
Ethno-ornithology: Birds in Jando and Nsondo folksongs among the Yawo of South-Eastern Malawi

Witness Mdoka, Lecturer in Literature, Literary and Cultural Theory, Head of Department, English and Communication Studies, The Catholic University of Malawi

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Abstract

From an ethno-ornithological perspective, this article analyses how birds are sources of indigenous ecological knowledge that can be utilised for environmental pedagogy. The article demonstrates how the depiction of birds in *jando* and *nsondo* initiation songs for boys and girls, respectively, reflect the people's environmental consciousness. Children are ingrained in their environment and teaching them ecocentric values through birds is likely to mesmerise their interests in nature. When children grow up with informed knowledge about their environment, their likelihood of being environmental stewards is high because they have been exposed to the interrelatedness of ecological entities at a tender age. They begin to value human-animal relationships and the various ways through which they are ineluctably interrelated. Such values inform an environmental ethic that ensures not only earth-centredness, but also the restoration of the lost biodiversity. My endeavour in this article is to draw from oral literature, especially the folksong as an oral genre in order to analyse the depiction of birds and how they relate with humans. The findings reveal that birds are vehicles through which the people sight see the environment and express their experiential knowledge about nature.

Keywords: ethno-ornithology, pedagogy, indigenous, ecocentric, interrelatedness.

Introduction

Living in an era of biodiversity loss, scientific environmental restoration measures need to be hybridised with local ecological knowledge for the purpose of supplementary. This paper utilises initiation folksongs involving birds to demonstrate how people who live in close relationships with the non-human world use birds as the basis for morality and wisdom. Cuddon (2013) defines "folksong" as a "kind of song [that] belongs to oral tradition and is thus passed on from mouth to mouth" (282). Thus, folksongs constitute one of the genres of oral literature. In the case of *jando* and *nsondo* folksongs, they are "songs for grown-ups to recite to children" (Finnegan 2012:294), for their didactic effects and instilling in children locally shared linguistic expressions as well as indigenous knowledge. Tidemann and Gosler (2010) have asserted that "[i]ndigenous knowledge that embraces ornithology takes in whole social dimensions that are interlinked with environmental ethos, conservation and management for sustainability" (xiv). *Jando* and *nsondo* folksongs about birds carry the people's mores,

philosophy, beliefs and attitudes about the environment. Furthermore, Tidemann *et.al.* (2010) explain that “[p]ortrayals of birds through art, patterns of utilization, language, life from creation to death, bearers of messages and interactions in everyday life are all examples of ethno-ornithology. As a term, ethno-ornithology is useful because it refers broadly to the complex of inter-relationships between birds, humans and all other living and non-living things, whether in terrestrial or extra-terrestrial spheres or in body or in spirit” (5). The prominences of birds in jando and nsondo folksongs reflect their naturalistic roles as integral parts of the environment.

Birds are known for their songs and calls and according to Fegurland (2014) bird songs involve the “spontaneous vocalisations” while bird calls are “associated with some meaning” (21). As Podos and Moseley (2009) note that “the vocalisation of some bird groups, including songbirds, humming birds, and parrots, develop through imitative learning, in a manner that parallels speech acquisition in humans” (389). Human sharing of attributes with birds in “imitative learning” serves to illustrate that human interest in sounds produced by birds is primordial. Sax observes that “before the modern era, the sounds of nature were everywhere, day and night. [...] Sounds of birds, most especially, were used to mark both the hours of the day and the seasons” (78). In the rural areas, birds’ sounds still constitute the natural cadence that energises human activities. Schliephake (2017) observes that “humankind’s reflection on the environment began as soon as the first meaning-making sign systems evolved tens of thousands of years ago” (2). Among the Yawo, sounds and activities of birds play a central role in imparting knowledge to initiates during *jando* and *nsondo* ceremonies because they are loaded with “meaning-making” signs.

Mthatiwa observes that “in the Yawo initiation ceremonies [...] the initiates are given or assume animals’ names” (60), but these “animals’ names” exclude those of birds. The exclusion of birds’ names for the initiates is on account of their familiarity with birds. Similarly, the initiates are not given names of domestic animals but rather wild animals to create what Siewers (2009) describes as “Strange Beauty.” In his book, *Strange Beauty: Ecocritical Approaches to Early Medieval Landscape*, Siewers expounds on how the representations of the environments by the cultures of antiquity have spread throughout the world and thereby impacting and influencing other cultures and thereby creating a “confluence of cultures” (33), strangely beautiful. Birds represent the tapestry of natural beauty in the environment. In imitating the pigeon, children sing:

<i>Nguku, nguku ncheche!</i>	Chickens, there are four!
<i>Nguluche, kutanjila!</i>	I fly, I will be trapped!
<i>Ndame, kuwa sala!</i>	I sit idle, I starve to death!

Birds do not only beautify the environment and provide a rich source of indigenous ecological knowledge, but they also contextualise human predicaments as in the song referred to above. Fegurland (2014) explains that “birds are a good indicator of the state of our surrounding environment; since they are widely distributed they react quickly to changes in the

environmental conditions such as climate change” (13). As “a good indicator of the state of our surrounding environment,” a point which Carson in her book, *Silent Spring* (1962) also earlier on had noticed, the different sounds and activities of different species of birds influence human existence. Wyndham and Park (2018) observe that “people everywhere and throughout history seek meaning in their environments, think about the future, and look for clues as to what is coming in their lives. [...]. These clues are taken most frequently from the natural world; rarely are they taken from cultural artefacts or human behaviour. [...]. Among these natural signs, birds figure prominently” (533). The prominent figuring of birds as signs that people interpret in seeking “meaning in their environments” illustrate the roles they play in influencing human lives and how they conceptualise ecological issues relative to their cultural perceptions of life-centred environmental consciousness. The Yawo observe the actions of birds and come up with songs that carry *misyungu* (core teachings) about what the initiated boys and girls are expected to avoid or what behaviour they are expected to emulate. The song consists of brief lines and they involve call and response and repeated several times.

The woodpecker

In forested areas, woodpeckers are observed and because of their strong claws and stiff tails they are adapted for climbing and their hard chisel-like bills for boring into wood in search for worms and insects. From a woodpecker, “a bird that makes holes in trees using its long narrow beak” (Rundell *et.al.* 1654), the Yawo invent a song about the dangers of embarking on new projects before the old ones have been completed. This observation about the woodpecker’s activities is based on the fact that the bird keeps on making holes in trees searching for ants, termites and larvae. The argument is that the woodpecker would have fire-dried (*kuwamba*) the insects and larvae already found to preserve them for future use before making holes in other trees. The people’s meaning of the woodpecker’s behaviour is that it is a lazy bird that spends most of its time in trees monotonously doing the same kind of job. The song that follows involves a woodpecker and its activities of excavating “cavities in living and dead trees” (Mikusinski 86) in search of insects and worms. The song warns the young initiates to desist from the behaviour of the woodpecker:

<i>Ndotota, ndotota kutotota sine,</i>	Woodpecker, woodpecker, keep boring trees
<i>Sine syangawamba!</i>	Before the others are fire- dried!

Using a bird, woodpecker, which bores trees in search for insects, this song teaches moral responsibility to the initiates about avoiding the life of monotony and that they should avoid starting new projects before they have finished what they already started. The onomatopoeic sound in the song *Ndotota* (woodpecker), – *tota* and – *totota* creates the imagery of someone monotonously pecking into wood. *Sine syangawamba* (before the others have been fire-dried) referring to insects woodpeckers find from the wood, reflects lack of organisation on

the part of the woodpecker. In the people's relational metaphysics, the woodpecker's monotony is a sign of inactivity for humans who display similar behaviour. The human-woodpecker relationship in this song is therefore, negative. The moral for the initiates is *ngatendaga mpela ndotota* (don't behave like the woodpecker) that reveals the people's experiential and observational knowledge about the behaviour of the woodpecker that they correlate with the behaviour of humans and literary representations of birds.

Mikusinski (2006) observes that "most woodpeckers are sedentary birds and are generally considered poor dispersers" (87). The Yawo people find the woodpecker's "sedentary" existence of little activity excepting making holes in trees unproductive in their agrarian community. If the woodpecker pecks in trees looking for insects, the bird should have been economically wise that some of the insects could have been fire-dried for future use rather than spending days on end on the same activity (*kutotota sine, sine syangawamba*). Furthermore, the song teaches the young initiates to be organised in various aspects of life including in farming activities where an individual requires entrepreneurial and managerial skills. The sound the woodpecker produces in boring trees is a metaphor of a disorganised person who does not finish his/her projects.

However, the woodpecker's behaviour of making holes in trees and feeding on larvae, ants and termites creates an ecological interconnectedness with other organisms in the environment. Styring (2002) notes that "in the habitats where they occur, woodpeckers form not only a distinct taxon, but also a discrete ecological guild" (63). The woodpecker's inadvertent promotion of natural relations in the environment elevates its activities beyond what traditional knowledge is under-lexicalised to decipher meaning. Mikusinski (2006) also explains that through the woodpeckers' activities, "facultative sap-consuming species are also benefited by their drilling for phloem sap and their activities can influence entire community structures" (86). The different species of animals that live under different conditions in the environment benefit from the tree excavating activities of the woodpecker form a network of interconnections, an ecological association based on sharing similar feeding interests. The song about the woodpecker encourages boys and girls to be focused on their work and avoid unfinished projects.

Ndotota (woodpecker) in the song is a metaphor of a person who keeps cultivating new pieces of land. The bird's name, *ndotota*, is onomatopoeic based on the sound the bird produces as it excavates cavities in trees, *kutotota* (to make an irritating sound or noise). The woodpecker's sound is thus, interpreted as irksome just like the behaviour of an individual who cultivates one part of his land and goes on to cultivate another section of the same piece of land leaving bushes in between. The people's awareness of the behaviour of the woodpecker entails their presence then as opposed to their extinction now when one can rarely hear the sound of their tree excavating activities because of deforestation.

Sax (2001) notes that "the woodpecker is not so much a singer as a musician, but its sound announces the start of the rainy season in many cultures" (82). Indigenous people are

aware of seasonal changes and various animals that are associated with particular seasons. The people are also aware of the various symbolic meanings of animals for morally correct human behaviours. Schliephake (2017) observes that “often practised with the goal of presenting a corrective to social and political developments that [are] seen as root causes of the environmental crisis, ecocriticism is itself a historical phenomenon with specific characteristics” (4). Ecocriticism pays close attention to the representation of ecological wisdom in literary texts and how such wisdom can be used for natural resources management and the restoration of ecological biodiversity.

Birds as metaphors of omniscience and legitimate or illegitimate human behaviour

Sometimes *jando* and *nsondo* songs dealing with birds contemplate them as all-seeing. *Jando* and *nsondo* songs represent birds as having the abilities to know and disclose vital, sometimes even hidden, information. Birds that are accorded this ability are usually small, songbirds. Wyndham and Park (2018) note that “worldwide, the domain of ‘birds that tell people things’ (Thompson *et.al.* 2008) includes diverse ontologies that posit birds as people or spirit beings (essentially or occasionally; Forth 1998); birds as exceptional animals who act as messengers from supernatural realms (Dove 1993); and birds as animals whose own ecological knowledge is an information source (Spottiswoode *et.al.* 2016)” (354). Birds do not only “tell people things” but they also tell things about people because their existence and knowledge transcend ordinary human knowledge. Birds’ flight is symbolic of omniscience as they soar high above humanity into the spiritual realm (*kumwamba, kwinani*: the sky/heaven). Songs about small birds are sometimes metaphors of children as innocent eyes of society. The following song illustrates this:

Timba tii pekonde-e!

Timba [tit] singing

ti-ti-ti in the bush!

Kumbonaga uteme nkasimusala-e!

Seeing me sitting on

my heels don't

disclose who I am.

Where the bird in this song sings is *pekonde* with locative *pe-* attached to *-konde* derived from *likonde* (bushy thickets). The bird in this song represents omniscient forces, *Kumbonaga uteme* (seeing me squatting), do not disclose his identity to others (*nkasimusala*; don't mention me). In this song, the singer is an elderly person in a defecating posture in the bush. He implores the bird not to inform others what he is doing in the bush. The song teaches children to guard their tongues against being talkative and spreading rumours about the secrets of the elders or whatever they have seen that requires keeping secrets. The *Timba* bird's relationship with the singer of the song is therefore that of confidant. The small tit bird (*Timba*) in this song is a symbol of innocence like a child symbolises childhood innocence. Cohen (2004) posits that “a culture sees its land according to its desires” and “a culture finds what it seeks” (1). The singer in *Timba tii* who tells the bird *Kumbonaga uteme* (seeing me squatting)

infers the presence of grass, trees and shrubs behind which he/she hides (*pekonde*, in the thickets), which attracts the attention of the songbird and the elderly person imagines her/himself being seen by a bird. *Timba* bird in the song is the metaphor of a child who comes across secret acts involving grownups. The initiates are seriously warned not to inform anybody about the secrets they have seen. The smallness of the bird symbolises their omnipresence to penetrate hidden issues that a big bird may not penetrate.

Wyndham and Park (2018) observe that “seeking patterns of meaning and guidance in their environments, people pay attention to certain birds more than others, influenced by local ecologies, cultural histories, and species-specific characteristics” (534). The diminutive *Atimba nkasimusala* (the small bird, don't mention me), reflects how the singer implores the child not to reveal not only his/her identity but what he/she is doing at that time in the bush for fear of diminishing his/her reputation.

Quails and partridges are birds that inhabit grassy areas and they are hunted by children. The representations of birds are closely associated with children in ways that society approves or disapproves human behaviour by associating the birds with humans. *Chiuti* (buttonquail) is a small terrestrial bird that leaves a trail/track in grassy areas where it inhabits. The buttonquail is represented as making trails that children symbolically make when they clean themselves by rubbing their buttocks against the ground after defecating:

Akawuti kulima msewo-o!

A little buttonquail
making a trail!

Akawuti kulima msewo-ye!

A little buttonquail
making trail!

Through this song, people teach the initiates that after visiting the latrine they should desist from cleaning faecal remains by rubbing their buttocks against the ground (*kokona*). This is discouraged not only because the children may hurt themselves, but it is also because it also pollutes the environment. Children are encouraged to use water to clean themselves up after visiting a latrine. When the children clean themselves against the ground the trail left behind in the space between the two buttocks as they rub on the ground is similar to the trail left by a buttonquail. In *jando* songs, birds are moral voices that help instil in children the virtues of living in accordance with the values of society. *Akawuti kulima msewo* (A small buttonquail making a trail) reflects how the natural behaviour of the bird is metaphorically transferred to the child who behaves in a similar manner. The emphasis in the song, however, is placed on teaching the initiates not to engage in childish behaviours now that they are circumcised because circumcision symbolises growth and newness. The metaphor of *kulima msewo* (literally, to construct a road) in the song has cultural significations as symbolic of polluting the environment and therefore, the children are told to avoid because it also hurts and it is childish.

Folksongs among the Yawo guide people into good living in terms similar to “art and scholarship might work together to guide audiences to more careful strategies for living on the

Earth” (Slovic 2015:5). By generating knowledge from the environment, the people teach the youth ecophilosophical values that help them live as responsible environmental citizens. The symbolic meanings of birds vary from one culture to another and even within the same culture the symbolic meaning of the same bird varies depending on the moral that is being promoted at the time. Gora (2009) asserts that “bird characters in African culture and tradition deserve special scrutiny because literary scholars need to appreciate and understand their symbolic meaning. The symbolic function of different birds may vary according to the contours of specific [genres]” (62-63). The symbolic meaning of the buttonquail’s trail may be valid only in the context of the Yawo culture of *jando* and *nsondo* but what is significant is that birds are cultural symbols and they influence human behaviours in different ways. Analysing oral discourses from an ecocritical perspective is important and as Iovino observes “not only does it enlarge the borders of ecocritical synopsis up to encompass antiquity, but it also shows how deeply ancient ecologies of matters and ideas can contribute to the development, theoretical and thematic, of ecocriticism. Including antiquity in the critical tool bag of ecocriticism is important also for another remarkable reason. It makes us think about roots” (312-13). Folksongs are premised on people’s roots and genealogies through which they have affiliations to their environment.

Red-necked francolin’s eating habits symbolic of environmental pollution and Ground Hornbill’s dawn drumming as a symbol of maturity

Birds have different feeding habits and folklore is replete with discourses that reflect the people’s knowledge about birds’ survival mechanisms. *Ngwale/nkhwali* (red-necked francolin), for example, feeds on seeds and insects or worms and it therefore scratches (*kupalasa*) on the ground to find its food. Children are also fond of playing with the soil moulding clay dolls and scratching the ground. Before the boys and girls have undergone *jando* and *nsondo*, parents tolerate them to do this because their behaviour constitutes *usongolo* (childishness). After they have been initiated into the adult world they can no longer be tolerated to play with the soil and be scratching the ground raising dust into the air around them. The following song that imitates the scratching habits of the red-necked francolin, is meant to make the initiates stop the habit:

<i>Kupalasa kwa Nangwale-eee,</i>	The scratching of a little
	red-necked francolin,
<i>Nangwale palu-palu-palu.</i>	Little red-necked francolin
	scratch-scratch-scratch!

In this song, children are told to avoid scratching the ground raising dust into the air as red-necked francolins do as they search for food (grains, insects, worms). Culture thrives in nature from which it draws its values and morals. The song imitates the way birds find food by scratching on the ground for worms, insects and granules. *Ngwale* is the red-necked francolin but the use of *Na-* in *Nangwale* personifies the bird in that the bird itself is *Ngwale* (red-necked francolin). *Na-* in *Nangwale* changes from a bird’s name to a human being’s name. The moral in the song lies in teaching the initiates that they should avoid scratching on the ground as this

bird does. If children scratch the ground, they become red-necked francolin (*Nangwale*) whose habits is to scratch the ground in search for food and thereby polluting the air in the process. *Kupala* or *kupalasa pasi* (scratching on the ground) as children do as they play raises dust and this causes pollution of the air. *Nangwale* (Red-necked francolin) is the metaphor of a child who scratches on the ground and the song advises them to desist from this bad habit. The imagery of red-necked francolins in the forest scratching the ground and raising dust into the air is similar to that of children in the village playing with dust. The folksong also marks an environmentally historical period when forests existed as habitats of birds including red-necked francolins that have now disappeared due to human habitat destruction.

Sahu (2014) notes in the context of ecocriticism, that “[t]he relationship between [humans] and nature is not just interdependent but also interrelated” (23). It is through interdependency and interrelatedness in the relationship between humans and nature that shape “the attitude of mankind towards nature” (*ibid* 23). How humans and nature are “interdependent but also interrelated” is in agreement with what Brooke Holmes (2017) says that “[t]he modern use of the word ‘nature’ [covers] a wide range of ideas associated with the environment, landscape, flora and fauna, and the cosmic totality of all beings” (ix – x). Covering this wide semantic range of meanings, as in Malawian indigenous environmental discourse of creation (*chilengedwe*), nature does not stand aloof from humans but it is conceptualised within the people’s cosmivision “and the cosmic totality of all beings.” Human stewardship and trusteeship of nature entail responsibility that maintains existential symbiosis. Concerning the term “nature” Holmes (2017) further notes that “however much we may want to throw out ‘nature’ altogether or side-line it in the practice of ecocriticism, it still remains deeply embedded in how we organise our own thinking about the non-human world, haunting forms of scientific inquiry and the epistemic modes of literature alike. ‘Nature’ therefore, still shapes what we look for when we turn to the past” (xii). The songs about bird-human relationships reflect the people’s environmental consciousness and their cosmivision through which the physical, spiritual and natural forces are intricately intertwined.

People’s environmental consciousness and knowledge of the environment are also demonstrated by the bird songs that reveal the people’s recognition of the dawn chorus. The trumpeter hornbill represents a sense of maturity and responsibility in humans and so humans have positive attitudes towards it. There are some birds, however, whose singing in the morning is symbolic of the noise children make. The next song indicates how people accuse the trumpeter hornbill of making noise in the morning but the bird, as the people imagine, defends itself.

Gomba ngoma kundawî ana wani wewewo-o? Beating the drum in the morning,
who is he?

Che Lititi wewewo,

He is Mr Ground Hornbill,

Che Lititi wálikanile nganimba une-ye,

Mr Ground Hornbill denied, it was not I,

Nsongolo jwelejo-o,

It was the uncircumcised.

Nsongolo wálikanile nganimba une-ye,

The uncircumcised denied, it was not I,

Wawumbale wélewo!

It was the circumcised!

The hornbill is “a tropical bird with a large beak” (Rundell *et.al.* 629; Pullanikkatil and Chilambo 29) and the Yawo *lititi* (singular), *matiti* (plural), gets its name from its drum-like call, *titi-titi-titi*. I remember we used to imitate in our childhood days the call of hornbills: *m-m-nichichi? M-m-mg (m-m-m what is it? M-m-mg)*. The moral value derived from *Che Lititi* (Mr Ground Hornbill) song is that grownups should behave responsibly. *Gomba ngoma kundawî* (beating the drum in the morning) is an irresponsible behaviour that disrupts the normal rhythm of the community. The first accusatory finger points at Ground Hornbill because his calls are heard around the same time. Realising his own mature and responsible calls he makes, Ground Hornbill thinks that the sounds of the drum he heard are the beatings of an uncircumcised person. When the accusatory finger of who makes noise in the morning finally falls on the circumcised, it becomes clear that the circumcised are behaving contrary to societal expectations. This kind of animal/bird-human participation reflects the people's consciousness about ecological interrelatedness. Tidemann *et.al.* (2010) argue that “[i]n this age of dwindling ecological resources and loss of land, language and knowledge, it is not sufficient to bask in the warmth of the riches of thousands of years of indigenous knowledge of birds” (9). There is need to research on how indigenous ecological knowledge can supplement scientific approaches to environmental conservation.

Our environmental responsibility depends on the degree of maturity as Mr Ground Hornbill suggests in the song above. *Nsongolo* refers to any person whose behaviour is childish and *usongolo* is childishness, which the people imagine Ground Hornbill sees in humans as disturbing the environment. The correlation of children's noisy behaviour with birds is also reflected in the song: *Masolokoto bwe-bwe pantapwito! Bwe-bwe* is the onomatopoeic sound of birds locally known as *masolokoto*, cuckoo-shrikes or barbets in search of fruits, berries and buds, *matapwito*. Children and birds are, thus, closely linked. Children also learn to identify themselves with birds. They learn not only to love the birds, but they also would cherish to protect them.

Birds as expressions of childishness

Children take great interest in bats which they think of in terms of birds though they are flying mammals and insectivorous. Among the Yawo, folksongs about birds constitute the core of *misyungu* (teachings) concerning animals probably because the initiates, below the age of ten, are more familiar with birds than most of the mammals. However, perhaps for its smallness

and folklore's representation of a bat as existing between a bird (*mbalame/chijuni*) and an animal (*nyama/chinyama*), it is here included in a *jando* or *nsondo* song for its winged bird-like features despite its being described as a nocturnal mouse-like mammal (Sax 2001) that "sleep during the day" and "upside down" (Brokaw 2). Children's behaviours of playing in trees placing themselves legs up and heads down are compared with the actions of bats as the following folksong illustrates:

Manjichi galikoleche-ye,

Little fruit bats hang themselves,

Mu mtela wapanganyapo-ye,

In the tree under which men sit.

Manjichi galikoleche-ye,

Little fruit bats hang themselves,

Mu mtela wapanganyapo-ye.

In the tree under which men sit.

The similitude of children who place their legs up and heads down in trees as they play is that of bats (*manjichi*) that display the same behaviour. The song teaches children to avoid displaying the same behaviour as bats not only because it reflects childishness but it is also because they can display their nakedness to the uncircumcised standing under the tree. The children's behaviour of behaving like bats is wrong on two counts. First, their imitation of the behaviour of bats may lead to the display of their nakedness (*jando*) to those standing under the tree and this is a taboo for the circumcised. Second, among the Yawo, two spaces are recognisably important: *kunganya* constitutes men's spaces as opposed to women's spaces (*kumatuli*), where there are wooden mortars and pestles for pounding. Disputes are settled at a place called *kunganya*, usually under a big tree. Uncircumcised or uninitiated children can be forgiven if they climb this tree, but not for the initiated. *Manjichi* are bats sometimes referred to as *iputiputi/mileme*. Fruit bats (*manjichi*) "eat fruit and sip nectar" (Sealey 171). The song about bats, *manjichi galikoleche* (bats legs up heads down in a tree) informs the initiates not to misbehave and that they should conduct themselves like grown up in order for them to be respected by society. The song about bats (*manjichi*), however, is also enough information in itself about their availability then and the impact they have had on society in their relationships with people.

It is worth noting that "[a]lthough 70% of bats eat insects, many tropical species feed exclusively on fruit or nectar. A few are carnivorous, hunting small vertebrates such as fish, frogs, mice, and birds."¹ The presence of bats in trees, caves and buildings implies that humans have interacted with bats though their population is decreasing now due to the human impact

¹ Night Friends – American Bats: Online Activity Guide, National Wildlife Federation (n.d.), p. 3, www.nwf.org.

on the environment. This negatively affects the ways through which culture relates to the natural environment in passing moral values about bats to children. It is also significant to note, as Brokaw (2010) observes that “ecological services provided by bats include pollination and seed distribution” (4). *Mtela wapanganya* (the tree under which men sit) in the song about bats (*manjichi*) is usually a big *mango*, *mtundu* or *kachere* tree and if bats visited such a tree seeds could be seen all over the ground under it. The availability of bats in the environment informs the interrelatedness of ecological entities not only in the web of feeding habits but also humans whose behaviour of putting their legs up and their heads down in trees is influenced by bats.

By singing about bats and implying their presence in their local environment, the people use bats instrumentally to mould their children's behaviours but they are not averse to them. Toker (2001) notes that “each interrelated part of nature has a particular value according to its nature and function. [...]. Human flourishing is thus dependent on fostering nature in its variety and abundance; going against nature's processes is self-destruction” (131-32). The animals depicted in the Yawo *misyungu* songs reflect a relational view in which animal life and their various niches have weighty implications on human life.

Although tobacco smoking is tolerated, those who smoke should ensure that they do not exhale smoke to the annoyance of others. Bats are used in issuing a warning against this habit. The peculiarity of bats is that despite being mammals, they have wings and they fly. Bats are identified with birds and they are therefore very close to children:

<i>Kaputiputi kakwanga lyosi,</i>	A little bat emits smoke,
<i>Pana achakulungwa,</i>	In the midst of elders,
<i>Kali kumbungoye-ee!</i>	While it sits windward!
<i>Kakwanga lyosi,</i>	It emits smoke,
<i>Pana achakulungwa,</i>	In the midst of elders,
<i>Kali kumbungoye-ee!</i>	While it sits windward!

Bat's being found in the midst of the elders (*pana achakulungwa*) is symbolic of its double identity as both a mammal and a bird; a small bird as a metaphor of a child among the elders. The song's *misyungu* (moral) is that those who smoke should regulate their smoking habits because, being environmentally conscious, the people know that inhaling smoke from a cigarette is unhygienic to those who do not smoke. *Kaputiputi kakwanga lyosi* (the bat emits smoke) creates the imagery that the bat itself is producing smoke as if it is being expended by fire (*kwanga lyosi*). Lutwack (1994) observes that “[f]amiliarity and transcendence have given birds a wider range of meaning and symbol in the literature than any other animal.

The resemblance of their activity to common patterns of human family behaviour makes them exceptionally suitable for anthropomorphic imaginary that links man to the common forms of nature” (xi). *Kaputiputi kakwanga lyosi pana achakulungwa/Kali kumbungo* (A small bat emits smoke in the midst of elders/While it's in the direction of the wind) is based on the

people's knowledge that bats' droppings and urine produce an acrid smell. *Iputiputi/manjichi* (bats) are used among the Yawo as symbols of immaturity and childishness. According to DeMello (2012), "[a]nimals are used to symbolise a whole host of characteristics that we see in ourselves, or want of misbehaviour and to project onto others, but that may be dangerous or foreign to us" (287). In the *Kaputiputi* song, the dangers of inhaling smoke from a cigarette for someone who does not smoke tobacco are projected onto the bat. Tidemann *et.al.* (2010) argue that "[b]irds have enriched the lives of humankind for thousands of years. They support life and livelihoods. They are symbols in art, story and dance. They are the conveyors to an afterlife. They have been symbols of war, peace, wisdom, love, evil, hope and luck. They provide moral guidance through stories and contribute to the consequences of misbehaviour and have been used as perpetrators of ideals" (10). These various roles of birds the Yawo *jando* and *nsondo* folksongs prove to have.

Conclusion

The focal point in the folksongs discussed in this article is that humans and birds are integral parts of a unified nature perceived in monistic terms rather than dualistic. The existence of humans and birds is largely dependent on a healthy rapport with nature in an ecologically holistic ecosystem. Olateju (2005) observes that "[a]nimal metaphors involve transference of meanings, and whatever meanings or interpretations are assigned to a particular animal metaphor, are culture and context dependent" (368). This equally applies to birds. The songs involving birds demonstrate the people's familiarity with these them. The ecological knowledge generated by the people from the birds reveals not only the people's awareness of birds' behaviours, but it also reveals the people's environmental embeddedness and knowledge of human-bird interrelatedness. Bearing this in mind, indigenous people's potential to protect the environment and animals and/or birds in general is as strong as their affiliation to their land.

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