battle; and the fragmentation.

Synopsis

The Shadow of the Dam is an anthropological and journalistic non-fiction text that was published in 1961, two years after the completion of Lake Kariba. The paratextual apparatus of the book are quite revealing. We gather from the acknowledgements section that the author drew on several archival sources that include the Northern Rhodesian Information Department, Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and the Federal Information Department. This information seeks to paint *The Shadow of the Dam* as a well-researched narrative that is based on verifiable historical documents and accounts. In other words, it is a reliable truthful account. Howarth

also consulted the work of anthropologists Elizabeth Colson and Thayer Scudder "...who each spent a year living with the Tonga to make a sociological study before the advance of civilization overtook it" (1961: 9). In addition, he also drew on Hezekiah Habanyama who "...was unique among the Tonga...full of energy and humour and common sense, and through a series of lucky chances, and his own ability...had won his way to Bristol University" (ibid: 43). Colson and Thayer are pioneer scholars on studying the Tonga insider perspective and together with Habanyama provide Howarth with insights into the Tonga culture and reaction to the dam. In addition to the journalistic tenor of the book that I mentioned in the methodological section of this report, we are introduced to its anthropological dimension that again bolster its credentials. The text is set during Rhodesian times when Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia), Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) and Malawi (then Southern Nyasaland) merged to form the Central African Federation that lasted from 1953 to 1963. The action of the text revolves around the decision to build Kariba dam and traverses Zambia and Zimbabwe. In the words of the author, the plot chronicles "...the story of the fifty thousand primitive people called Tonga who lived in the valley before the dam was built, and of what happened when they were told that the flow of their river was going to stop, and their land was going to disappear below the water of the lake" (ibid: 8). In framing a linear plot, the author packages the Kariba Dam experience into a predictable encounter between colonial authorities and their mesmerized subjects. This plot structure is misleading in that it tries to bring order to a process that was chaotic, senseless, evitable and unpredictable to Tonga people. The Tonga become stock characters and spectator casualties in mega-dam-plans designed in the metropolises of Harare and London. The introduction of the book states that the human protagonists are "...the white settlers represented by the industrial masterpiece in the gorge far away at the foot of the valley; the Civil Service, in the persons of the District Commissioner and District Officers; the simple Africans of the remote countryside; and the African politicians of the towns" (ibid: 9). The respective listing order of these characters foreshadow the power relations between them, mirror their place in the text and accords with the hierarchical structure of colonization. It is foreseeable that Howarth will peripheralize the Tonga perspective and underscore the ideals of British imperialism. Right from the title of the book to the map on the front flyleaves and the statements on the illustrations page (Before the Dam, The People in the Drama, After the Dam), Kariba Dam is established as a rich source of narrative temporality. This aspect is sustained in the first chapter that offers different temporalities-on the one hand, the dam speeds up colonial time bringing progress and power, on the other, it takes white men back to the earlier frontier days of the mining camp-. Throughout its one hundred and ninety-three pages and twenty-nine

chapters, *The Shadow of the Dam* creates a dichotomized conceptualization of the colonizer and the colonized which I problematize in this reading through highlighting contradictions and similarities. The chapters have illustrative titles that whet the appetite of the reader and attempt to influence the reading experience. For example, the last five chapters of the book are titled as follows: The Governor; The Battle; The Animals; The Exodus; and The Promised Land. It is clear from these titles that the narrative focalizes the perspective of the colonial functionaries rather than the Tonga people. Indeed, as I will argue in this chapter, The Governor is a god whose words and actions are irreversible and cast in stone. This impression is bolstered through the biblical allusion to the exodus of Israelites from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. The parallel is quite misleading and serves to deodorize the Kariba dam experience. Whereas the Israelites pleaded with God to rescue them from the land of bondage, I demonstrate in subsequent sections of this chapter that Tonga people pleaded otherwise. To them, Gwembe Valley was their promised land and resettlement areas lands of bondage.

Nixon (2013: 167) posits that “[a]ssaults on a nation’s environmental resources frequently entail not just the physical displacement of local communities, but their imaginative displacement as well, indeed on the prior rhetorical and visual evacuation of those communities from the idea of the developing nation-state.” Following Nixon, I first explore the ideological and rhetorical dislocation of Tonga people before proceeding to consider their literal displacement as represented in *The Shadow of the Dam*.

Tonga People’s Precolonial Life

Like typical colonial narratives, *The Shadow of the Dam* casts Tonga people as inferior to British people. This approach resonates with James Mangan’s (2010: 308) observation that:

A large part of imperial image construction was concerned with the creation of positive and negative stereotypes. These stereotypes existed to manipulate reality in order to reflect imperial values, ambitions and priorities and to promote them as proper, necessary and constructive: imperialism required a carefully crafted image of the colonizer and

colonized. Image creation has a crucial place in the dialectics exalting the colonizer and humbling the colonized.

In line with these imperial dialectics of representation, *The Shadow of the Dam* first humbles Tonga people through portraying their precolonial existence as a monotonous “wild” (ibid:15) and “changeless life” (ibid: 62). This evokes Hegel’s infamous claim that “Africa is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit” (1956: 99). The adverb wild infers that Tonga people were “uncontrolled, violent, or extreme” (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>) and “living in a state of nature” (www.merriam-webster.com). The impression of Tonga barbarism gains traction through the phrase ‘changeless life’ that disqualifies their historical progression. Moreover, the text depicts that Tonga “life in the village was extremely simple. Life is always simple for people who have no kind of artificial light, so that there is nothing they can do when the sun has set except dance by the light of fires, or go to bed, or simply sit and gossip” (1961: 56). From the above basis, the British ‘civilization’ mission of Tonga people becomes ‘noble’. The colonizer rescues the colonized from perpetual ‘stagnation’ into the realm of ‘modern time’ and ‘progress.’ More to the point, the British become what Nixon terms “...developer-dispossessors who descend from other time zones to impose on habitable environments unsustainable calculations about what constitutes the duration of human gain” (2013:17).

Howarth’s second act of humbling Tonga people involves obliterating their precolonial life. He writes that the District Commissioner’s 1955 tour of Gwembe Valley was after Livingstone’s 1865 tour “...the most important date in the valley’s history; it might almost be said to be the date when history began” (1961: 26). This condescension echoes Miriam Makeba’s remark that “[u]ntil the white man comes to any place, nothing lives. It is only when he comes and says ‘Poof, I have discovered you and now you exist’ that you begin to exist. Such imperial posturing resonates with British historian Trevor Hugh Roper’s remark that “Africa had no history prior to European exploration and colonization, that there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness...the unedifying gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe” (1963: 871). Howarth seems to build on these patronizing modes of representation of the other in *The Shadow of the Dam* where he depicts Tonga people as lawless, indolent, fragile, simple and forever ill. In the author’s words,

the “Tonga, in fact, were living a vicious cycle. Malaria and malnutrition sapped their energy, and with less energy they grew less food, went hungry and became even more susceptible to diseases” (1961: 85). From this basis, I argue that Howarth positions British colonization as the redeemer of Tonga people from looming demise.

That framing evokes Rudyard Kipling’s (1899: n.p) espousal of the colonization of the Philippian Islands by the United States of America in his poem “The White Man’s Burden” where he bids his nation to:

Take up the White Man’s burden
Send forth the best ye breed
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives’ need...
Fill full the mouth of famine
And bid the sickness cease
And when your goal is nearest,
The end for others sought,
Watch Sloth and heathen Folly
Bring all your hopes to nought.

Framing colonization as a colonizer’s sacrificial mission for the benefit of the colonized (The end for others sought) massages the colonizer’s moral misgivings and masks the greed that drives imperialism. Through a similar strategic subterfuge, Howarth renders the subjugation of Tonga people a ‘benevolent’ move that is meant to rescue them from supposed sloth, heathenism and barbarism.

Mental Deportment of Tonga People

The Shadow of the Dam depicts Tonga people as ‘irrational’ and ‘superstitious’ in antithesis to the ‘logical’ and ‘scientific’ Europeans. In one illustrative instance, Chief Chipepo (a Tonga member of the Gwembe Valley Native Authority) is juxtaposed to Alex (a white Rhodesian district officer). The narrator differentiates “...the trained legal mind and the illiterate native intelligence” (ibid: 82). In this vein, Tonga people are cast as “...the simplest and most primitive of all people in that part of Africa. Usually, in the past three or four decades, they had seen a white man once a year, but civilization had hardly touched them at all” (ibid:18). From this basis, the actions of white men are likened to miraculous acts of God that are beyond Tonga comprehension and opposition. For instance, upon hearing that Lake Kariba was set to flood their homes, the narrator relates that “[n]obody even suggested that the disaster might be prevented. Although it was only a human decision to build the dam, it seemed more like a cataclysm of nature, an Act of God” (ibid: 49). In yet another illustrative emphasis of this mental dichotomization, we read that although both Europeans and Africans lack:

...any idea how one set about building a dam four hundred and twenty feet high... [Europeans] believed it could be done, because they had lived in civilization, and people in civilization are accustomed to believe in technical possibilities which they do not understand. But the minds of the people of Chisamu had never been trained in that way. They had no past experience to give them the same unquestioning faith that engineers can really do the things that they say they can do. [Ibid: 65]

The European mind is thus cast as scientific and technical while the African mind is cast as superstitious and delusional. This dichotomized classification evokes Albert Schweitzer’s postulation that “[t]he African is indeed my brother, but my junior brother” (cited in Chinua Achebe, 1975: 4). The condescendence hints at the alleged mental shortcomings of African people and the supposed superior intelligence of Europeans.

It is therefore no surprise that *The Shadow of the Dam* later suggests that:

[t]he Tonga often credited Europeans with even more mechanical ingenuity than they really possessed, but there was always a certain logic in their ideas. From a Tonga point of view, it was fantastic to make a machine which could bite the earth; and it was no more fantastic, and much more sensible, to make it so that it would know how to do its work without being told. [87]

It is indicative that Howarth recognizes logic in Tonga people solely when they esteem the brilliance of Europeans. In other respects, they remain simple-minded. This is stressed later in the text when the District Commissioner:

...watched the attentive, naively expressive faces, and felt half-ashamed of the childish phrases he was using to describe a thing of such supreme importance; but he could not avoid them, because there was no other way to put such abstruse ideas into the Tonga language, or to reach the minds of the men and women sitting round him” (1961: 64).

The burden of the District Commissioner increases with the reminder that “the Tonga people had never made a cart on wheels, and he would have to explain about turbines and electricity” (ibid. 40). In the same vein of crafting the ‘unscientific’ nature of the Tonga mindset, Howarth suggests that “...the Tonga had never discovered that sexual intercourse is what produces babies; and it was said that the only work they could do when they came to town was to empty earth closets” (ibid: 73). The inescapable impression created from the foregoing is that the Tonga person’s mindset is simple, childish, inchoate and inferior. Howarth thus manipulates that colonial make-believe description to claim that when Tonga people were asked to leave their ancestral shoreline homes, they refused “to face the problem” consistent with their “general easy-going lassitude” (ibid: 84). He adds that this was “...almost the first time, they were being asked to make mental effort, and it seemed to lay beyond them” (ibid). This imperial caricaturing is strategic but problematic. It masks colonial abuses and rubbishes the legitimate interests of Tonga people.

From the colonial mindset, “it was right that they [the Tonga] should suffer for the sake of the progress of the country as a whole” (ibid: 40). It does not occur to that mindset that perhaps Tonga people preferred their current circumstances to the shocks of colonial modernization. To his credit, Howarth ostensibly recognizes this when he cautions that although those in favor of the dam:

...could say that the dam would bring prosperity to the country, and that prosperity meant more schools and hospitals and roads and houses; but the Tonga had never had any of these things, or consciously wanted them, except the mission schools. And they could say that Kariba would create more jobs, and better paid jobs, in mines and factories; but the Tonga had no aspiration at all to be wage-earners in cities. All they wanted was to be left where they were in the valley, and to go on living more or less as they had lived for the last fifty years; in fact, the most honest answer to this question might have been that for Tonga, and for a great many other rural Africans, so far ahead as anyone could foresee, the Kariba Dam was of no possible use whatever. [53-54]

It is however presumptuous for Howarth to claim that of all the trappings of colonization, Tonga people desired mission schools most. In contradiction, Franco Frescura (2015: 80) demonstrates that although missionaries “... sought to alter the basic system of social, cultural and spiritual beliefs of indigenous people. In this they patently failed, and although by 1910 they could show some small advances, in the context of a wider Southern African rural society these were negligible and usually of a cosmetic nature.” The patent failure of missionaries manifests best in relation to Tonga people, most of whom still hold on to their pre-colonial religious beliefs. I will attend to this dimension in the next chapter. For now, it suffices to ponder Howarth’s claim that Tonga people had no possible use of jobs, hospitals, roads and houses. The claim would perhaps have made sense before the construction of Kariba dam when Tonga people relied on the fertile shores of Zambezi river to guarantee their food requirements. After the dam condemned them to parched upland areas, the claim becomes a callous justification for the denial of basic amenities to Tonga people.

Physical Appearance of Tonga People

The representation of Tonga people's physical appearance in *The Shadow of the Dam* seems more nuanced than of their minds. This is ostensible in the text's comparison of Chipepo (a Tonga chief) to Alex (a white administrative officer) from which the narrator relates that "[w]hen the two men met, perhaps neither would have recognized in the other any likeness to himself, but nobody who saw them together could have missed seeing similarities beneath the white skin and the black, the Scottish and the negroid features" (82). The above departs from the classical characterization of African features in colonial narratives where Africans are assigned uniform flat noses and thick lips while Europeans are allocated straight noses and thin lips. To bolster this gesture from the norm, Howarth inserts in the text (between pages 72 and 73) images of the British and Tonga man. The images illustrate the striking similarities of these two individuals. Both have long noses, straight cheeks, thin lips, slim bodies, similar height, straight faces and look-alike teeth. The stress on similarities rather than obvious differences of skin color, eye color and hair type recognize a universal human condition that transcends rigid ethnic dichotomizations.

The text goes on to depict that:

The Tonga had a naturally good physique, but lack of treatment, and the climate, and their own insanitary habits, had made their health appalling. Almost all of them, it was found, had malaria and enteritis. The latter disease was spread by the custom of relieving themselves by the side of the streams from which they drank. [84]

From the above, three reasons compromise Tonga people's health. Two of these point to human failure to offset treatable diseases. The claim that Tonga people relieved themselves by the side of the streams from which they drank points to supposed puerile ludicrousness. It comes as no surprise when Alex claims that "...every single one of them was ill" (ibid). Howarth corroborates that "[i]n this he was not far wrong...[as] they were still living in the state of chronic sickness which was general in Africa before Europeans came" (ibid). This egotistical colonial discourse drowns a long tradition of Tonga alternative medicine passed through the

word of mouth across generations. It is inconceivable that Tonga people would have survived before the introduction of western medicine without their own functional remedies. It seems to me that Howarth magnifies the claim about Tonga chronic sickness to position British colonisation as a noble humanitarian medical intervention.

In addition to their 'chronic' sickness, Tonga people are also depicted as indolent. In one instance, the narrator reveals that "the forest pulsated in the stupefying heat, and the sun beat down on the village with sickening intensity, and the reek of the sweat of so many bodies attracted hordes of flies" (ibid: 1). The phrases 'stupefying heat' and 'sickening intensity' recognizes the inclement climate conditions of Gwembe Valley that seemingly induce Tonga idleness. The suggestion nonetheless collapses with the Rhodesian government's solution for curing that laziness through imposing taxes on Tonga people. In Howarth's words, "[i]n fact the object of the government tax, as a matter of policy, was not so much to raise money as to make Africans work, instead of merely growing enough to make their own families alive" (ibid). From this basis, the introduction of taxes becomes a bitter pill for the cure of indolence and underproduction. This conjures Rev Muller's (cited in Aime Cesaire: 1972: 39) endorsement of the colonial project on the basis that "humanity must not, cannot allow the incompetence, negligence, and laziness of the uncivilized peoples to leave idle indefinitely the wealth which God has confined to them, charging them to make it serve the goal of all" (1961: 30). In other words, the introduction of taxes becomes a progressive move that ushers Tonga people into diligent work for surplus production. Further discussions on African laborers in the text provide a sense of industrial time that is contrasted to subsistence time as migrant labor is drawn into the vortex of the dam. The illustrations on the Tonga then position them as timeless ethnographic objects, living outside 'modern' time. These people who 'reek of the sweat' and attract 'hordes of flies' need redemption from their degenerate condition. The repulsive descriptions of Tonga people in *The Shadow of the Dam* serves to dehumanize them so that the reader will not commiserate with them when the Rhodesian authorities uproot them from their shoreline homes. Moreover, in describing Gwembe Valley as inapt for human habitation, the author appears to be pursuing the same goal. It thus surprises no one to read that some advocates of Kariba "...even argued that it would be better for the Tonga in the end to be taken away from the valley and installed in lands which had a healthier climate" (ibid: 38).

The above drowns Tonga misgivings over the impact of taxes on their lives. As Franco Frescura (2015: 76) submits, “[a] factor which was to have a profound influence upon the long term social and economic make-up of southern Africa from the 1870s onwards was the creation of a migrant labor system.” He adds that the creation of taxes “...not only provided a disproportionately large slice of the income necessary to create a system of local first tier administration in the rural areas but it also created the need for local people to go into towns in order to earn the money for its payment” (ibid: 78). One can argue therefore that the imposition of taxes on Tonga people had a negative effect upon their social and economic circumstances. Paul Gundani (2019: 14) recognizes the “...adverse effects wrought by the heavy tax on the African social structure as the young and old were pushed out of their homes by economic pressures in search of paid employment.” Gundani’s observation resonates with Nixon’s notion of invisible slow violence (2011) and Magadza’s concept of unforeseen tertiary repercussions (2006). Because the taxes-hut tax, dog tax, cow tax and land tax-were principally payable in cash, local people at first sold their livestock to gain the cash. This was disastrous because Government buyers were the sole valuers of the livestock. In consequence, there was a massive depletion in Tonga livestock numbers. In time, this cumulative strain drove Tonga people to seek employment in distant cities-such as Harare, Bulawayo and even Joburg-as mine, farm and domestic laborers. This rereading of the Rhodesian taxes’ regime bolsters the suggestion that it was a calculated “...enrichment program for white settlers” (ibid: 15). Cheap labor was mobilized for Rhodesian commercial farms, mines and industries. Paradoxically, as the colonial economy flourished, the fortunes of Tonga people plummeted as lesser time and fewer resources were left to serve their farms. This strategic colonial move was designed to lure or cajole the locals to sell their labor to settler mines, industries and farms. From this basis, Howarth’s claim that taxes were meant to benefit Tonga people becomes unsustainable.

Material Culture of Tonga People

In another step towards humbling Tonga people in *The Shadow of the Dam*, their material culture is denigrated. This speaks to what Nixon terms “...an indirect bureaucratic and media violence that creates and sustains the conditions for administered invisibility” (2011: 68) and disposability. *The Shadow of the Dam* depicts that “[a]ll the Tonga villages were ramshackle places. The huts were easily built, and soon fell down again” (1959: 56). Earlier in the text we are introduced to “...round thatched huts, built of poles and mud, some standing precariously

on stilts” (ibid: 18). This description of crumbling huts prepares the reader for the ultimate destruction of these huts at the end of the novel. What is there to miss about ramshackle huts? Even if the Rhodesian forces had spared them, forces of nature or wild animals would have obliged the ‘inevitable’ destruction, seems to be the argument. The Rhodesian government valued these huts at “...£10, using employed labor at the usual rates. The government did not intend to employ men to build new huts, because nobody but the Tonga could have done it in exactly the Tonga style” (ibid: 75). In this instance we notice colonial pretense at its best. Howarth manipulates the material culture of Tonga people to clear the moral ground for its jettisoning and keep the cost of relocating Tonga people to a bare minimum.

The other aspect of Tonga people’s material culture whose representation I consider is clothing. Suggestive inconsistencies seem to materialize in this instance. In the first description, we are presented with two curious accounts from David Livingstone’s writings. The narrator discloses that:

In those days, the men of the Tonga wore no clothes at all, which he found indecent. “They walk around without the smallest sense of shame. I told them that on my return I should have my family with me, and no one must come near us in that state”. They asked him what they should wear for that occasion, since they had never possessed any clothes; and he told them that if they had nothing else, they must put on a bunch of grass.” At that idea, they laughed merrily. [1959: 20]

The above suggests that Tonga people wore no clothes before the coming of Livingstone who reprimands and advises them to wear clothes, or in the absence thereof, at least ‘a bunch of grass.’ Borrowing from austere Victorian dressing standards, the moralizing ideologue Livingstone imposes Western standards on Tonga people. His patronizing attitude blinds him to alternative modes of thinking and living that arise from different geographic conditions. To begin with, he neglects to appreciate that clothes from a cold climate zone (British) will present challenges in a hot climate zone (Gwembe Valley). This realization later materializes in the novel through Alex’s experiences. In one of his walks under the scorching temperatures of

Gwembe Valley, we read that “[t]he Tonga went about with water streaming from their naked skins, and Alex continued his journeys bareheaded, in shorts and a shirt, as he had always travelled; for clothes were always a nuisance in the valley and he only wore enough to uphold European ideas of decency” (ibid: 110-111). The ‘streaming water’ metaphor exposes the ludicrousness of imposing stringent Victorian dressing standards on Tonga people reeling under sweltering climatic conditions. Even Alex compromises as he struggles to reconcile the demands of British clothing decorum with the climatic conditions of Rhodesia. In this instance we observe an instructive relativization of what can be considered rational or otherwise, contingent upon geographical factors. This exposes colonial discourse’s practice of othering alternate cultural practices as inferior and illogical, even when a closer look suggests otherwise. Such a pontifical ideological attitude forecloses moments of mutual cross-cultural understandings. It also leads to misrepresentations and outright inconsistencies.

These inconsistencies become more ostensive in Livingstone’s dramatic volte-face over the dressing habits of Tonga people. When Livingstone revisits the Gwembe Valley, a mere five years after witnessing naked Tonga people, Howarth depicts that because “...his brother Charles was with him and perhaps through his influence, he took a more liberal view of Tonga. ‘We now saw many good-looking young men and women. The dresses of the ladies are identical with those of Nubian women in Upper Egypt’” (1959: 20).

It is baffling that such a phenomenal alteration from stark nakedness to donning Nubian women dresses could have occurred within a period of five years. Even more perplexing is the metamorphosis from those miserable looking Tonga of 1855 to the ‘many good-looking young men and women’ of 1860. Howarth’s suggestion that perhaps the presence of Charles colored David’s reconsideration of Tonga people raises more questions than it answers. How does the mere presence of Charles inspire a more liberal view? More to the point, how does it bring a material change to the circumstances of the Tonga people? These questions toss into disrepute Livingstone’s account of Tonga people that Howarth imbibes to the last dregs. It appears from the foregoing that colonial narratives project the preconceived ideas of their authors rather than what is encountered on the ground. It is not what one beholds that matters, but who, how and why one beholds. In other words, people see what they wish to see and because those with socio-political power and material means of writing see more than others, the narratives of the

less privileged (such as Tonga people in this case) are sidelined or misrepresented in official accounts.

Social and Political Life of Tonga People

The Tonga political structure is represented as a loose autocratic structure that exposes them to hostile outside forces and fosters internal fear. The text depicts that:

Before the British rule began, all Central Africans were ruled by their hereditary chiefs. Advanced tribes had hierarchies of chiefs, the highest of them all, were men of wide influence for good or evil. But the Tonga who had been bullied for so many generations by their neighbors, had never evolved that kind of government, and each small area of their valley had its own small independent chief whose powers were not very wide. There were also religious leaders, prophets, witches, and sorcerers, and the people were kept in order more by a fear of spirits than by any temporal power. No idea of democratic rule had ever occurred to Tonga, or to any other Central African people. [27]

To his credit, Howarth acknowledges the presence of powerful Central African kingdoms with centralized systems of power. This is reminiscent of the Zulu, Ndebele, Mbundu and Rozvi Kingdoms. He also notes that Tonga communities were fragmented into small chiefdoms with ‘small independent chief[s] whose powers were not very wide’. It however appears presumptuous for him to conclude that ‘no idea of democratic rule had ever occurred to Tonga, or any other Central African people’. It is ironical that his description of the Tonga political system is consistent with the democratic practice of power devolution. For the Tonga, power was not concentrated in one autocratic leader but was distributed across numerous chiefs, religious personages, ancestors and Nyaminyami the river god, who I will explore at length in the next chapter. The supernatural element that Howarth captures in the phrase ‘religious leaders, prophets, witches, and sorcerers’ was the cement of the Tonga people. It was this supernatural force that guided people in all their quotidian activities, ensured social cohesion and guaranteed their survival for centuries. To frame that influential element as some evil force

that condemned people to perpetual fear is to misconstrue Tonga people. I argue here that the Tonga political system was for, by and of the people. To bolster this claim, I cite Howarth's latter concession in his text when he writes that:

In the heat of the valley, almost every human activity took place in the open air; and to have no walls at *Munyumbwe* was also perhaps a symbol that the meetings of the authority, like those of the Parliament on which it was roughly modelled, were not secret. Anybody who cared could sit on the steps of the platform, or under the trees outside. [46]

The Tonga people conducted their meetings in an open space called *Munyumbwe* where all people were welcome. These proceedings can be perceived to be more open than western parliament models where few elected members take part in the proceedings, ostensibly representing the interests of all people. It also appears to be a vote of confidence in the Tonga traditional political system that the Rhodesian government chose to adapt it to serve colonial purposes rather than dismantle it. Howarth writes that:

The British continued the system of hereditary chiefs, and merely adapted it to civilized ideas of justice. The native customs and laws were maintained, unless they conflicted with the fundamental world of the civilized world. Barbaric punishments were stopped, and attempts were made to put an end to witchcraft; but the chiefs were supported in their authority, provided they did not misuse it by oppressing their people or breaking the law themselves. [28]

The above quotation brings to our attention two contentious issues; the thin line between civilization and barbarism; and the claim that colonization was meant for the protection of the colonized from themselves. In relation to the first point, when the British were labelling certain Tonga customs-such as polygamy and clairvoyance-as barbaric, it did not occur to them as it occurred to Tonga people that some colonial practices such as land dispossession and

exploitation of cheap local labor were also barbaric. Blind or reluctant to consider this paradox, Howarth thus maintains the claim that:

It is often said that some of the British in Africa have taken no interest in Africans except as an inexhaustible source of cheap labor; but the final aim of the District Commissioner, and the colonial administration in general, has always been to work themselves out of a job by teaching the Africans to govern themselves with justice. [28]

The above bolsters the imperial claim that colonization brought justice and peace to a lawless and war-torn African continent that was on the cusp of implosion. This contributes further to the authorial displacement of Tonga people in *The Shadow of the Dam* from which we further read that:

[w]hen Livingstone preached to them, they seemed to him to welcome the Christian promise of peace. The Tonga had always been marauders and had tricked and slaughtered neighboring tribes when they had an opportunity; no tribe could have survived at all Africa in those days if it had not fought to the best of its ability. But they had not been very effective warriors and had usually had the worst of it in battles with their neighbors. So, they told Livingstone that they hoped the British-whom he was always careful to distinguish from Portuguese or Boers-would come to take care of them. [21]

It is difficult if not impossible to reconcile the above image of Tonga marauders, tricksters and murderers with the incompatible description that is provided eight pages later when we read that the Gwembe Valley District Commissioners "...grew fond of the Tonga, because they were charming, cheerful and happy-go-lucky when times were good, and courageous when times were bad, and because they were courteous and kind and friendly but never servile; in short, because on the whole they were loveable people" (ibid: 29). The explanation that I

salvage from this contradiction is that the image of the barbaric Tonga people justifies colonial subjugation while the image of the hospitable Tonga people illustrates the sedative impact of British colonisation. In relation to the brutal suppression that the alleged hostile nature obliged, Howarth writes that “[i]n the early days there were District Commissioners in some parts of Rhodesia who felt they could only establish authority by a show of toughness and were not above telling their messengers to beat a man who did not show respect” (ibid: 29).

Howarth suggests that Tonga people perceived the advent of British colonization as a harbinger of peace and protection from various adversaries. He therefore maintains that “...the Commissioner’s authority was accepted without any question. The reason for this was that British rule could be seen to have subdued the slavers and warlike tribes and brought peace, so that it seemed to peaceful people to have an invincible power behind it” (ibid: 29). To cement this suggestion, he concludes that, “[u]ndoubtedly the first sign which the Tonga saw of British rule was that the Matebele and Barotse and Portuguese stopped raiding them and left them for the first time in memory to live in peace; and if some aspects of colonialism seem distasteful nowadays, the fact should be remembered” (ibid: 25). From the above, *The Shadow of the Dam* reframes the colonization of Tonga people as a noble measure that protected them from hostile forces and guaranteed peace for the first time. While there is no denying that precolonial Southern Africa experienced internecine battles such as the 1815 to 1840 Mfecane that caused a lot of bloodshed and destruction of properties, and that Tonga people might have been probable victims of these raids, those attacks at least left Tonga people to pursue their riverine lifestyle, unlike the establishment of Lake Kariba that terminated it altogether. To claim that British colonization brought peace to Tonga people and that it was better than the Ndebele, Barotse and Portuguese raids is therefore problematic. The author seems to manipulate these local conflicts as convenient smokescreens to hide British violence towards Tonga people. Through this classical imperial stratagem, Tonga people are blamed for their colonization.

It is in the same spirit that *The Shadow of the Dam* misrepresents the recreational practices of Tonga people. We read that Tonga people:

...often had beer parties, and sometimes at inconvenient moments. When their beer was brewed, they had to drink it quickly before it went sour, and if someone had done a big brew a few days before, not even the arrival of three platoons of police on the riverbank might have stopped them from going to drink it". [ibid: 138]

The impression that is created from the above is that Tonga people valued beer more than life itself. Howarth reinforces that:

...the main diversions of life in Chisamu were beer and music. Beer was brewed, by stewing corn, for every kind of party, and especially for working parties when a man wanted his neighbors to help him build a hut or clear a patch of land; and music was provided by the drums and cow horns at which Habanyama still excelled. Each neighborhood had an orchestra of its own. It performed mainly at funerals, and when anyone important died, orchestras gathered from several neighborhoods. When the intoxicating rhythm of the drums began, the limbs of every Tonga began to twitch, and soon everyone from tottering infants to tottering old men and women joined in a shuffling dance. There was intense competition between the orchestras, and when they met, old half-forgotten war dances were revived, and the ceremonies often ended in a fight which almost everyone enjoyed. So, a good funeral was the best of the Tonga's parties. The drums were also used for sending messages, and before the British came they had signaled the warnings of raids, and called the men to war. [57-58]

The above touches on work parties where a person would invite his neighbors to help 'him build a hut or clear a patch of land'. It was through this collective practice that people eased their domestic and agricultural workloads. These communal work parties were convened at special moments and seasons when there was need to clear the land, plant, weed and harvest. Tonga people did not commodify labor as a saleable item but harnessed it for communal use.

The host was obligated to provide guests with food and beer for the duration of the work as a gesture of gratitude. I therefore argue that at these work parties, it was the desire to work and help each other rather than the thirst for beer that brought people together. Rather than stress this point for the benefit of the reader, Howarth rushes to accentuate that these parties often turned raucous. It also seems strange to me that he concludes that a good funeral was the best of Tonga parties. This bolsters his earlier remark in the text that “[b]irth and marriage were events which passed with very little celebration. Death was the only occasion which was elaborately observed” (ibid: 56). This sustains the impression that Tonga people were of a funereal nature. It is in the same vein that he describes their music as intoxicating and their dances as warlike hence leading to fights which ‘everyone enjoyed’. The stress on war, beer, intoxication, fights and death helps to dehumanize Tonga people and sets the stage for their ultimate displacement from their homes and mainstream Rhodesian discourse of national progress.

Economic Activities of Tonga People

Similar debasement also manifests through the depiction of their economic activities. Mizinga (2000: 57) notes that “Tonga [people] practiced a mixed economy, clearing and tilling land for cultivation with hoes and axes. They grew sorghum, finger millet, and later maize. They kept domestic animals such as goats, sheep, cattle, chickens, and dogs. They supplemented their diet by hunting and gathering.” From those diverse economic activities, *The Shadow of the Dam* only mentions recession agriculture with the usual touch of disdain. We read that:

[t]he Tonga had never been persuaded to use manure, or even the simplest kind of irrigation, or to practice rotation of crops. The only staple crops they grew were millet, maize and sorghum and tobacco, and their method of growing them was to let sunlight into a patch of forest by lopping the trees and burning the branches, and to plant the patch for a few years till the soil was exhausted, and then to abandon it and open another patch. The only permanent gardens they had ever had were on the flood plain near the river banks, where the Zambezi overflowed in each rainy season and fertilized the land with a new

deposit of silt. The Tonga grew crops in the winter there, when the floods receded. In any year where the rains were sparse there was hunger in the valley; but the winter gardens had kept the tribe alive.

[41]

It is difficult to recognize the need for artificial fertilizers when deposits of silt from the perennial waters of Zambezi river made the shoreline gardens fertile. Moreover, although the author dismisses the practice of shifting cultivation, it has been shown to be effective and popular even with large commercial farmers. It is also curious that unlike Mizinga (2000), Howarth undermines the importance of the winter gardens as he emphasizes the hunger vulnerabilities of Tonga people. It seems to be a grudging afterthought when he concludes with the statement that ‘but the winter gardens had kept the tribe alive’. Howarth’s representation of Tonga people’s economic activities serves to validate the suggestion he hazards that British intervention rescued Tonga people from a looming hunger crisis.

In antithesis to that impression, following their resettlement from their shoreline homes, the *World Commission on Dams Kariba Dam Report* (2000: X-XI) submits that:

[m]ost of the new land was of poor quality and easily erodible. Also, as no recession agriculture was possible due to the far distance to the river, only one crop per year could be produced. Resettling too many people to areas too small aggravated the problem. It is therefore not surprising that food production decreased and famine occurred in the first years after resettlement. [ibid: xii]

Famine has continued to plague Tonga people in post-colonial times. A combination of natural and human factors has condemned them to rely on foreign donors for food, clothes and water inter alia other basics.

From the above ‘soft’ colonial violence, I argue that belittling Tonga customs as loathsome, thoughts as ridiculous and material culture as immaterial sanitizes their translocation from their riparian homes. It is easier to marginalize the interests of ‘inferior’ people when they are pitted against those of ‘superior’ people. Howarth acknowledges that “...the interests of the Tonga carried little weight compared with the industrial interests of the country. If Kariba was built, the Tonga would have to be moved; and the cost of moving them would be only a very small part of the cost of the dam” (ibid: 38). It was not just the cost of moving them that would constitute a small part of the cost of the dam, their value as a people as well had been lowered through misrepresentation and denunciation, a process Nixon recognizes as imaginative displacement. From the perspective of *The Shadow of the Dam*, there is nothing to lose and all to gain in relocating Tonga people from a place that makes life precarious.

Tonga Voices

The Shadow of the Dam drowns Tonga voices and caricatures their counteractions. Howarth denies Tonga people a political voice when he writes that “[i]n the Gwembe Valley, and other such primitive parts of the territories, political and economic problems seemed remote. Among people like the Tonga, there were very few who knew or cared in the least about such things...” (ibid: 36). It does not seem to occur to the author that colonialism plunges Tonga people into calamitous political and economic turmoil that drives them to political activism. The portrayal of Tonga people as apolitical sets the stage for Howarth to claim that anti-relocation sentiments stemmed from urban political parties such as the African National Congress (ANC) (then under the leadership of Harry Nkumbula). In one such instance, the District Officer interrogates and reproaches Tonga people:

...soundly for their rudeness, until he could see that they were feeling ashamed, and then he began to talk to them in their usual good humor. And in the end they began to smile again, and then they confessed to what had happened. It was nothing supernatural. Two men had been in the village, and said they were sent by the African National Congress to collect subscriptions; and the two men had said that if the Tonga stayed where they were and refused to do what the District Officer told

them, the government would not be able to move them from their land and the flood would never come. Alex would have been much less surprised to hear a story of ghosts because there had been no indication in the past two years that African politicians were taking any interest in the Tonga or the flood. And on the whole, a ghost story would have been more welcome, because the Tonga were used to ghosts, but they were not at all used to political propaganda. [1961: 89]

It remains unclear why Tonga people should feel ashamed, slide back into their usual good humor and begin to smile again when their life is about to change forever with the flooding of their homes. The problematic impression from the above quotation is that if Tonga people were left to their own devices, they would not have opposed the actions of the government. It is the ANC influence not the displacement of Tonga people that becomes the problem. For "...to Europeans, Congress had often seemed to be hopelessly muddle-headed. It was an unwieldy organization, perpetually hampered by the ignorance of its junior officials, and its opposition to the government had sometimes been so illogical that was impossible to counter" (ibid: 89). The rhetorical missiles muddle-headed, ignorance and illogical help to cast the issue as one that is between reason and unreason. In this strategic but simplistic conceptualization, those who support the government are on the side of logic while those who oppose it are on the other side. The argument seems to be that the cerebral inadequacies of the opposers causes them to fail to realize that it was impossible to "...stop the building of the dam, even if they wanted to; millions of pounds had been spent on it. And they must know that when the dam was finished the flood would come, and the Tonga would have to go" (ibid: 93). It therefore becomes "...almost incredible, even after the illogical things that Congress had done in the past, that they would risk drowning the Tonga simply to spite the government" (ibid: 93).

The dismissal of opposition voices as little more than spiteful noises rather than legitimate concerns for the protection of Tonga interests from irreparable damage resonates with what Nixon terms "...spatial amnesia, as communities, under the banner of development, are physically unsettled and imaginatively removed, evacuated from place and time and thus uncoupled from the idea of both a national future and a national memory" (2011:168). Whilst discouraging Tonga people from relocating to uplands before the onset of the flood might

appear as suicidal, there is more to it than Howarth admits. To begin with, more blame rests with those who took the decision to build the Kariba dam at the sacrifice of Tonga interests, animal and plant life. This was the motivating principle of those who opposed the relocation. Their desperate pleas arise from their desperate situation on the eve of their forced displacement. With the realisation that the Dam wall was almost complete, it became imperative to persuade the government to revise upwards compensation costs and relocate them to more habitable areas. Similar protests across the globe have yielded fruits in terms of better rehabilitation deals for affected communities or even stopped major dam projects. India is one case in point. The *Blue Planet Project* (2013: 2) reports that "...the case study of dams in India also demonstrates the power of people's resistance to dams in a country where, despite strong state support for the industry and pressure from international financial institutions to develop dams, people's movements have managed to halt major projects." There is therefore nothing illogical when Tonga people defend their homes, gardens, lifestyle and ancestral waters. The benefit of hindsight indicates that colonial and post-colonial regimes care(d) little for the interests of Tonga people. It was wise for Tonga people to register their concerns with the sole remaining weapon at their disposal. Once the relocation was done, their voice wilted. In all this we recognize how relative logic and unreason are.

The Shadow of the Dam curiously renders the Rhodesian government and the British Queen mouthpieces of Tonga people. This is not surprising considering that the text's depiction of Tonga people discounts rational thought or reasonable action. We read that:

[i]n the minds of the Tonga, the District Commissioner came to personify government. He was their magistrate, the highest of all human authorities they knew; and he was also their advisor and advocate, the man they turned to in any serious trouble which beset them, so that they referred to him in their language as their father. [ibid: 25]

It is in the spirit of a father we later read that "...in the course of time he had come to know the Tonga probably better than anyone else alive. He also was fond of them, and sympathized with

them thoroughly in their trouble, and he also embarked on a course of patient explanation and persuasion” (ibid: 106). The patronizing attitude of colonial discourse is palpable in the suggestion that the District Commissioner had come to know the Tonga probably better than anyone else alive, or more to the point, perhaps better than the Tonga knew themselves. Using the metaphor of a father to describe the District Commissioner captures the relationship of the colonizer and colonized where the former was the omniscient master while the latter was the oblivious subject. In dealing with their ‘simple’ subjects, Howarth reminds us that “[m]any of them had to restrain themselves from becoming too fond of them, because it is always their duty to find a balance, like a school master or parent, between affection and authority” (ibid: 29). It is the role of the father or school master to discipline, guide, think, act and sometimes talk on behalf of his children or pupils who cannot be trusted to be sensible. So, when the Rhodesian Governor meets local people who are resisting attempts to relocate them before the flood, we read:

Another of the Congress men joined in and said: “But the Native Authority agreed that the dam should be built, and did they inform people about Kariba? Did the people agree that the dam was to be built?”

“The Native Authority were not consulted before the decision to build Kariba was taken”, the Governor said.

“Then we will stay on our God-given land, water or not”, the man replied. “How can this be decided without our agreeing?”

“In big matters like this, little people are not consulted”, the Governor said. “This is a very big matter. In big matters the Queen does not consult small men.” [164]

The contemptuous rejoinder of the governor to the legitimate concerns of Tonga people captures the colonialist refusal to recognize colonized people as human beings, but as lesser beings (small men and little people) whose interests cannot measure up to those of bigger people. It is in this vein that Queen Elizabeth dismisses Khumbula’s 1955 petition for her “...to appoint a commission, mostly of Africans from West Africa, to enquire whether it was

really in the interests of the country to obtain the benefits of Kariba at the expense of suffering for the Tonga, and whether atomic energy could not be used instead...” (ibid: 91). Because the government position was irreproachable and sensible from the perspective of those who conceived Kariba dam, “... a brief reply was sent to Nkumbula, saying that the Queen was advised that the petitioner was not representative of the people concerned and did not express any genuine grievances, and that the petition for a commission was not granted” (ibid: 91). The brief response from the Queen begs the need to revise the definition of ‘genuine grievances’ that is worse than the loss of one’s home, land and lifestyle. Moreover, that short response signals how she considered Khumbula and his request to be inconsequential. In suggesting that the petitioner was not representative of the people concerned she raises two problematic issues; that Khumbula was not as qualified as the Rhodesian government to express the genuine concerns of the Tonga people; and that the people concerned in this matter are white Rhodesians. For as the Governor reminds congregants to one meeting, the Queen:

...had sent him to Northern Rhodesia to be her ears and eyes and mouth, to see and hear things and report them to her, and to say things which would be her words. She had told him to look after all the people of Northern Rhodesia and do everything that was right for their welfare.
[ibid: 162]

It becomes apparent from the above that the Governor and the Queen become the implausible voices of Tonga people. This problematic ruse condemns subaltern voices to the margins of colonial discourses such as *The Shadow of the Dam*. When some Tonga people decide to use their spears to register their opposition to the Rhodesian Federal Government’s violent displacement, it surprises none but the self-appointed voices of the Tonga people. For “[t]he government is quite satisfied that the Lusitu plan is in your best interests, and now it intends to carry out this move without delay. Those who resist will be moved by force, using the police you see here today” (ibid: 139). The use of force to enforce the move shows the government’s last step towards silencing dissent. Because Tonga concerns were deemed illegitimate and illogical, the author writes that:

Many Southern Rhodesians would have argued that the Tonga, and similar simple people, had never been governed in their history by anything but compulsion; and so, when they met a civilized problem which they could not possibly understand, it was kinder to tell them exactly what to do and to see that they did it, whether they seemed at the time to like it or not. [106]

The above reduces the dispute between Tonga people and the Rhodesian government into a simplistic battle between atavistic barbarism and progressive civilization. It becomes what Arundhati Roy (1999: 2) terms in an Indian context "...a war between modern, rational, progressive forces of 'Development' versus a sort of neo-Luddite impulse- an irrational, emotional 'Anti-Development' resistance, fueled by an arcadian, pre-industrial dream." This forecloses further debate and justifies the use of force to maintain broader peace and progress, regardless of the violence heaped on Tonga people. So, when some Tonga people throw a volley of stones at a messenger who is traveling with the District Officer, "...he was suddenly shattered by something quite unexpected: something which seemed astonishing to him and to everyone who knew the kindly Tonga" (ibid: 87). This marks a volte face in the representation of Tonga people in the text. Earlier the impression created is that "[w]ith the Tonga nobody needed to be tough. They told Livingstone they would welcome British rule, although they only knew what it meant from what he had told them; and when it came, forty years later, they did welcome it" (ibid: 29). This contradiction in the description of the Tonga represents colonial discourse's strategic labelling of the other not as they are but as what is expedient for the advancement of the colonial mission. Later in *The Shadow of the Dam* when another rebellion occurs, we read that the District Officer "...immediately recognized men whom he knew quite well and was horrified at this final change in their demeanor, this relapse into savagery" (ibid: 141). In mobilizing and feeding into the popular stereotype of the savage other, Howarth justifies the need for colonial violence to stop what he characterizes as a 'relapse into savagery'. He "...confers on it a false legitimacy" (Roy, 1999: 2) as the Tonga people become disposable obstacles to national development. It is difficult to grasp at what point the heroism of fighting for one's life, home and land becomes barbaric? It perhaps happens when development is seen as a one-size-fits-all phenomenon across diverse cultures and geographical regions, when the colonizer refuses to introspect and behold the barbarism that helps establish colonization. In the loaded words of one Tonga headman Namakungulu, "...when the Queen

decided to close the Zambezi river, she decided to kill everybody. If the Queen wishes to kill us, we cannot run away” (1961: 169). Another headman Mazulu echoes, “[w]e will not move. Let the water come up and kill us” (ibid). These suicidal exclamations indicate that displacing Tonga people from Gwembe Valley was a death sentence of sorts. Thus cornered, fighting became inescapable and plausible.

The Chisamu Battle

The Shadow of the Dam depicts a battle between the Tonga people of Chisamu Village and Rhodesian police as of “...established authority and senseless anarchy” (ibid: 167). When the Tonga refused to relocate, the Gwembe Tonga Native Authority approved the Gwembe Tonga Removal Rules on the 27th of August 1958 and thereafter the Gwembe Tonga Removal Amendment Rules which:

...authorized the officers of the administration, or the police or the messengers to “conduct and regulate the orderly carrying out of the said removal.” It gave them power to remove any person who refused to move when he was ordered; and finally, in case the people who were moved should try to come back again, it took the unprecedented step of authorizing the government to destroy the villages as soon as they were empty. [1961: 137]

In essence, the Native Authority embodied the interests of the Rhodesian government. It therefore rubber stamped and provided legal sanctification to the displacement of Tonga people. These legal subterfuges rendered criminals those Tonga people who resisted to be relocated. It is little surprise that Howarth opines that “[s]o many Tonga had broken so many laws that all the courts in the land could hardly have tried them; and -which was more important still-nobody could find it in his heart to blame the criminals. So, the government never brought charges against them” (ibid: 186). The instructive concession from the foregoing is that it is not a crime to fight for the right to water, land, life, home and peace. It is instead a crime to rob people of these basic human rights. Innocent or not, the colonial government resorted to the use of force to uproot the Tonga people of Chisamu Village from their homes.

The narrator submits that Rhodesian Police Superintendent Prior instructed translator Chimputu to "...read out a form of riot proclamation, commanding the men in the name of the Queen to disperse in peace. But they replied by shouting abuse and insults" (ibid: 143). In reminding the reader that the Rhodesian police were acting on behalf of the Queen of the British Empire, Howarth underpins that Tonga people were abusing and insulting the royal house. Placing emphasis on the 'obnoxious' behavior of the Tonga rather than the legitimate reasons that invite it sways the emotions of the reader towards the Queen. There is therefore more to the statement that:

[f]or two hours, the lines of men faced one another, the Tonga with their spears gesticulating, dancing, and shouting old threats of war which they had used generations before, to encourage themselves against the Matebele; the police with their scientific weapons, stolid and sternly disciplined. And in the middle, between the lines, the fruitless argument went on. [ibid: 142]

The battle is reduced to the police defense of the Queen's name, British civilization, peace and progress against Tonga insolence, intransigence, retrogression and barbarism. In summoning the war-monger image of Tonga people, the author excuses the use of colonial violence. It matters little that the British took part in two ruinous wars (World War 1 and World War II) where tens of millions of people lost their lives. The scale of that destruction relativizes the war-mongering question. Howarth goes on to caricature the Tonga "... weapons of the Iron Age-spears, axes, clubs and shields" (ibid: 173) and glamourizes the Rhodesian 'scientific' weapons and discipline. It seems to escape his attention that the Rhodesian 'sophistication' decimates more lives than the ostensible ineptitude of Tonga people. It is little surprise that after the Chisamu Battle:

Six Tonga were brought in dead, and sixteen wounded. Two of them died on the way...None of the Congress men were among these dead or wounded...Nor among the casualties were there any policemen; in fact not a single police man had been hurt...When the police

themselves heard this news they were astonished, and naturally glad, but they were also acutely embarrassed. Police are always subject to criticism, especially in Africa, and they are expected at once to be accused of shooting when they were not in any danger. But in fact, nobody ever criticized them for what they did that day. [181]

The above reiterates that indigenous people are the worst casualties in resource wars instigated by outsiders. It is curious to read that ‘not a single policeman had been hurt’. This sustains the impression of British invincibility in *The Shadow of the Dam*. The phrase that ‘the police themselves were astonished, and naturally glad, but they were also acutely embarrassed’ mocks Tonga resistance and massages the Rhodesian ego. The remark that ‘nobody ever criticized them for what they did that day’ problematises the sincerity of the suggestion that the Rhodesian police were ‘acutely embarrassed’. Moreover, it submerges the traumatic loss of Tonga life under the gloss of British imperialism and the glamour of Kariba dam. In this, the Tonga become what Judith Butler (2009) in the context of the so-called USA global war on terror terms ungrivable lives. She reflects as follows:

One way of posing the question of who “we” are in...times of war is by asking whose lives are considered valuable, whose lives are considered ungrivable. We might think of war as dividing populations into those who are grievable and those who are not. An ungrivable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all, we can see the division of the globe into grievable and ungrivable lives from the perspective of those who wage war in order to defend the lives of certain communities, and to defend them against the lives of others-even if it means taking those latter lives. [2009: 38]

Following Butler, one can argue that from the colonial perspective, Tonga lives never existed, cannot count as lives at all and are ungrivable.

From that perspective, *The Shadow of the Dam* terminates its plot on a misleading romantic note of forgiveness, peace and great promise. This is deplorable for a text whose professed objective is to uncover the life of the Tonga before Lake Kariba. Notwithstanding, the author writes that:

Of all the surprising things which the Tonga had done, their sudden return to sanity and kindness and courtesy seemed most surprising. But it was characteristic of them, and perhaps of all unspoiled Africans, to admit when they were wrong, and quickly to forgive anyone who wronged them. They felt no grudge against the government...Their only bitterness was against the Congress men who had misled them; but they soon forgave them too, and the men who had briefly tasted such intoxicating power sank back to their status as ordinary villagers and contentedly went to Lusitu with the rest. [ibid: 186]

The epilogue sustains the depiction of Tonga people as impulsive and Janus-faced. That these two contradicting sides can be switched on and off with such ease (sudden) and are present on the same person raises questions about the representation of the other in colonial literature. On one side is the self-destructive savage who rebels against the 'noble' intentions of his redeemers, the side that colonizers must tame. The other side has the 'noble nigger' of child-like innocence, placidness and boundless cheerfulness. It is the side that ostensibly enables Tonga people 'to admit when they were wrong, and quickly to forgive anyone who wronged them'. Moreover, to legitimate colonial rule, the Tonga who have lost all because of the Rhodesian government are made to feel no grudge against the government. Instead, their bitterness is directed towards the Congress men who have 'misled' them into fighting for their homes and lives. It is a fleeting bitterness that Tonga people are quick to forgive. The fabricated denouement of the novel is that of Tonga people who relocated to Lusitu contented, repentant, and glad. It was to take Zimbabwe's Second Liberation Struggle (1966 to 1979) for the Rhodesian government to realize that black people harbored genuine grievances against colonial rule. It would have been fairer if Howarth had concluded his text with his prior observation that as the Tonga were relocating, "...the trucks lurched away slowly in bottom

gear, the people looking back at what they were leaving, rather than forward towards the promised land” (ibid: 105).

The Fragmentation

The establishment of Lake Kariba displaced Tonga people from their riverine homes. It also resulted in their paradoxical severance through the Zambezi river waters. Instead of linking the two shores as it had always done in precolonial times, the river became a barricade between two nations. Howarth writes that:

Whatever happened, it was clear even then that the tribe [Tonga] would be split into two. To the people in cities who had decreed the dam, the Zambezi was a frontier. The people on one side belonged to Southern Rhodesia, and those on the other side to Northern Rhodesia. But to Tonga, it had never been a frontier at all. They often crossed it, to borrow food or cut poles to build their huts, or to court new brides, or just to go to parties or call relations. Many families lived half on one side and half on the other. But now it seemed that each government intended to drag its own people back from the river, away into the hills, so that friends on the opposite bank would disappear and never be seen again. [1959: 50]

The interests and voices of Tonga people sank under the glamour of Rhodesian technological and economic progress. *The World Commission of Dams 'Kariba Dam: Zambia and Zimbabwe Report'* (2000) explains that:

During the first years after resettlement, the Tongas were allowed to cross the lake and meet relatives and friends at the other side. However, the frequency of visits was no longer the same given the long distances involved, as some were located more than 100km from the lake. Furthermore, when the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland broke

up in 1963 and Zambia became independent in 1964, free movement ceased to exist and border posts were established at Chirundu and Kariba. From that time, the Tonga could no longer afford the long journey through the newly established border posts. This meant that relatives and friends on the opposite side of the border lost contact with each other. [xii]

It became onerous for Zimbabwean Tonga people to maintain contact with their Zambian relatives because the nearest border post was established in Victoria Falls, 600km away from their homes. The situation has of late improved with the opening of the Kasambezi Border Post on the shores of the Zambezi River in 2020, albeit a staggering 40 years after Zimbabwe's independence and 56 years after Zambia's independence from Britain. The harnessing of electrical power from the waters of Zambezi River from 1956 has continued to marginalize and traumatize displaced Tonga people.

Conclusion

In this chapter I problematized Howarth's representation of the Kariba dam discourse from a colonizer's perspective. I underscored the detrimental impact of 'modern' progress on indigenous Tonga people he freezes as timeless ethnographic objects, living outside 'modern' time thus rendering their displacement inevitable and desirable. The Tonga people are denied agency, individuality and a sense of historical progression. I complicated this misrepresentation through revealing colonial stereotypes and the points at which they become unsustainable. For all its promises, *The Shadow of the Dam* renders Tonga people ghosts of colonial progress and legitimates the colonialization of Gwembe Valley. In the words of Jane Hill (2005: 157), "...narratives are not merely overtly "about" some "content," such as what happened when, where, and to whom, but that they somehow make public the covert underlying presuppositions that organize the worlds in which speakers live."

The next chapter considers the other dimension of hydro-colonialism (Hofmeyr) that critiques colonial constructions of water, reads for water, explores colonization of water, the

colonization of the idea of water and the notion of inspirited waters. I analyze Clements' *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God* and Nyanja's 'Nyaminyami: The River God.'

Chapter Three: Representation of Nyaminyami, Zambezi River and Kariba Dam in *Kariba: The Struggle with The River God* and ‘Nyaminyami¹⁴: The River God’.

Introduction

In their representation in literature, rivers can be protagonists, landscapes, symbols and plot catalysts. As Manuel Gómez (2018) observes, “...the water imagery of the river is particularly ingrained in cultures as the source of life, mythical significance, symbolic revelations as well as literary inspiration; therefore, the imagery of and about the river has become part of the universal human experience from primeval times to our present” (139). It is from this insight that this chapter considers the ways in which Zambezi river shapes and inspires Clément’s *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God* and Nyanja’s ‘Nyaminyami: The River God’. In both texts, the river becomes a rich cultural site for reading and rearticulating the captivating Lake Kariba narrative. Namwali Serpell (2020: 1) offers that “[t]he history of Kariba is the story of a war over the past and the future of a river.” This struggle over a river between Tonga people and British settlers reminds us that colonization was as much a struggle for water as it was for land, something that helps rescue Southern African conversations from an inordinate fixation on land. Both texts draw on the behavior of Zambezi river for narrative technique and epistemological direction. In *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God*, the author employs the characteristics of Zambezi river to capture its resistance to the Rhodesian desire to tame it. Clements personifies the river as it battles to protect its natural flow. The author taps into Tonga cosmological beliefs that center Nyaminyami, the Zambezi river god. It is in the same vein that Nyanja frames his text such that the waters of Zambezi river become animated with divine and ancestral spirits, suggestively ceasing to be vacant spaces. From this turn, the focus shifts from a tangible struggle for water and land to a spiritual combat between Tonga and Christian beliefs. In this light, the physical and spiritual contests mirror the dual colonial aims of Christianizing the continent and feeding industrial capitalism. That these significant historical battles are written in and read through Zambezi river underscore the importance of water in re-narrating

¹⁴ Nyaminyami the river god of Tonga people has generated intense interest from writers and scholars. Some of the resultant works are *Nyaminyami: The Zambezi River God* (2016) by Ronald Thackwell, *Nyaminyami and the Kariba Dam: Grade 6* (2002) by Catherine House, Karen Ahlschlager and Jiggs Snaddon, *Nyaminyami: The Spirit of the River God* (2008) by Mondo Murage and *Kariba: Nyaminyami’s Kingdom 1995* by David Martin.

land-based colonial histories of Southern Africa. The eclectic potential of water at both material and metaphorical levels enables this turn. This hydrocolonial analysis seeks to complicate binaries common in colonial and post-colonial studies as it underlines how “...pre-colonial and colonial hydro-epistemologies interact and creolize” (Isabel Hofmeyr, forthcoming: 14). The Zambezi river thus becomes a frame that conjures and reflects different historical times, ideologies as well as genre spaces.

This chapter first provides brief summaries of the two chosen core texts before it shifts to consider the representation of Nyaminyami. Thereafter, focus settles on the depiction of three illustrative battles between the builders of Kariba dam and the Nyaminyami inspired Zambezi river. It then considers in brief the impact of the dam on other forms of life before moving on to scrutinize the interactions of the construction workers of the dam and the possible lessons that people can glean from nature.

Synopsis

In *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God*, the Rhodesian government’s decision to create Lake Kariba and Kariba hydro-electric power plant across the Zambezi river encounter the spirited resistance of Nyaminyami, rendering an engrossing narrative that captures nature resisting human encroachment. The narrator relates that the Italian multi-national contractor, “Impresit was a force seldom more than a thousand Europeans, who, with some six thousand African auxiliaries, fought a three-year battle against the most violent if not the most powerful river in Africa” (76). It becomes clear from the superlative ‘most violent if not most powerful’ that Zambezi river is peculiar. By making an aquatic being (Nyaminyami) and a river the core protagonists of the plot, Clements underscores the role of water and the supernatural in the colonization of Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi. The narrative flows in and with the waters of Zambezi river, the climax of which transpires at the Kariba gorge that is located within the Gwembe Valley borderline region between Zambia and Zimbabwe. Clements’ well-researched and balanced text resists clear-cut genre categorization as it blends a journalistic and an imaginative approach that offers what I consider to be an insightful interpretation of the Kariba dam real-life historical drama. In crafting his narrative, the Rhodesian journalist and politician draws on anthropological sources from the time of David Livingstone, the Federal Information

Department of Rhodesia, personal interviews of some of the crucial players involved and personal field observations. *Kariba: The struggle with the River God* constructs the colonial human geographies of Rhodesia through the natural geography of the Zambezi river and the indigenous beliefs shaped by its inspirited waters. The text helps this research report in at least two crucial ways; reminding us that nature is often a silent victim of industrial progress; and reopening conversations on Tonga religious beliefs otherwise rubbished in colonial narratives such as *The Shadow of the Dam*.

The thematic content and cinematic composition of ‘Nyaminyami: The River God’ are also shaped and inspired by Nyaminyami and the Zambezi river. It documents and visualises accounts of Nyaminyami from current Lozi and Tonga people located within the Kariba area on the Zambian side of the river. The pool of contributors includes Lexon Mizinga the Director General of the Zambian National Museums, Phaniel Simamba a member of the Banganda Royal clan, a local chief Simamba, Jabula Kangwenda a 90 year-old blind elder who claims to have seen Nyaminyami, ambassador Fredrick Hapunda, Herman Striedl the proprietor of Sandy Beach Lodge, ambassador Inonge Mbukusita of the Lewanika Royal family, George Mbenda an anthropologist, and curio salespeople-Joseph Stanley and Richard Mumba-who trade Nyaminyami artefacts to tourists. These diverse voices offer often-conflicting versions of Nyaminyami all of which provide depth to the river god. It seems that those local people who are rooted in local cosmologies still venerate Nyaminyami while others who are steeped in western ‘scientific’ knowledge and Christianity disparage the Zambezi river God. These competing voices illustrate one advantage that documentaries bring to narrativization, that is offering contending opinions and enabling the reader or viewer to formulate their opinion from the evidence presented. If one agrees that seeing and listening is believing, ‘Nyaminyami: The River God’s’ audio-visual-tactile medium lends a degree of authenticity to the tale. In any case, it brings to this study a different way of seeing and telling the tale of Nyaminyami and Zambezi river.

The documentary begins with an establishing shot of the imposing Kariba Dam wall that overshadows green trickling waters of Zambezi river underneath. From this shot, the impression that human beings conquered nature at Kariba is hazarded. Nonetheless, the presence of sprouting green plants on the side of the walls begins to suggest otherwise, as these

point to nature fighting back. This realisation is bolstered after three seconds as a close shot of a majestic Nyaminyami sculpture that towers above the dam wall appears on the screen. Immediately after, an interviewee offers that “Nyaminyami was very very strong. Had very very strong mysterious powers. Bigger functional powers than the smaller gods”. The screen sequence shifts to a wide shot of ominous looking darkish clouds accompanied by diegetic thunder sounds. In an instant, visuals of raging waves sweeping away a helpless worker and attacking a foot bridge appear on the screen. A different voice adds that “Nyaminyami was annoyed in a way, making floods so that people could perish.” Another contributor explains that “there was a conflict. Nine people were killed as a result of that resistance that took place.” The terminating shot of the introduction sequence shows an aerial shot of the Victoria Falls, magnificent and eerie with white mist rising from the plunge pool. This shot further foregrounds Nyaminyami and the Zambezi river as the protagonists of the text. The introduction creates suspense and a sense of mystery in the viewer that the rest of the documentary unravels.

Representation of Nyaminyami

Since ancient times, the relationship between human beings and rivers has been inseparable. For instance, the following rivers were important to the following people: the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to Mesopotamians, the Nile river to Egyptians and Ethiopians, the Indus and Ganges rivers to Indians, the Yangtze river to Chinese and the Haliacmon river to Greeks. Likewise, and for purposes of this section, the Zambezi river was special to Tonga people. Mawere and Awuah-Nyamekye (2015: 248) opine that:

Many important shrines and sacred places were dotted along the river which symbolized their spiritual attachment to the river and the marine world. This included family shrines (known as *ntumba* or *numba*) which were established on the riverbank gardens. Most sacred places were pools, all of which had an individual name.

The importance of rivers across diverse civilizations and time spans is a function of their utilitarian as well as spiritual purposes. In the latter case which speaks to the focus of this

subsection, Manuel Gómez (2018: 146) suggests in the context of Latin American literature that is as pertinent here that:

[t]he river...frames rituals, a collection of religious beliefs put into practice, that become symbolic. The place captures sacred attributes... Such a conception synthesizes a long, human tradition ascribing mythical powers to geographical places, where ceremonies of cleansing and purification take place.

To Tonga people, the waters of Zambezi river possess sacred traits that emanate from the presence of Nyaminyami, their omnipotent God. Mawere and Awuah-Nyamekye (2015: 244) note that "...this river-god remains shrouded in controversy and continuous academic debate in Zimbabwe and beyond."

In contribution to this ongoing academic debate, I consider the representation of this aquatic being in 'Nyaminyami: The River God' and *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God*. I explore the general, physical and functional attributes that he is associated with. The objective, as Clements (1959: 88) articulates, is to reveal that "Nyaminyami is no mythical monster like the dragon in folk-tale. Although he is at times personified as a great river beast, the wider concept of his existence is far subtler. The African's own religion is a long way from being unsophisticated." The author further iterates that although it is possible to characterize Nyaminyami "...as a mere personification of the elemental force of the river, as Thor personifies thunder... there is much more to him than that" (ibid). To grasp this wider concept of his existence, I shall pursue two courses; that is consider the insider Tonga perspective; and compare Nyaminyami to Jehovah of the Judeo-Christian tradition. I argue that although Nyaminyami's influence became salient to the outsider during the construction of Kariba Dam, his presence and importance to Tonga people precedes and outlasts that singular historical moment.

Mawere and Awuah-Nyamekye (2015: 247) trace the existence of Nyaminyami back to the progenitors of Tonga people, presumably thousands of years before British colonization of Southern Africa. Drawing on common Tonga myths that have been passed from generation to generation, the above scholars note that among Tonga people, "...many tell of symbolic and magical crossings of the river by founding figures. Thus, the centrality of the river is quite apparent; people swore by the river saying, 'by the river' or by 'God who gives water' in Tonga." These scholars stretch McGregor's (2009) notion of 'crossing' I mentioned in chapter one to the level of Tonga ancestral lineages and spiritual beliefs. Clements notes of Nyaminyami, the center of those Tonga religious beliefs, that he is "...no picturesque fiction. Like Jehovah, he is a personification of supernatural power" (1959: 12). In juxtaposing a popular celebrated Judo-Christian God to a lesser known and caricatured Tonga God, Clements places both supernatural beings on an equal footing, showing that they represent similar paranormal qualities. This complicates bigoted colonial misrepresentations of indigenous gods as diabolic forces. From the basis of this disabuse, it becomes possible to perceive indigenous Gods as credible as those Gods of other 'civilized' cultures.

For instance, numerous sources from Nyanja's documentary indicate that no one has seen Nyaminyami. Instead of citing this as proof of His nonexistence, one remembers that no one has seen Jehovah nor other prominent deities. For the King James Version of the Bible (John 1: 18) declares that "[n]o man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him." Even 91-year-old Jabula Kangwenda, the one person who claims to have seen Nyaminyami admits that this divine being "was not easily seen. Even when it revealed itself, only the shoulders would be visible, never the head. Just as the hippo behaves in water." Kangwenda claims to have beheld the shoulders of Nyaminyami and nothing more. This is again consistent with the Biblical account in Exodus (33: 23) where the prophet Moses was told by God that "...you shall see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen." It is therefore little surprise that ambassador Fredrick Hapunda submits in the documentary that "nobody really knew what exactly the face of Nyaminyami looked like." Neither is it a surprise that another contributor Phaniel Simumba offers that "there is an assumption that if you see it, you become sick." As the documentary proceeds, this turns out to be more than an idle threat as Kangwenda, the beholder of the shoulders of Nyaminyami is shown to be blind. Ominous as this sounds, the case is more portentous in the Christian Bible for Jehovah makes it clear to one of his prophet Moses that "you cannot see my face: for there

shall no man see me, and live” (Exodus 33: 20). To explain this deific refusal to be seen, the voice over narrator of the documentary suggests that ‘imperfect’ human eyes cannot grasp and endure the glorious might of divinities.

That no one has seen Nyaminyami in full has inspired numerous conjectures. In the documentary, ambassador Hapunda suggests that Nyaminyami “... was neither a human being nor an ordinary creature. It was a combination of a fish, some kind of snake and also with human features.” The voice over narrator adds that “*Nyaminyami*, the river god, is a snake like dragon, but with a fish’s head.” It is instructive that this divine being combines in one three different animal types: fish from the aquatic family; snakes from the reptile camp; and lastly humans from mammals. One can argue that Nyaminyami’s supernatural abilities stem from a union of the powers of these three categories of animals. Being three-in-one, it taps from the marine world of fish, the amphibious powers of snakes and the intelligence of human beings. Additionally, this union of snake, human and fish recognizes a deep interspecies connection within Tonga cosmological beliefs, an ostensible veneration for nature and non-human life that contributes to mutual self-preservation rather than unbridled predation.

The presence of Nyaminyami, like other deities, could be perceived through the strange behavior of elements of nature. In this light, Kangwenda discloses in the documentary that “every time it came out the water would go in reverse. Therefore, water would mysteriously flow unnaturally.” This evokes the Biblical account in Exodus (14: 21) where “...the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided” so that the children of Israel could escape from the pursuing Egyptian forces through the Red Sea. In both cases we notice a supernatural power bending or suspending rules of nature, in this instance gravitational forces. In other words, when gods speak, nature listens and submits. This seems to be the case in the behavior of whirlwinds when air and water combine to create an indomitable force capable of great damage. It is perhaps because of this spectacular demonstration of power that water deities have been described as “shadowy... whirlwind-like” (Siegel Brian, 2008: 16) and “a storm or whirlwind” (Lange Mary, 1998: 3). ‘Nyaminyami: The River God’ captures a compelling visualization of a whirlwind as it sweeps across water. In this extreme close shot, the camera focuses on the eye of spinning waves of water whose rapid circular movements threaten to pull down the viewer.

The next shot sequence plunges the viewer under dim greenish waters, a subtle touch which relives the fate of those unfortunates who lost their lives on the Zambezi river. This hints at the intimidating facet of Nyaminyami which I will explore later in this chapter. It is critical at this moment to mention that the documentary underpins and complicates Nyaminyami's connection to whirlwinds through Herman Striedl who offers that he once:

noticed snake like movements that were very fast. It looked like snake movements. It moved for some time then stopped all of a sudden. I watched it for a few times. It was too big for a crocodile. It looked like it would have been a big serpent. I later found out that it was a whirl wind. A whirlwind comes from land and hits the water. It causes a circular movement in water because there is no dust.

The similitude between the movements of a snake and the movement of a whirlwind on water is striking. This explains why some people characterize water gods as whirlwinds. Indeed, when Striedl witnesses the strange phenomenon above, he is convinced that he is beholding a big serpent. This impression is dispelled at a later stage when he stumbles upon a scientific rationalization of this spectacle. Suffice to add, the documentary sustains Nyaminyami's close connection to water through aquatic-based cinematic techniques. When the voice over narrator is commenting on Nyaminyami, the background visuals center water. For instance, in one case we are shown cascading sheets of Victoria Falls, blurred with rising white mists from a plunge pool. This is accompanied with roaring diegetic sounds of the falling waters. Put together, the hazy mist and deafening sounds capture the enigmatic nature of Nyaminyami. Moreover, the pounding and raging waves of the waterfall point to his might. His might is also sometimes represented in the documentary through wide shots of red-greyish clouds and booming diegetic sounds of thunder. But, as the voice over narrator reminds us, "this mysterious deity has an equal share of love and hate for the people". His benign side is captured through establishing shots of tranquil flowing waters of the Zambezi river. The greenish waters silently and patiently meander around the boulders that line the course of the river. This highlights the nourishing, resilient, gentle and caring side of Nyaminyami.

The foregoing has established that Nyaminyami's physical appearance is a subject of conjecture. It flows in the waters of legend, speculation and contestation. If anything, it is possible to argue that this divine being is shapeless but possesses powers to shapeshift and inhabit multiple frames the occasion demands. This conforms to the elusive corporeal attributes assigned to various deities of other religions from across the globe. Suffice to emphasize, Nyaminyami the river god complicates animal/human and nature/culture dichotomizations in instructive ways. It is in this vein that I now turn to the depiction of Nyaminyami's functional powers as provider and protector of the Tonga people.

Nyaminyami the Provider

There were clear benefits of living along the shores of Zambezi river. The river provided irrigation water for crop production throughout the year and fish for consumption. Mawere and Awuah-Nyamekye (2015: 248) submit that Tonga:

[p]eople associated the good spirits with the river because it is the provider. People never lived far from it; they depended on its fish and flood waters. God would come down and give them food through the river. It was a holy gift and something revered. It provided food like a mother.

I am more interested in the last part of the quotation that draws our attention to God's numinous visitation from heaven to the Zambezi river to provide food to His Tonga children. The simile like a mother captures the nurturing and caring attributes of this supernatural being who the documentary identifies as 'Nyaminyami: The River God'. In the same, Lexon Mizinga, the Director General of Zambian National Museums sheds more light on this divine provision of food. He offers that during periods of drought and hunger, Nyaminyami would expose his back (read breast) on the banks of Zambezi river so that people could cut and gather meat from his body for their consumption. Mizinga adds that the river God would let people cut as much meat as possible and would submerge once He was satisfied that people had taken enough meat. To reinforce this disclosure, Mizinga delves into linguistics as he decodes the name Nyaminyami which means 'pieces of meat' when translated to English. Nyaminyami's divine

sacrifices evoke analogous actions from Jehovah who provided manna to Israelites in the middle of the desert. The Biblical account in Exodus (16: 4) records that “[t]hen the LORD said to Moses, ‘I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people will go out and gather the amount for each day, so that I may test them.’” Just like Jehovah of the Israelites, Nyaminyami of the Tonga people rescued his children from starvation through provision of supernatural food.

Nyaminyami was also responsible for the provision of rain. Tonga people would consult him before the start of the rain season or propitiate him with sacrifices in moments of drought. In the documentary, Phaniel Simumba divulges that people used to go to “inland shrines to pray for rains and after praying you would see a small cloud and rains would come.” This evokes the Biblical account in 1 Kings (18:41-45) when Elijah the prophet prayed to Jehovah for rain after a three-year drought. While he was on his knees and still praying, Elijah sent his servant to the sea to look at the skies for signs of rain. It was on the seventh time that the servant beheld “...a little cloud about the size of a man’s hand rising from the sea” (ibid: 44). In the next verse we read that “[a]nd soon the sky was black with clouds. A heavy wind brought a terrific rainstorm...” The striking similarities between the behavior of the Israelite God and Tonga God help to dispel colonial discourse’s dismissal of indigenous Gods as diabolic beings. Just as humans from other civilizations have pleaded with supernatural powers for rain, Phaniel Simumba reveals that Tonga people go to:

several shrines that are used to worship Nyaminyami. A Baobab tree is an example of a Nyaminyami shrine. There are two big baobab trees where people used to and still consult for rains. The priest would come and place a stick into the hole three times. And the sound that will come from there tells us whether rains will be good or will not be good for the season.

If this Tonga meteorological diagnosis would forecast bad rains, the elders would initiate appropriate sacrifices to plead for good rains from God. In those occasions when these efforts

failed to yield abundant rains, Tonga people counted on Nyaminyami to emerge from Zambezi river waters and provide them with meat to ensure their survival.

Nyaminyami the Protector

It is evident that Tonga people depended on the Zambezi river that also housed their beloved God. It is believed that Nyaminyami resided at the Kariba gorge along the Zambezi river, a place that Clements suggests "...has always been associated with danger and fear, and many are the legends which are told about it by old men around the fires in their kraals at night. The very word 'Kariba' implies menace..." (17). Serpell (2020: n.p) explicates that "[t]he word Kariba was a corruption of *kariva* or *kaliba*, a local term meaning 'trap'. It already named a place on the river, a massive stone slab that jutted out of the water at the opening of the gorge." She further corroborates that local "...legends said that this was the home of a river god named Nyaminyami..." (ibid). Clements echoes that "... this rock was regarded as the headquarters of the great river god Nyaminyami, who caused any canoe or human being who ventured near to be sucked down forever into the depths of the river" (1959: 18). This captures a hostile side of Nyaminyami, or seen from a different angle, His self-defensive impulse. From this basis, it is possible to argue that Nyaminyami rose to protect his home when "[t]he British took one look at that big rock and decided it was the best place to build a dam..." (Serpell: 2020: n.p). The other factors as the narrator of the documentary explains, were that the "...construction angered Nyaminyami not only because his people had been resettled, but also since the builders had separated him from his wife Kitapo who was now on the lower side of the dam. As a show of might, he decided to unleash his wrath on the builders." It is to the depiction of this dramatic battle between Nyaminyami and the Impresit constructors of Kariba Dam that I now turn to.

The Warfare

In *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God*, Clements depicts the strange circumstances surrounding the construction of the Kariba Dam. He states that "...never has a river fought so savagely and persistently as the Zambezi was to do..." (105). The resistance was so spirited, unsettling, and ostensibly premeditated that Clements conceptualizes it through a superb use of war lexicon. In this light, Nyaminyami is read as the Commander of Zambezi river aquatic forces repelling an attack from British colonial forces. As Clements writes, in the minds of

most Tonga people, "...Nyaminyami is the all-powerful god of the river. He will never allow the white men to control him. With one flick of his tail he will destroy all the work in the gorge" (ibid: 88).

Expectedly, in the beginning Europeans treated this threat as a local superstition. However, the progression of events later "...gave to almost everyone concerned a sense of being part of events which transcended normal experience. They groused and grumbled, as soldiers do, and bragged like old sweats" (ibid: 59). The author adds that even "...many of the engineers themselves became obsessed with the feeling that they were fighting a strange battle in addition to performing what they had begun by considering as a routine job of work" (ibid: 13). I now turn to explore three chapters in *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God*-The Skirmishes (Chapter 4), The First Assault (Chapter 9) and The Angry God (Chapter 11)-that capture the nature of a remarkable battle between human beings and nature.

Clements notes that a visitor to Kariba towards the end of 1955 when Impresit was setting up base:

would at once be reminded of a beachhead. The rear was still scarred with the debris of an advancing army, an army, however, whose weapons were of construction. Rough wooden signposts and boards with identification symbols marked the sandy tracks to the store dumps, to the headquarters of units, to messes, to latrines, to the medical aid post. Disabled machines, half-tracks and vehicles lay scattered around. Small groups of men moved purposely up the hills above the gorge. They were nearly all in khaki, some stripped to the waist, a few wearing the bush shirt, scarf, corduroys and sand-boots which was the unofficial uniform of the desert armies. To heighten the illusion, the muffled sound explosions sent up clouds of yellow and white smoke to drift listlessly with the dust across the brazen sky. [57]

The author invites our attention to preparations for an Anthropocene assault on ‘wild’ and ‘savage’ Zambezi river. The apt metaphor of a beach head, that refers to the military tactic of securing and fortifying a small portion from which to launch a larger attack on the rest of the terrain, suggests that Kariba Gorge became the British bastion from which Zambezi river would be conquered. Writing in the context of Latin American colonial narratives that resonate with Southern African colonial narratives, Manuel Gómez (2018: 149) contends that “... the descriptions of the rivers are closely related to a civilizing project”. For this reason, Clements writes that “[w]ork which would be unremarkable in the placid rivers of Europe could be perilous in the tumultuous Zambezi, and many times boats were capsized or wrecked on a sandbar or rock in the uncharted river” (35). In demonstration of the projection of colonial notions on nature, ‘civilized’ Europe possesses calm rivers while ‘barbaric’ Africa possesses ‘savage’ rivers that need to be placated to serve ‘modern’ human ends. Gomez (2018: 157) explains and cautions that “[a]fter the scientific revolution, man’s belief in progress translates into the recognition that he has almost succeeded in conquering nature. But nature, in a sense, has the last word because man ultimately always carries nature within him, becoming central to the person he is.”

The Initial Skirmishes

Clements writes that Zambezi “...river’s behavior decided the schedule of the project” (1959: 57). This at first captures the importance of Zambezi river both to the colonization project of Rhodesia and to the text itself as protagonist and aesthetic enabler. Secondly, at metaphorical level it humbles human beings through the reminder that nature rules and orders their fortunes and actions. The initial work on Kariba Dam construction involved the construction of a pontoon bridge that would facilitate the movement of people and crucial supplies across the Zambezi river. Concomitant to this task was the construction of the first coffer dam that would be used to divert the river’s water from its natural flow and enable work on the main Kariba Dam wall. To increase their success chances, the contractors had to understand the behavior of the river so that they could attack when it was at its lowest strength, that is:

in October, and usually begins to rise at the end of November, continuing to do so steadily until March, when there is a sharp rise to

its peak flow. This is normally maintained for one or two weeks, after which the level drops rapidly and evenly until the end of August; after this date it declines more slowly until the rise begins again. [ibid]

From the initial stages, the builders of Kariba Dam chose the wise path of doing most of their work prior to, and well after the peak flow period of Zambezi river. This way, it was imagined that Nyaminyami's missiles would be dodged and the forces of modernization march unmolested. But unbeknown to Impresit and the Rhodesian camp was that Nyaminyami was a step ahead and would tap into his reserve forces. For:

on Christmas Eve, 1955, the river struck, and the flood which came down swept away the pontoon bridge and swamped the only partially completed foundations of the coffer dam. Nyaminyami, it began to be whispered, had shown that he would accept the challenge. Throughout the rest of that rainy season, he was to harass the skirmishers with a series of counterattacks, some of them utterly unexpected. Never before in the recorded history of the Zambezi's flood had there been two peaks to the flood, so that it receded and then came back with new strength. But that was to happen later in that first season after the decision had been made to halt the river. It was, no doubt, a coincidence, but there were many such coincidences still to come. (ibid: 59).

From the above, Nyaminyami is personified and imbued with human-like abilities to 'accept' the challenge of the European skirmishers and regularly (series of counter attacks) direct His forces (read floods) to strike at their critical infrastructure. For it must be highlighted that the strike on the pontoon bridge marks a strategic attack on communication lines. This valuable war tactic isolates and cripples rival forces through cutting the supply chain of materials and reinforcements. Moreover, demolishing the foundation of the coffer dam scuttles plans to establish the main Kariba Dam wall that would barricade and re-channel Zambezi river, home to Nyaminyami. To hinder this, He re-strategizes and wrong foots his nemesis. Instead of

sticking to a single peak routine, He launches two peaks to the flood with the later coming with greater fire power. It is possible to read the later flood as some kind of mopping up force, deployed to quell outstanding pockets of human resistance. In this, Clements problematizes the claim that human beings are above nature and have ultimate control over it. There is still a lot to learn about nature, the supernatural and indeed human nature itself. It is a sign of human superciliousness, or the slipperiness of human scientific knowledge when the author suggests that the behavior of the floods was ‘no doubt, a coincidence, but there were many such coincidences still to come.’ The satiric tone recognizes that a coincidence seizes to be one the moment the rate of recurrence surpasses chance occurrences. That there is no ‘rational’ basis to explain the causal relationship between the flood and Nyaminyami points to the limitations of rationalism, that is its failure to handle supernatural manifestations that cannot be measured in a test tube. To those who witnessed the above floods (both Europeans and Africans) there was little doubt that a supernatural force (Nyaminyami) was behind these attacks. From “...that first skirmish with the river, man suffered a minor tactical defeat... [but] so much work remained to be done in the hills and above the furthest reach of the river’s fury that no time was spared for regrets” (60). However, that work was postponed until after the middle of that year because “...a cyclone, known in the meteorological records as ‘Edith’, had struck the headquarters of the Zambezi, causing a second flood of unprecedented lateness and further curtailing the short time when work in the riverbeds was possible (ibid: 68). Through these attacks, Nyaminyami demonstrated his readiness for the battle that had been brought to His doorstep. He spoke in a language no human being could ignore, obliging the reluctant Europeans (Impresit) to recognize his presence, disquiet and might.

The Second Attack

To the Italian contractors, the rumors of Nyaminyami struck a familiar note as “...he was just about as terrifying as venerable old Father Tiber and even less dangerous than Lombardy’s own river Po” (1959: 106). Father Tiber was the god of the river Tiber who struck Rome with a succession of floods during the 16th century. Po is the longest river in Italy and just like Zambezi river is associated with its own legends. These similarities gave the Italians some measure of ease on the basis that Nyaminyami would be no worse than Father Tiber nor Zambezi river worse than Po river. This was the impression after the first attack, for in their minds the worst had been seen and worn. So, they proceeded to assemble a “...vast mechanical

conglomeration on the steep slopes of the gorge, together with machines to power it and the raw materials to feed it... (ibid: 108). Unbeknown to them was that Nyaminyami was preparing for a fresh attack, for "...over eight hundred miles away the Zambezi was also mobilizing its forces. Upstream from Kariba the river is served by a catchment area of two hundred thousand square miles of country..." (ibid:109). The map of Southern Africa that is shown in the prologue of Clements' text (14-15) shows "...that the country north and south of the Zambezi is marked with little more than the names of rivers" (ibid: 62). This again speaks to the significance of rivers in shaping the colonial project and local settlement patterns. But for present purposes, it recognizes that Clements perceives these rivers to be brigades of Nyaminyami's aquatic army. In this light we read that:

[b]etween the Falls and the gorge, the main flood would be reinforced by three of the great Southern Rhodesian tributaries, the Gwaai, the Sengwe and the Bumi, besides a hundred smaller streams. Almost at the entrance of the gorge, within sight of the dam workings, lurked the Sanyati with its reputation for sudden violence... When in spate, the Sanyati's flow has the sudden, overwhelming ferocity of a cavalry charge.

Gwai, Sengwe, Bumi and numerous other small streams become Zambezi river's (the main regiment) reinforcement forces. These troops converge at the entrance of Kariba Gorge to defend the fortress of their commander, Nyaminyami. To complete the complement of these forces is lurking Sanyati brigade, whose strategic placement and 'reputation for sudden violence' render to it the ruthless firepower of a calvary charge. Sanyati can also be seen as a reconnaissance force whose strategic nearness to the Kariba Gorge gives it critical intelligence on the movements of Impresit forces. Because a calvary charge leverages on great speed and element of surprise, Sanyati becomes a crucial ally of Zambezi river.

In 1957, Zambezi River struck the first blow which was "...so far beyond its normal range that in one night several villages were swept away" (ibid: 109). The author further describes that:

[a]s the river gained strength, the outposts of man's fortifications in its bed began to look pitifully small. The piers of the road bridge trembled from the shock of the current, which reached twenty-five miles an hour. The men working inside the haven of the coffer heard the roaring and grinding of the great boulders as they were swept around the river's bed like pebbles. Those watching from the banks saw the debris which lurked on the surface of the water: smashed canoes, huge trees, entanglements of thorn and bush, and once a vivid reminder of the disasters upstream, the almost undamaged roof of a hut, which spun in lazy gyrations as it hurtled by. [1959: 110]

Like a calvary charge, the swiftness of the attack and movement of the water currents overwhelms the unsuspecting foe. The strength of the river, that speaks to the underestimated engulfing power of nature compels humans to realize their minuteness in the greater scheme of the universe. Film critic O'Toole Deirdre (2019: 365) explicates that “[c]ontrasting images of characters to vast landscapes creates a...narrative of smallness and isolation.” The trembling piers of the foot bridge capture how fragile human enterprises and material objects (canoes and a hut roof) are under the onslaught of nature. To represent the immense might of the river, Clements makes use of gripping aural metaphors (roaring boulders), tactile images (grinding boulders) and careful diction that paints in the reader's mind the overwhelming force of Zambezi river. The apt simile of those great boulders that were swept like pebbles also serves the same purpose. This vivid portrayal points to the behavior of an irate river pulling all its forces to defend its channel and commander. The river is sending a clear message to human beings; that it is the sole ruler of its course (literal and metaphorical); and that human beings should not temper with it. It is a message that those helpless people ‘watching from the banks’ understand in full. From this assault, one grasps what Deirdre (2019: 359) characterizes as “...the feeling of being overwhelmed, particularly in the face of nature and the grandness or power of the environment.”

When the forces of Impresit were trusting that Nyaminyami had exhausted itself, it came as a greater shock and concern when “...the river rose eighteen feet in twenty-four hours as the first wave of Sanyati's cavalry stormed irresistibly into the gorge. The coffer dam was overtopped,

only a turbulent crescent of foam marking its position under the water” (1959: 111). The turbulent crescent of foam symbolizes the seething rage of Nyaminyami who, to annihilate his enemies, commands Sanyati river to unleash its water grenades. It seemed plausible that some invisible force was directing the behavior of the floods. This perception of some supernatural force led Baldassarini, Impresit’s chief at Kariba to observe that “[w]e are going to have to watch out with this river. It looks as if it knows exactly what we are up to” (ibid: 110). For “[o]n March 19th, the river was within a few feet of the bridge and the main Zambezi flood was due within twenty-four hours. There was nothing left to do but to post a watch and to wait” (ibid: 111). Human beings had been compelled to surrender, to ponder their real place in the geosphere. Having made His point and magnanimous in triumph, Nyaminyami withdrew His forces. Twenty-four hours later, “...the Sanyati’s flood was rampaging uselessly two hundred miles down the river. So weak had the Sanyati become that for a while it flowed backward as the Zambezi waters poured up its channel” (ibid: 112).

The truce permitted Impresit to regroup and proceed with work on the north bank coffer dam. When the time came to destroy those segments of the dam which obstructed the diversion channel, “Sir Malcom Barrow, the Minister of Power, and a group of engineers and journalists assembled at an observation point high on the south bank hills to watch what was going to be the biggest explosion ever set off by man in Africa” (ibid: 115). The self-adulation of the colonial forces of modernization is too conspicuous to miss and speaks to the dialectics of colonial triumphalist discourse (McGregor, 2009). It reaches its pinnacle when:

a hundred thousand tons of water hurled itself into the new channel with such violence that at first the river actually reversed its flow about fifty yards below the dam. Three minutes later the turbulence and the whirlpools had died down, and the Zambezi was flowing undisturbed along the new course which man had made for it. [1959: 115]

The initial violence of the river that later dies down can be seen as the last kicks of Nyaminyami. Man has redirected the course of the giant river. Intoxicated in this Anthropocene bubble, a young engineer gloats to journalists that “[a]t last we have the river under control.

Floods can make no difference now” (ibid: 116). Had he known anything about the behavior of Nyaminyami, he would have realized that the strange reverse flow of water signals the presence of the river God.

The Angry God

The 1956 floods were so ferocious and so unprecedented that meteorologists forecasted that floods of the same magnitude could only recur after 2000 years. This spurred the soldiers of Impresit to intensify work on the dam. Unsurprisingly:

[b]y mid-November 1957, the coffer dam was almost ready, and rafts carrying pumps were lowered into the dirty water with which it was filled. Pumping began on November 19th, and two days later the last dregs were expelled. The surface of the Zambezi’s main riverbed was exposed for the first time in the hundreds of thousands of years the river had flowed through the gorge. On it lay boulders two or three times the height of man, worn into shapes which resembled the skulls of prehistoric monsters. As a raft touched the bottom, three men stood triumphantly upon it, gazing at the contorted secrets of the riverbed. [ibid: 128]

The dirty water can be read as a symbol of the ‘wounded’ and ‘bleeding’ riverbed, that has been subjected to protracted warfare. The trace of human hubris is again perceptible in the gratification from exposing the riverbed for the first time since time immemorial. This nonetheless reminds the reader that it took immense effort to make this possible as Zambezi river is no small rivulet. That achievement marked a turning point towards the subjugation of the river, hence the triumphant mood of the three Impreset men who behold its sacred nakedness. The two boulders ‘worn into shapes which resembled the skulls of prehistoric monsters’ hint to the reader that Zambezi river is wild, fearsome and dangerous. This sets the stage for the incredible report that reaches the gorge while the workers were still in triumphant mode; that “[a]bove the Victoria Falls, the Zambezi was already seventeen feet above the highest level of last year’s floods” (ibid: 130). “Then came the news that phenomenal rains

were falling all over the catchment area, and that dangerous floods could be expected in February” [131]. Nyaminyami and his forces were readying for another attack, this time fiercer than the previous ones.

Just like in 1956, Zambezi River launched the first attack as she “...bore down on the gorge with overwhelming and sudden ferocity. On February 7th, the road bridge, which had been so narrowly saved a year before was struck a mortal blow. One of its supporting piers collapsed and was washed away within seconds...” (ibid). The speed, element of surprise and viciousness of the attack bespeaks of well trained and marshalled forces. To add more strength to the attack, again just like the previous year, Sanyati river “...rose eight feet in twenty-four hours and charged into the gorge. Almost at once the water level rose to a height ten feet above the peak of the previous floods...” (ibid). The waters continued to rise and “...flooded the air strip and all air traffic was cancelled. Except for a dangerous storm-swept route along the access roads, which could no longer take heavy traffic, Kariba was isolated” (ibid). With the isolation almost complete, the Impresit forces were left to face infuriated Nyaminyami with no recourse to reinforcements or rescue. That night, “...a violent thunderstorm burst over Kariba. In the torrential rain, landslides started on the slopes of the hills, and came skidding across the access roads to pour into the river. Swathes were cut out of the banks as fifteen-foot waves swirled and scurried against them” (ibid: 132). This time, the entire arsenal of Nyaminyami congregates at the Kariba Gorge; the ground forces in the form of the turbulent waters of the irate rivers; the air force in the shape of violent thunderstorms; and the auxiliary forces in the shape of roaring landslides. It came as no surprise that “[in] less than four hours the area inside the dam was flooded. The river had re-conquered its bed” (ibid:133). To those who witnessed these events:

it indeed seemed that there was some sort of intelligence guiding the river, seeking out the weak points in man’s defence, following a planned campaign. First the road bridge, the main line of supply, had been crippled, and now the main assault on the already breached coffer dam was launched. [Ibid: 134]

To complete the rout, “[i]n what was a mopping-up operation, the Zambezi again diverted its attention to the crippled road bridge... Then with a sharp sound which was later compared to the bark of a field gun, the bridge was gone” (ibid: 135). The aural war imagery of the field gun reminds the reader that Kariba gorge became a battlefield where humans and nature fought. Those sustained and intelligent attacks from the Zambezi river persuaded some people to recognize and revere Nyaminyami. For instance, Baldassarini felt that his team was “...confronted with a force far stronger than ourselves. All that was left for us to do was to salvage what we could and wait for the floods to go down. The river was master” (ibid: 136). We read later that “[t]he triumphant army of water passed over the wreckage of his enemies at more than three and a half million gallons a second, a flood which, it had been calculated, could only happen once in ten thousand years” (ibid:139). It is suggestive from the above that a supernatural power that operates outside chronological time and human comprehension was in charge. A superior power that could direct elements of nature to do its bidding and bend natural laws for its benefit and when it deemed fit. Phaniel Simumba suggests in ‘Nyaminyami: The River God’ that this recognition led Impresit representatives to seek the advice of Tonga Elders on how to placate Nyaminyami. Simumba submits that these Elders were engaged to conduct rituals to win the favor of the Zambezi river God after which the Kariba Dam was completed without disturbance. For this reason, Clements notes that Tonga people are convinced that had Nyaminyami “...wished, he could have broken more than the bridges. But he has agreed to your plan. For through your machines he will go all over the world. It is he who will run along your wires but only because he wished to” (ibid: 210). From this basis, it is possible to perceive Nyaminyami’s acquiescence as some form of rebirth and strategic surrender.

Once again, human beings were forced to re-estimate their place in the universe as their supposed superior intelligence and technology bowed to forces of nature. In this instance where the overwhelming force of nature disarms human beings, the tables are turned as humans become passive while nature becomes active. The behavior of Zambezi river and its aquatic allies during the construction of Kariba Dam suggests the existence of a superior intelligence that was directing its strategic actions. To read those actions as mere coincidences as rationalists are inclined to do is to overestimate the power of western science and underestimate insights from alternative knowledge systems. It is these alternative modes of knowing and relating that promote intra/interspecies connections that are crucial for mutual survival of all creatures.

To Tonga people, Nyaminyami is still fighting for what he and His people lost because of the construction of Kariba Dam. Chief Simumba corroborates in the CGTN documentary that “Nyaminyami’s powers are still felt today. Nyaminyami is still trying to find a way to reunite with his wife but the concrete walls are keeping them apart. Hence the tremors that happen when they are trying to meet each other.” There is a local belief that the Zambezi river God will not rest until the dam wall crumbles so that He reunites with His wife Chitapo. Because most Tonga people did not get the promised benefits of the dam, they also consider the looming destruction of the walls as some form of divine justice. Serpell (2020) states that:

scientists and reporters have issued warnings about the dam’s potential to cause ecological disasters of opposite kinds. On one hand, low rainfall has yielded water levels that barely reach the minimum necessary to generate electricity. On the other hand, heavy rainfall has threatened to flood the surrounding areas. [n.p]

The paradoxical nature of the threat smacks of supernatural elements, Nyaminyami to be precise. New Yorker Times contributor Jacques Leslie (2016: n.p) captures the full magnitude of the threat when he writes that the collapse of Kariba Dam wall:

would constitute an epochal event in the history of energy development-the dam industry’s Chernobyl-. The ensuing torrent would be four times bigger than the Zambezi’s biggest recorded flood, in 1958, and would release enough water to knock over another major dam three hundred miles downstream, in Mozambique.

He explains further that this would impact about three million people who live along the path of the river and eliminate an estimated 40% electrical power of twelve Southern African countries. Although rationalists acknowledge the peril, their explanation has no place for Nyaminyami who is “...another of man’s rivals tamed to serve his will” (1959: 219). To these people, if the dam wall collapses, the cause will be structural defects resulting from tear and

wear, that is the deepening plunge pool at the bottom of the dam wall that is threatening its foundation.

It can be argued that those Europeans who masterminded the construction of this mega structure dread the collapse of Kariba Dam wall. Its symbolical capital within colonial and neo-colonial circles is fathomless. Clements (ibid: 218) submits that “[t]he lake is in fact a subject for dreams rather than plans. To have created an inland sea which, with its creeks and inlets, will be approximately the size of Wales, is an achievement which either stuns or inebriates the imagination of those who contemplate it.” “Never before has man reconstructed the geography of the world on such a scale. One hundred and eighty miles long, and in places forty miles, the lake will reach a maximum depth of nearly four hundred feet” (ibid: 157). In it “...lies the mark of man’s ruthless power, of his ability to re-design the whole world into his own pattern, to usurp the privileges which once belonged to his gods” (ibid). He concludes that the dam wall is “...by far the greatest piece of masonry constructed in Africa since the days of the Pharaohs and the pyramids” (ibid: 210). From the above, the wall becomes a luminous insignia of human pre-eminence over nature, showcasing the Anthropocene quest to exploit nature for the benefit of mankind at whatever cost. Moreover, the success of the project rendered British colonizers some type of gods capable of recreating nature and recharting the course of Tonga life. The Kariba Dam wall is the personification of the British colonization of Southern Africa. From this basis, colonization becomes a force that breaks the ‘lull’ that came after the great Pyramids epoch. Of course, as Hughes (2010) argues, Lake Kariba showed that Europeans could refashion land-locked Southern African territories in the image of European-like waterscapes.

Melting Pot

On another note, Kariba Gorge became a melting pot of people from different continents and nations, presenting opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges. This evokes Julia Kushigian’s (2018: 57) suggestion that “[b]ecause of its fluid, dynamic, violently sweeping, unfetishized, and inherently communal value, the river, specifically, and nature, generally, refashion a social order for collective voices.” In relation to religious aspects, some Christian Italians dipped into Tonga religious beliefs when the situation became untenable. In the same vein, some Tonga people flocked to the Roman Catholic Church of St Barbara whose “...symbolic message is

surely that something more than a dam has been built. Here...Out of everything, in the end, something better will come” (Clements: 199). A new religion that has one foot in either camp was born during the construction of the Kariba Dam. However, the construction of the St Barbara church can also suggest the memorialization of the conquest of western religion over Tonga religious beliefs. It is perhaps because of this symbolical weight that the Zimbabwean government installed a giant statue of Nyaminyami that towers above Kariba dam to re-cover and restate the influence of Nyaminyami. As I argued in the previous chapter, the power of Nyaminyami is still felt in present times.

Moving to the material aspects, the dam united Europeans from different countries in one place at a time when memories of World War 11 had reignited deep fissures. The two main partners of the Kariba venture-Britain and Italy-fought each other at this war so much that there was a general fear that the construction of the dam was going to suffer because of prior hostilities. Nonetheless, as Henry Olivier, representative of the international consortium of consultants in Rhodesia during the project notes, “the job has always been more important than the nationality. Kariba has been to me a wonderful example of what Europe, which so many people regard as finished, can achieve when its people get together” (ibid: 212). It is also likely that the pull of capital-lure of a lucrative Kariba dam contract-during a period of global recession convinced the erstwhile enemies to rise above their differences.

Concomitant to the union for a higher purpose were embryonic signs of cordial interracial relations that developed between Italian workers and their African counterparts. Clements writes that:

Right from the start, the Africans and the Italians got on very well together. Most of Impresit’s artisans are from a peasant background. Their arduous life in the northern plains and in the Alps of Italy has not encouraged them to be pretentious, and in their attitude towards the African they are free of that color-consciousness which often has morbid manifestations among Europeans of the same class. Their attitude is relaxed and friendly. [99]

This camaraderie saw “European and African employees, do lifting and pushing jobs together... [and such] sharing of common dangers also, of course, linked everyone who worked on the wall...” (ibid: 100). The moments of shared vulnerabilities that characterized the construction of the Kariba Dam compelled these different races to come together. There was no choice to do otherwise. The point here is that the seeds for interracial cooperation in Rhodesia were sown during the construction of Kariba Dam. It was to take more than two decades for the fruits to be realized in Zimbabwe and close to a decade in both Malawi and Zambia. It is from this basis that Clements concludes that “Kariba has shown what Africa and Europe together can achieve and has also shown the folly of Europe’s own artificial disunity” (ibid: 211). As Kushigian (2018: 67) suggests, “[i]n contrast to a hierarchical mechanism that emphasizes divisions including the separation of workers from managers and owners...the river symbolizes an unfettered, living organism that is not socially or scientifically controlled or damned.” The flowing currents of water teach humans to promote inter-cultural, cross-class and cross-racial exchanges.

It is of course true that sour race relations also defined this Kariba period. Indeed, there were strikes by disgruntled black workers as Howarth mentions in *The Shadow of the Dam*. Moreover, it must be remembered that Italy committed some atrocious crimes in their horn of Africa colonial territories. For instance, apart from the hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians, Eritreans and Somalis who perished during the expansion of Italy in East Africa, Michael Kinch (2016) notes that Italian forces used mustard gas to massacre one hundred and fifty thousand Ethiopians in the 1940s. These atrocities help us to avoid labelling Italians as noble colonists who possessed class consciousness and exceptional interracial openness different from the open bigotry of most white Rhodesians. Perhaps the fact that the Italians were not in charge in Rhodesia robbed them the opportunity to abuse power as they had done in their colonial territories. However, it must be stressed that whatever force was restraining them in Rhodesia, relations between Italian workers and their black counterparts seen during the construction of Kariba dam sowed seeds of cordial interracial relationships in a Rhodesia that was bent on zero social contact between the races. Even though the material manifestation of this turn was minimum during the time, the symbolical gesture was prophetic and significant.

Impact on Fauna and Flora

For all the positive outcomes from Kariba Dam, it must not be forgotten that it came at a huge cost for the displaced Tonga inhabitants, plants and animals. I will for present purposes highlight the fate of the latter two. Incalculable and irreparable damage was done to flora when thousands of acres of land were cleared to make way for Lake Kariba. Howarth (1961) captures the depth of the carnage as follows:

In an average area, one pair of tractors could wreck thirty acres of forest in an hour. Groves of trees which had been landmarks to people who lived nearby as long as the oldest could remember disappeared in a matter of seconds. Behind the tractors, bulldozers pushed the wreckage into rows, and it was burned. The columns of smoke drifted over the valley, and ashes settled thickly, and at night the distant melancholy bonfires could be seen. [108]

Clements concurs and deplores that “[s]o much has been destroyed, millions upon millions of trees and so many living things” (ibid: 218). Some of these trees “are still alive although two thirds under water; others are already shriveled and bare in death. As you see them, so they will be forever frozen, a petrified forest deep below the surface” (ibid). The phrase ‘petrified forest’ captures ruthless human indifference towards nature that committed no crime to deserve the punishment. Their haunting presence under Lake Kariba testifies to their defiance and reminder of man’s callousness. Moreover, the ‘death-dealing’ (ibid: 187) waters of Lake Kariba decimated millions of creatures, great and small.

Touched with the plight of these hapless and helpless creatures, Archie Fraser (then Director of the Southern Rhodesian National Parks and Wildlife Management) and others launched a rescue operation that came to be known as Operation Noah and made headlines across the globe. While there is no doubt that this operation rescued some animals, it was used to divert attention from the dam’s immeasurable damage to innocent animals and plants. Clements puts the matter into perspective when he observes that it must be:

remembered that over six hundred thousand head of game have been shot in Southern Rhodesia alone as part of the campaign against tsetse fly, and that this slaughter continues within a hundred miles of the area where rescue operations are now being conducted. Between 1953 and 1957, one hundred and thirty thousand head were destroyed in these tsetse fly operations. For every animal that has been rescued by officials in Operation Noah, at least two, during the same period, have been shot by other officials working nearby. [184]

The above bloodbath captures official figures of a human assault on animals. It remains numb on the billions of creatures that the rising waters of Lake Kariba flooded to a silent death, with no camera or pen to record. These are the unmournable (Butler), unknowable and invisible (Nixon) casualties of Kariba Dam, washed away from the shores of existence and remembrance. It is indicative of human pretense that we create problems and celebrate when we come up with ‘solutions’ to those problems. Operation Noah soon developed into a melodramatic farce as hives of journalists from across the globe swarmed Kariba to witness a rendition of the Biblical Operation Noah. It must be remembered that the British colonizers saw themselves as gods endowed with divine-like powers to recreate nature, terminate and give life. The human god was giving a second life to doomed creatures. Due to these symbolical overtones, “...a situation developed when there were more observers and journalists than there were rangers taking part in Operation Noah (ibid: 194). To add to the sensational charade, rescue scenes were stage-managed sometimes causing the loss of poor animals.

Conclusion

When nature fights back as was the case with Zambezi river during the construction of Kariba dam, human beings are forced to re-estimate their place in the universe as their ‘superior’ intelligence fails them. Michael Richardson (2018: 11) reasons therefore that in a “drowned world, the markers of human achievement are signs only of civilizational fall, of climatic wounding.” The behavior of Zambezi river and Nyaminyami invite us to think with, rather than for, of or above other-than-human lives when we implement massive projects. Our indifference

result in “...anthropocenic storm clouds gathering” (Sarah Nuttall, 2019: 35) that harbinger the great fall of human civilization.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

This research report deployed a hydro-colonial lens to re-read the depiction of Rhodesian colonial themes in three texts on Kariba. Focusing on mega-dam discourse, I considered the formulaic depiction of Tonga people and British people in Howard's *The Shadow of the Dam* with the intention of unearthing binarized stereotypes and the points at which these become unsustainable. I explored how Kariba Dam helped entrench British rule in Southern Africa. The British forces colonized the waters of the Zambezi river before directing the same waters as weapons for uprooting Tonga people from their shoreline homes. Besides this watered colonial/post-colonial strand, I also considered the prominence and role of water in Clements' *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God* and Nyanja's 'Nyaminyami: The River God'. From this angle, I first explored the notion of inspirited Zambezi river waters that reveals alternative modes of relating with and conceptualizing water. Subsequently, I examined how Nyanja and Clements draw on the materiality of water to inform their aesthetic and thematic sensibilities in their texts. In terms of theoretical anchorage, the study built on Isabel Hofmeyr's thoughts on hydro-colonialism and Rob Nixon's notion of slow violence.

In chapter two I offered an enhanced postcolonial/colonial discourse analysis of Howarth's *The Shadow of the Dam*. I complicated this lens through introducing a hydro-colonial dimension (Hofmeyr) which considers the impact of 'modern' water-based progress on indigenous communities such as the Tonga people who are cast as timeless ethnographic objects, living outside 'modern' time and norms. Further, building on Nixon's notion of slow violence, I explored how Howarth misrepresents Tonga people to make their displacement from their ancestral homes inexorable and noble. I first considered Howarth's authorial and ideological displacement of Tonga people before zoning in on their literal displacement in the text. Throughout the analysis, although the author sustains a binarized depiction of the Tonga and British people-black versus white, civilized versus primitive, Christian versus pagan, scientific versus superstitious, lawful versus lawless, rational versus instinctive-, I attempted to underline areas of confluence and contradictions, for instance, the striking similarity that Howarth underscores in the physical appearance of Habanyama (a Tonga) and Alex (a British). Moreover, I demonstrated the remarkable parallels that exist between Judeo-Christian religion and Tonga religious beliefs seen through the deities Jehovah and Nyaminyami. Although at

face value these Gods seemingly come from irreconcilable worlds-north and south-, careful comparison revealed that both represent similar aspects to their disciples and indeed can be seen as one supernatural provider and guardian. This helps to explain the current prevalence of Tonga religious beliefs in the Zambezi basin, more than one and a half centuries after contact with Christian missionaries. From this recognition, the Christian missionary's dismissal of Tonga religious practices as demonic implodes. In this and other instances of colonial stereotypes in colonial discourse, preconceived notions on the 'superiority' of British people and 'inferiority' of Tonga people that preclude the recognition of similarities between colonizer and colonized become unsustainable. The insistence on, and sustenance of differences of course serves to validate the dispossession and domination of the 'lesser' other.

Colonial discourse also instantiates curious contradictions that arise from the imperious desire to name and control. After reading *The Shadow of the Dam*, one remains unsure whether Tonga people are rational or irrational, violent or peaceful, cheerful or surly? The reason for this incertitude seems to be that their representation is strategic as it depends on what aspect of colonization needs to be justified rather than on an objective appraisal of Tonga people. For instance, on the eve of colonization, the author portrays them as cheerful, grateful and peaceful people who welcome the British for rescuing them from looming collapse. This initial image of grace and kindness later transforms into savage intransigence and ingratitude at the end of the text when some Tonga people resist attempts to displace them. Upon their violent suppression, the initial image is upturned and manipulated to serve different ends. The savage image validates the use of violence against Tonga people while the cheerful portrait sanitizes colonial intrusion as some benign visitation.

Kariba Dam provides helpful insights into the dangers of modernization and the challenges of decolonization. It becomes problematic when the larger picture of national development leads to the erasure or derealization (Butler) of those 'lesser' people and 'lesser' non-human organisms whose 'crime' is to be in resource rich areas. While Kariba dam contributed and continues to contribute to the economic development of Zambia and Zimbabwe, the plight of Tonga people has continued to worsen. For them, the sight of Kariba dam induces traumatic memories of past evictions, apprehensions of the present and gleam prospects for the future. As I demonstrated, the tragic Tonga narrative is that the benefits of Kariba dam (such as tourism, commercial fisheries, water, electrical power) are yet to reach most of them even after

‘independence’. Tonga people are casualties of exploitative development and politics of marginalization.

The presence of Kariba dam in the post-colonial state points to the indelible mark of British colonization on the natural and mental landscapes of Southern Africa. It is a mark that captures the ambivalence of colonization as a terminator of certain traditional practices but also as a harbinger of new modes of living. The continuous flow of water along the Zambezi river symbolizes this human urge to embrace change and move on. In relation to the contentious discourse of decolonization, it might be argued that Kariba dam captures the elusiveness of that dream. Not only have ‘independent’ Zimbabwean and Zambian governments embraced it and exploited it, but they have also imbibed what the dam represents in terms of a capitalist economic thrust of development. Both governments adopted multi-national finance-led economic restructuring programs¹⁵ that have impoverished millions and widened the gap between the rich and the poor. In fact, the construction of mega-dams increased in the post-colonial period across Africa¹⁶ resulting in the displacement of more people with little or no compensation. For instance, 2018 witnessed the completion of Zimbabwe’s three hundred-million-dollar (US) Tokwe Mukosi¹⁷ dam which left more than twenty thousand people without homes and arable land, a replay of Kariba dam. Unsurprisingly, Zimbabwean and Zambian post-colonial regimes have continued to marginalize Tonga people and others. This realization helps us to notice that there was more to colonization than simple racial differences. It was about class, selfishness, adventure and the human desire to dominate, regardless of race or ethnicity. The reluctance to grapple with these other determinants in initial decolonization attempts help to explain the miserable condition of most post-colonial African nations.

Concomitant to the above, chapter three considered the ways in which Zambezi river can be seen as a rich cultural text that conjures different Zimbabwean historical periods and associated ideologies. As McGregor (2009: 3) observes, “...the political, economic and cultural claims to the Zambezi that accompanied the physical transformation of the landscape highlight changing understandings of the natural world.” The pre-colonial Tonga comprehension of Zambezi river

¹⁵ For more on the impact of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes on developing nations see Saliwe Kawewe and Robert Dibie (2000), Michael Thomson, Alexander Kentikelenis and Thomas Stubbs 2017 and Nyambuya MN 1994.

¹⁶ More scholarship on mega-dam projects in Africa include Kibret (2019), Skinner (2009), Eyita-Okon (2020) and Siciliano (2018).

¹⁷ For more on Tokwe Mukosi see Environmental Justice Atlas website (2017), Chazireni (2018), Tarisayi (2018) and Nhodo (2021).

was (is) such that its waters were animated with the presence of Nyaminyami the divine being. It is from this basis that Clements (1961) and Nyanja (2018) personify the river and manipulate its material characteristics for narrativization purposes in their texts. Nyanja captures the multiple sides of Nyaminyami through cinematic shots of violent waterfalls (menacing side), tranquil flowing waters (nurturing side) and whirlpool (divine). Clements (1959) militarizes Zambezi river waters through graphic descriptions of unprecedented floods and mudslides to capture the Rhodesian battle to tame and dam the river. The river assumes some agency that helps to narrow the anthropogenic privileging of human beings with ‘superior’ intelligence and decisive action over ‘inferior’ and passive other-than-human life. Recognizing the place and acts of non-human life is a vital part of protecting the environment and averting a global warming apocalypse. As Kushigian (2018: 8) attests, “the natural world, in its fluid, communal and cyclical form, can serve as a site of memory and an example of resistance and, looking in particular at the dynamic flow of rivers, can offer a space for collective voices and the pursuit of environmental and social justice.” It is of course ironical that the post-human shift is somewhat reminiscent of premodern belief systems. Such is the cyclical nature of human ideas that mirrors the flow of water.

I am aware that my reading of *The Shadow of the Dam* and *Kariba: The Struggle with the River God* has overlooked other insights that can be gleaned from these texts. To begin with, for all its oversights in the representation of Tonga people, *The Shadow of the Dam* did more than previous similar texts in highlighting the impact of colonial development on indigenous people, particularly to a global audience. It is with this thought in mind that Howarth writes in the introduction that his text:

...offers one example of how the diverse interests of these four groups may lead, in spite of everyone’s best endeavours, to a violent situation which nobody in any of them desires. I hope that some people who read about this small tragedy will find it helps to explain for them, as it does to me, some of the major tragedies of modern Africa. [vii]

It appears that few influential people read the text considering that a violent protracted war broke out in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) from 1966 to 1979 between blacks and whites over issues of racial segregation, land dispossession, poor infrastructure in black neighborhoods and universal suffrage inter alia. Most of these issues were central to the Kariba drama.

In the case of Clement's text, one can read it as a fantasy text and come up with insights of a different kind from mine. It is also possible that the book's use of the triumphalist trope serves to normalize colonial conquest over nature, thereby feeding into capitalist anthropomorphism. In other words, Clements captures the 'inevitable' subjugation of nature in the same vein that Howarth captures the overthrow of Tonga people. This turn might be read as a diversionary tactic that masks the detrimental impact of colonisation on indigenous communities. Seen in this light, one can argue that Clements contributes to the marginalization of Tonga voices in as far as he focalizes the resistance of nature rather than of Tonga people against colonial invasion. In underscoring the experiences of Impresit workers and the Rhodesian authorities, Clements becomes blind to the concerns of those people who lost all because of Kariba dam.

Possible areas of research for the future that arise from my study include: exploring the river as a genre space and how to problematize nature/human dichotomizations without unwittingly imposing human ideas on nature? Is it at all possible to think with and not about non-human life and articulate the outcome accurately in prejudiced human language?

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