

Exploring the literary representation of the rural in *Before Dawn* by Andrea Masiye

Florence M. Tembo¹
Stewart Crehan²

¹florence.mpandamabula@unza.ac.zm

²stewart.crehan@unza.ac.zm

^{1,2}The University of Zambia

<https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.7.2.45>

ABSTRACT

This article is based on a doctoral study whose purpose was to explore the literary representation of the rural and the urban in selected Zambian fiction in English. Therefore, this article focuses on analysing the literary representation of the rural in *Before Dawn* by Andrea Masiye. The study was qualitative, and a desk survey was used to collect the data. The data was then analysed using thematic and content analysis where recurring patterns were identified from the content of the texts, and then themes were drawn from these. The theoretical framework applied in this article is Gerald Genette's narrative theory. The study found that rural in *Before Dawn* has been represented as a physical place outside the city; as a site of traditional culture, a closely-knit society, and as being backward or lacking in social and economic aspects. The study recommends that future research be undertaken and should focus on comparative analyses between Zambian fiction and literature from other Southern African countries. Such studies could explore differences in portrayal and the influence of regional socio-political contexts on the depiction of rural and urban spaces in Zambian fiction.

Keywords: Before Dawn, Literary Representation, Narrative, Rural, Urban, Zambian Fiction

I. INTRODUCTION

The rural and urban spheres have influenced literary narratives, drawing inspiration for creating settings, themes, and character development. Macola (2005) argues that the literary expressions of rural and urban are historically contingent and rooted in specific socio-economic contexts. Themes such as social change, tradition and modernity, growth and responsibility, parenting, the role of men, women, and children in society, religion and culture, and political issues have all been prominent in the rural and urban dichotomy in fictional texts. Similarly, Majdoubi (2024) postulates the view that since colonisation, the topography of African countries has had a dual structure: the city versus the village. Literary works show evidence of the rural and urban spaces as inspirational backdrops upon which stories are told. From early classical literature, fictional texts such as *the Epic of Gilgamesh*, *the Iliad*, *the Odyssey*, and *Beowulf*, the divide between the rural and urban have been prominent. Additionally, African literature has not been averse to the use of the rural and urban spaces in literary works. One example of African works which have used the rural and the urban setting is *Cry the Beloved Country*, by Alan Paton, where we find Ndotsheni a rural setting and Johannesburg an urban setting. Zambian fiction is by no means left behind in using the rural and urban as a setting. Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope*, *Before Dawn* by Andrea Masiye and *The Tongue of the Dumb* by Dominic Mulaisho are set in two geographical areas: villages and cities connoting the rural and urban. Evidently, authors use the rural and the urban spaces in their texts thus, indicating that the two spheres play an important role in shaping literary texts. However, despite this evidence, there is little to no empirical studies focusing on the literary representation of the rural or urban in Zambian texts or from a Zambian context. This study is, therefore, motivated to fill this empirical gap.

1.1 Research Objective

The objective of this study was to explore the literary representation of the rural in *Before Dawn* to establish how the rural is depicted by Andrea Masiye in this text.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies have been conducted that have highlighted the literary representation of the rural and urban. Kuehl and Eppley (2024) conducted a study titled *Representing Rural: A Critical Content Analysis of Contemporary Middle Grade Novels Set in Rural Places* in which they analysed the textual constructions of rurality in 52 contemporary middle grades, realistic fiction novels set in the US rural places. The study used a critical content analysis method

grounded in place theory. The findings revealed that five salient themes emerged from the novels on how authors construct the rural. These were that authors constructed rural spaces in which systems work to keep rural people in poverty, where rural people have a deep connection to place, and where rural people have diverse intersectional identities. The study also found that some middle grade books challenged stereotypes of rural places as monolithic, by including nuanced portrayals of some characters of colour, LGBTQ+ and characters with disabilities. Additionally, the study revealed that some texts relied on the simplistic representation of the rural while others portrayed complex environments, which impact the stories' identity formation and sense-making.

The study by Kuehl and Eppley (2024) provides a framework for critically analysing how Zambian rural settings and characters are depicted. It helps to question whether literary representation of the rural in *Before Dawn* moves beyond stereotypes such as those identified by Kuehl and Eppley, and toward authentic portrayals that reflect the realities and diversity of rural Zambia. In China, Shi and Zhu (2018) conducted a study on *urban space and representation in literary text* based on two views of the city, one by Lewis Mumford, in his classic book *The Culture of Cities*, and the other by Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*. The study found that Lewis Mumford's city is represented as the point of maximum concentration for the power and culture of a community. It is the place where the diffused rays of many separate beams of life fall into focus, with gains in social effectiveness and significance. The study added that Mumford's view is that the city is the form and symbol of an integrated social relationship; it is the seat of the temple, the market, the hall of justice, the academy of learning, a place where the goods of civilisation are multiplied and manifold and a place where human experience is transformed into viable signs, symbols of conduct and a system of order.

The study revealed that the representation of the urban by Mumford contrasts with that of Raymond Williams, who viewed the city as the great buildings of civilisation, the meeting places, the libraries and the theatres and domes, the houses, the streets, the press and excitement of so many people with so many purposes. The study concluded that the two works, although different in their views about the city, are concerned with the identity of the city as an emblem of civilisation and culture. The difference is that Mumford represented the significance of the city in functional terms, whereas William gave priority to experience. It was further argued that Mumford and William signify the city as the representation of space, and that space refers to the dwelling place full of human consciousness. This study by Shi and Zhu (2018) is cardinal to the current study as it provides a framework for analysis of how the urban is represented in literary works. However, the study still creates a gap in information as it only deals with the city or urban representation and does not discuss how the rural also referred to as the village or the country, is represented even though these are present in the two books the authors analysed. The current study focuses on both the rural and the urban and so, provides information about the rural, which was not provided by Shi and Zhu's study.

In Africa, Sryfi (2018) in a study titled *Rethinking Space: The Representation of the City in the Moroccan Novel in Arabic Reading* examined the urban space in the context of the Moroccan literary heritage using two Moroccan authors, Muhammad Zaf and Muhammad Shukri. Using critical inquiry and analysis, Sryfi, examines the use of city space in four novels by the two authors to investigate the way the city is represented. The study found that novels depict the city as fast-moving modernisation and the effects of such progress on the people who live in the cities. The study further revealed that the authors depict the city as a dehumanising, alienating, chaotic and deceiving place where the individual is isolated. It is also depicted as a living space, imbued with ideology. The study concluded that spaces in fiction are subject to redefinition and expansion. Sryfi's study left a gap in area of topic as it focused only on the urban and not rural space, which this study covers.

A study titled *Reading the City: Analysing Literary Space in Selected Post-Apartheid Urban Narratives*, was conducted in South Africa by McNulty (2005). Using Michael Foucault's works, Michael de Certeau's approach to cities, Walter Benjamin's theories on space, time and the city, and other South African theoretical approaches to space and the city, McNulty attempted to analyse the representation of place in selected pieces of literature set in a post-apartheid city. Focusing on the autobiography, *Man Bitch* by Johan van Wyk, *Never Been at Home* by Zazah P. Khuzwayo, *No Way Out* by Zinhle Mdakane, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* by Phaswane Mpe and the short story *Autopsy* by Ivan Vladislavic, McNulty investigated the representation of urban space specifically, the cities of Durban and Johannesburg and in particular, the inner cities. He also analysed how the literary representation of space has altered with political and socio-economic changes.

McNulty's study found that the city was portrayed as both a sign of progress and as a site of poverty, indifference and squalor. She also found that in the selected texts, the city is a site of duality, where binaries exist, with the city characterised by being urban and rural, wealthy and poor, white and black and able to exist and be imagined as either or both. With regard to representation, Shi and Zhu (2018) concluded that the concept of 'city' in literature is much more than just buildings and streets. It exists also in social relationships and links between people, both in the city and places outside of the city. The city is a set of social, political and cultural conditions that manifests itself in space and it is this aspect of city which is represented in the texts she investigates.

As has been discussed and proven from above literature reviewed, there are a number of studies that have been conducted on the literary representation of the rural and urban from global and African perspectives. However,

none of these studies is from a Zambian perspective. There are evidenced empirical studies found by the author that have attempted to explore the literary representation of the rural and the urban. The above literature and others, although providing commentary to the study, place no focus on the rural and urban in Zambian literature but in other countries and in some cases. Therefore, there is also a gap in literature on studies that focus on the literary representation of the rural and urban in Zambian fictional texts.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative approach and the sampling technique was purposive. The data collection was based on the primary text understudy, and the procedure for data collection and analysis was close reading and content and structural analysis of the text. Data was also analysed through the narrative theory as proposed by Gérard Genette, a prominent French literary theorist. Genette proposed a systematic framework that helps one to understand how stories are constructed and conveyed. The theory focuses on structural elements such as order which refers to refers to the sequence in which events are narrated compared to the chronological order of the story that is, straightforward, linear progression or whether they employ techniques such as flashbacks and foreshadowing to disrupt chronological continuity. Other elements include duration, frequency, voice, and mood that shape a narrative's form and effect. The study uses these parameters to explore how the narrative in *Before Dawn* is presented.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Published in 1970, *Before Dawn* is a novel by Andrea Masiye. The narrative follows the life of a young boy called Kavumba. Told in first person point of view, the story is about the birth of Kavumba, his growth, education, conscription in a war, and installation as headman of his village after the death of his grandfather. The story is set in Chiparamba Valley in Headman Banda's village in the Eastern Province of Zambia. Although the protagonist is Kavumba, other major characters are included these are Banda the Headman, Menyani Kavumba's father, Tineneji Kavumba's mother, Namukungwi the village priestess, Ganizo the Bwalo Keeper, Masoanjole a member of the community, and Thandiwe a girl that Kavumba loved, among others. These people play a significant role in not just the story but also in Kavumba's upbringing and ultimately what he turns out to be at the end of the story.

4.1 Representation of the Rural in *Before Dawn*

Before Dawn by Andrea Masiye is one text in which the rural has been prominently represented. The rural in this text is represented as a physical space, as an agrarian space, a site of traditional culture, and a closely-knit.

4.1.1 The Rural as a Physical Space

The rural in *Before Dawn* is firstly represented as a physical space. In this study, physical space refers to the tangible environment or location. In this text, the rural is represented as being a particular location, with human activities, labour, ecological and geographical features, and distance, exhibiting this physicality. The first way in which this is represented is by the physical setting of the story. The story happens in a rural village called Headman Banda's Village. It is located in a specific place - Chiparamba Valley of Chipata District. The narrator, through descriptive language, indicates this:

It was a cloudy, chilly morning. The place? Headman Banda's village in the Chiparamba Valley of Chipata District. When? Menyani knew not, but it was before dawn (p.3).

In the quote above, the setting is explicitly stated. The context, the place, and the time where events occur are clearly stated, leaving the reader with no room to guess where the place is. By explicitly stating the place, Masiye removes all assumptions from the reader's mind, helping to know exactly where the place is or what it is like. The physical features drawn by Masiye in this text, as shown by the above quotations, focus on the representation of the rural as a physical space endowed with physical geographical or ecological endowments.

The second way in which the rural is represented as a physical space is through human activity, which includes dwelling and everyday activities. Headman Banda's village is an abode where people live. It is the place of dwelling, shelter, and everyday existence of Kavumba, Menyani, Banda, and other characters in the novel.

Here people lived and died... Each morning, men and women hurried to their gardens (p.3).

This representation indicates that the rural space in *Before Dawn* functions as the immediate spatial environment that houses human life, shaping routines, relationships, and survival as we see throughout the story. It is a habitable place. The phrases 'where people live and die', 'the place', 'Headman Banda's Village', and 'when', in the above quotes, show that a specific place is being referred to, and this space is a tangible physical environment where people live and do things daily. Additionally, by the phrase "Each morning men and women hurried to their gardens (p.3)", emphasis of the physicality of the rural is enhanced, showing the place as lively and functional. Additionally,

inclusion of structures such as homesteads, pathways, and the existence of people who actively engage with each other are also used to show that the place is a physically functional place and not dead or passive. The narrator says:

The midwife's hut was at the far end of the village (p.3).

In addition to the mother, the father had two more wives... He built a high fence around his huts and usually kept a watchful eye over his wives (p.5).

The representation of the rural as a physical space has an implication on Genette's narrative theory. This explicit mention of the place and time aligns with Genette's idea of narrative space or narrative instance; that is, the representation of physical space and environment in the narrative. This influences how the story is perceived and experienced by the reader. The narrative space is directly narrated or marked through specific references: *Headman Banda's village, Chiparamba Valley of Chipata District, where people lived and died, and the midwife's hut*. By naming the village and valley, the narrator anchors the story in a concrete geographical location, leaving no ambiguity. This precise setting functions to situate the reader in a specific physical environment, making the rural space concrete and recognisable rather than abstract.

4.1.2 The rural as an Agrarian Space

The rural is also represented as an agrarian space. This is first evident in the economic activities of the rural inhabitants. The rural dwellers are farmers, and this is their major economic activity. It is indicated in the phrase *Each morning men and women hurried to their gardens* (p.3). The category of people who live in this space – *men and women* – is an archetype of the entire population without gender distinction, while '*each morning*' *hurried to their gardens* points to how they function in their daily lives, showing that all of them are involved in farming or agricultural activities. This is also evident in the event when Menyani goes to seek help from the Namukungwi when Tineneji is about to give birth. Both the Namukungwi and her husband are going to the garden, highlighting that both genders were involved in the agricultural lifestyle:

The midwife's hut was at the far end of the village. Menyani saw her holding a basket, evidently preparing to go away. With a hoe in his hand and axe slung on his shoulder, the midwife's husband was already on his way to the garden. He was calling upon his wife to hurry up (p.:3).

This excerpt illustrates the farming season and both males and females involved. Specifically, the woman (the midwife) is shown holding a basket, preparing to leave, which suggests her participation in activities such as gathering, collecting, or possibly trading—roles traditionally associated with women's contributions to household and community sustenance in agricultural areas, while her husband is depicted with a hoe in hand and an axe slung over his shoulder, indicating his involvement in agricultural work, such as farming or land clearing. This representation plays a key role in interpreting the rural not just as a physical place but also as an agrarian space. In this case, Masiye's representation of a husband and wife going to the gardens and the artefacts they carry, has what functional role? The use of ecological features in the description of the landscapes is also another way Masiye's *Before Dawn* represents the rural as an agrarian. There is an emphasis on features such as fields, gardens, and natural climate that are favourable for farming or agriculture.

This area was a densely populated land of numerous flat hills that enclosed the fertile plains (p.3).

There was nothing peculiar to distinguish Banda's village from others that were dotted the wide Chiparamba Valley. The valley itself was reputed for its rich, fertile soil, which yielded abundant crops (p.9).

It was a cloudy, chilly morning...The December rain was in the air; it threatened to fall any moment. The hoeing season had come (p.3).

The ecological features like *flat hills, fertile plains, fertile soil, and rain*, which indicate suitable temperature, are key elements Masiye uses to enhance the rural as an agrarian. With regard to time, the story is set in the rainy season, which is usually a time of farming. The words *cloudy, chilly, and December rain* (p.3) in the quote all indicate the farming season. The setting of the story in the rainy season is crucial because farming occurs in the rainy season. Therefore, Masiye uses the rainy season as a symbolic narrative technique to represent the ecological aspects that reflect the rural as an agrarian.

The finding that the rural has been represented as an agrarian space draws attention to the author's use of space. Rather than simply as a backdrop of the story, the representation of the agricultural elements has an implication of theory from Genette's perspective. The use of narrative time, space, and order clearly helps in representing the rural as agrarian. Genette's theory suggests that the time of narration with respect to not just the tense but the events narrated is an important element in understanding the meaning of a narrative. In this text, the time of the farming event is described in the present time, but the time of the narrative itself is in the past. Using narrative order, specifically a flashback, we see the event is narrated not as it happens, but through a flashback of events that Kavumba narrates from the past. Additionally, the use of specific seasons and times are deliberately used to mark the aspect of time. For example, the mention of "The December rain" indicates a specific time of year, December, which contextualises the story within a particular season, the rainy season, in realistic representation. This seasonal marker is crucial because it

not only situates the narrative temporally but also symbolises the aspects associated with December in the narrative's context; December is associated with farming. Further, using narrative space amplifies the representation of the rural as agrarian. The way in which Masiye depicts the natural environment of the story influences his representation. The excerpt "*densely populated land of numerous flat hills enclosed the fertile plains*" emphasises several features that are arable for an agricultural environment. This structure indicates the functionality of the rural space in *Before Dawn*, in which the rural cultures' deep-rootedness in their lands and farming activities, causes their inhabitants not to move to other areas until they are threatened by the changing economy, which in this case is a money economy. According to Bandopadhyay and Das (n.d) the concepts of time and space are very important for understanding the functions of phenomena in the natural world and specifically in fiction. They argue that to understand events, the reader may, for instance, need to know that the hero's house is located on the town square and close to the harbour and this may influence how they interact or get shaped. Therefore, the representation of the rural using time, artefacts and order is not merely for narrative purposes but enhances the representation of this place as an agrarian.

4.1.3 The Rural as a Site of Traditional Culture

Masiye's *Before Dawn* also represents the rural as a site of traditional culture. It is important to define what is meant by traditional culture in this study, as usually, the concept of tradition tends to have ambiguous meanings. According to Beckstein (2017), traditional culture, refers to customs, beliefs, values, practices and procedures that are not modernised in nature and passed down through generations. The traditional culture in *Before Dawn* is evidenced firstly in the use of oral tradition incorporated through songs, proverbs, myths, and folktales. One event where oral tradition is prominent is the songs sung when Menyani refuses to offer a goat and the villagers felt that this would offend the spirit. They joined together singing songs about peace and the safety of the village;

The people felt that all was not well in the village. For that reason, all the songs the women sang referred to the peace and safety of the village. They also sang about male children who behaved like the whirlwind when they grew up. I knew then that they were singing about my father's behaviour (ibid p.18).

The headman started a slow moving chant. His councillors responded with a sonorous, mournful dirge. With their arms folded behind their backs, their heads bent low, the men trudged on, singing:

Hear our prayers, O Thunga

Why should we perish

O Thunga, Mulungu's hero

Disaster has befallen us

Have mercy upon us, Thunga

What evil have we done

Punish only the wrongdoer, Thunga (p.22)

Proverbs and myths are also another oral tradition prominently used to depict the rural as site of traditional culture. One myth is about the whirlwind, which the people of Chiparamba Valley believe was a sign of the wrath of the spirits. Narrative perspective is used to represent this:

The whirlwind which had now devastated our village was, in the villagers' minds but another manifestation of Thunga's wrath (ibid p.20).

The narrator himself also directly indicates that many myths were present in the village, specifically those linked to Thunga. He says:

There were many myths linked with Thunga and the geography of the area immediately around the village (ibid p.20).

Myths are represented by Masiye as rooted in the rural community and form part of the oral tradition used in the text to represent the rural as a site of traditional culture.

Other ways in which the rural is represented as a site of traditional culture is through specific rural people and places who are custodians of cultural continuity. The rural places include the village court known as the Bwalo while the custodians of the culture include Ganizo, Banda and the Namukungwi. This is evidenced in the narrator's description as follows:

Most of the myths and beliefs were revealed at the Bwalo, the village-court, where Headman Banda, my Grandfather, settled the weight matters of the people with the help of the Bwalo-keeper and other councillors (ibid p.8).

Naphiri, the Namukungwi, was Ganizo's wife. She conducted all worshipping ceremonies and led people in sacrificing to the spirits of our ancestors... As the village soothsayer, midwife and witch doctor, she was held in veneration. She was the sole link between the villagers and the mysterious world of the dead (p. 11).

The Bwalo is an important and symbolic space in the village of Headman Banda. It is the centre of communication where adults pass on information from one generation to another. It is here that we also see Ganizo as one of the custodians of cultural continuity.

Our open-air village court was a useful centre of communication. All sorts of stories and gossip were fairly distributed here. In fact, it was at the Bwalo that I learned about most things including the story of my birth and life of our people (ibid p.9).

The Bwalo signifies a traditional culture holding a symbolic meaning of connecting people to their culture and roots and rebutting any strange culture. It is no wonder Menyani is viewed as a stranger for not sitting at the Bwalo and for revolting against the rules set there. Other symbolic spaces like forests, rivers, shrines, and sacred hills are also prominent in the story as sites where traditional worship is practiced. Shrines are critical religious spaces in the rural village of Headman Banda. Sacrifices, and ceremonies are conducted in shrines and the rural people of this village also believe that the Supreme God and the spirits of the dead live in these shrines.

Mother continued to tell me mythical stories of Thunga and the deep lake at the shrine where all spirits were said to live.... The villagers had gone to Thunga's shrine. They offered their sacrifices of beef, flour and beer. The shrine was at a nearby hill against which most cyclones flattened themselves after sweeping through the village (p.32).

The shrines reveal the core values, fears and connection of rural inhabitants not just to the land but to their ancestors, belief system and way of life. 'They offered their sacrifices' brings in a sense of how the community is socially connected in this traditional cultural aspect, therefore also enhancing the representation of the social ties in the rural space. Customs, such as encompassing initiation ceremonies, marriage practices, and funerals; belief systems and upholding of supernatural beings have also been used by Masiye to represent the rural as a site or place of traditional culture. Rituals include those surrounding birth and child naming, sacrifices to gods, divination and initiation into adulthood and death and mourning practices highlight the customs of the people of Headman Banda's village. These practices are presented through various events. When Tineneji is in the process of child birth, initiation songs are sung. We are told:

The women knew what was happening and encouraged the operation by singing initiation songs. Before long a new baby cried in the hut (p.5).

The initiation songs in this case represent a rite of passage. The songs mark Tineneji's transition to motherhood and the birth of Kavumba. The songs serve as elements that reinforce the mystical aura surrounding rural spaces, shaping community beliefs and taboos in this text.

The 'Thing had a particular significance in our village. We connected the whirlwind to two hills. Villagers believed that Thunga, the sacred serpent lived in one of the two hills. They believed too that Thunga brought life and death to the village from Mulungu (ibid p.20).

Additionally, the people in the rural space described in this text hold various beliefs. For example, they believe in nature and the environment for protection, progress and continuity, which are all typical in the African tradition religion. We learn their belief that lightning is associated with danger and so, when it strikes, people run for cover.

That moment a frightening flash streaked across the firmament. A booming thunder echoed in the distance. Menyani dived for cover. The Namukungwi spat into the sky, saying: Stay up there, lightning (Masiye, p.5).

Both Menyani's reaction to take cover and the Namukungwi's command or rebuke of the lightning to stay up there, is a reflection of the interconnectedness and belief of the people of Chiparamba Valley to the natural environment. Kavumba the narrator enhances this when through his voice he says:

As I grew up, I began to realise that the cyclone was a significant centre of my people's beliefs. This natural phenomenon appeared to account for almost every occurrence in our village (p.8).

Clearly, nature plays a critical role in the belief system of the people of Chiparamba Valley. Menyani does not take cover out of fear but mainly for protection from being harmed and respect for nature. On the other hand, the Namukungwi's command is uttered out of her own authority as a priestess who stands in the gap between the supernatural world of the gods and the physical world of the people. The rural domain in Masiye's *Before Dawn* also believes in spiritual forces such as ancestral spirits, deities and ritual specialists who mediate between the spiritual forces and the people. The people believe in the dead, in Supreme God who they called *Mulungu* and the various spirits which they believed was the way God manifested himself. However, they do not approach them directly but through a medium; Namukungwi who plays the role of medium. She is a custodian of the traditional religion and practices her role in accordance with the cultural demands of the people of Chiparamba Valley.

The tensions between Ganizo and Menyani, when Menyani is requested to sacrifice a goat for the birth of his son, also represent the rural space as a site of traditional culture. A tensional moment between Menyani and Ganizo, occurs when Ganizo vehemently demands that Menyani makes a sacrifice, but Menyani refuses:

Father was already trembling with rage. I'll see you Ganizo, one of these days', he said angrily. It was clear to me that father regarded the Bwalo elder with contempt. His brief periods of absence at the Chipata administrative centre had made him a pompous stranger. But Ganizo was determined to maintain the village practices. Wasn't he the Bwalo-keeper? Ganizo did not understand Father's agitation over all this (p.12).

This conflict between Menyani and Ganizo is symbolic of the representation of the rural as a traditional culture but also enhances the tensions between tradition and modernity. The rural tradition is represented by Ganizo, while Menyani represents modernity, which is a reflection of the urban and the new ways of life. Menyani also embodies modernity when he builds a fence around his compound:

He built a high fence around his huts and usually kept a watchful eye over his wives (ibid p.9).

Menyani's building of a fence around his compound is similar to the walls of the city or the urban. His colleagues' interpretation that Menyani fences his compound as a way to keep out intruders and specifically protect his wife, is actually a symbol of how modernity threatens the traditional culture of openness, but also an indication of individualism, which was more prominent in the urban space, and which Menyani represents. On the other hand, Ganizo's fervent attempt to maintain the village's tradition highlights the resistance of traditional elements to change that lead to conflict between tradition and modernity.

The finding that the rural is represented as a site of traditional culture carries a range of significant implications, thematically, ideologically and theoretically. Thematically, it enhances the understanding of the tension between the rural and the urban and how the colonial influence of modern culture contributed to the shaping of rural areas. Ideologically, the representation of traditional cultural aspects that take place in rural spaces helps us to understand how authors conceptualise the traditional and modern concepts through the prism of rural and urban spaces and through rural and urban characters. Additionally, such representation highlights that culture stems from place and that historical forces, struggles and tensions of a people, and migration patterns can affect what becomes of a culture. In this case, the traditional culture of the people of Chiparamba evolves because people like Menyani and others no longer live and die in the same traditional space but migrate to other places where they learn new cultures and ways of life.

Theoretically, applying Genette's narratology to this finding highlights the use of narrative frequency to emphasise the traditional culture of the rural space. Throughout the text, there is a frequent reference to traditional culture as a way of life in Headman Banda's village, with the major conflict being the desire to maintain the traditional culture. Masiye constantly refers to the gods such as Thunga, village rules, myths and spaces such as shrines as a way of life in Chiparamba Valley. Additionally, he uses direct comparative strategies such as juxtaposing Menyani and Ganizo to emphasise that the rural is a traditional place. This is evident when he says:

It was clear to me that father regarded the Bwalo elder with contempt. His brief periods of absence at the Chipata administrative centre had made him a pompous stranger. But Ganizo was determined to maintain the village practices.

Here Masiye contrasts the attitudes and behaviors of the Menyani (the narrator's father) and Ganizo. Phrases such as "regarded the Bwalo elder with contempt" and "made him a pompous stranger" advances the idea that the father looks down upon or dismisses the village's traditional practices, whereas Ganizo determination is an idea of upholding tradition. Narrator's voice is also prominently used in this narrative to re-echo the representation of the rural as a site of tradition. With Kavumba as the major character and the prominent narrator, the story highlights the use of first-person point of view, giving the reader not just a closer look into his thoughts and experiences but first-hand information about the traditional culture of the people of Chiparamba valley. The reader is able to delve into the traditional culture through Kavumba's eyes thereby gaining authentic insights into the rural's traditions.

4.1.4 The Rural as a Closely-Knit Social Community

The study also found that the rural space is depicted as a closely-knit social community. This is depicted through characters and social aspects, such as communal life and family systems.

Communal life is portrayed as existing more in the rural than the urban, whereas individualism is depicted as taking place. Firstly, the closely-knit communal life is depicted through the village folks. Masiye represents the rural people as a united people who work together to protect and uphold their traditional culture. The odd one, and one who the entire village is against is Menyani. Menyani's refusal to sit at the Bwalo and offer sacrifices, portrays his individualistic tendency, which is said to have stemmed from his absence from the village and his acquired modern culture from the urban. To the community, this is a strange behaviour. Menyani is even referred to as a stranger:

Then headman Banda continued, you are almost a stranger here at the Bwalo. That's why people call you a lone hunter. You must sit at the Bwalo (p.10).

It was clear to me that father regarded the Bwalo elder with contempt. His brief periods of absence at the Chipata administrative centre had made him a pompous stranger (p.11).

From the quotes above, the author successfully represents the rural as a communal system while the urban is depicted as individualised. Terms such as 'all' in the first quote and 'people' in the second reflect the closely-knit system where everyone is involved. On the contrary, terms such as '*a lone hunter*' and '*pompous stranger*' indicate individualism, which is frowned upon by the rural community. The urban is a place where people often prioritise their own interests over the welfare of others and their communities, and this is exactly what we see in Menyani. The belief that failure to appease the spirits would lead to disaster and even punishment for the offender and the entire village exposes not just Menyani's strange behaviour and the people's dismay to such a behaviour, but is Masiye's technique to show the social bond that exists in the rural space and how individualism can be viewed as destroying this social unity of the community.

Kavumba's return to the village after being conscripted in the war is another element that Masiye uses to enhance the representation of the rural as closely-knit. When Kavumba returns, he finds the community in mourning and almost stagnated because of the death of Headman Banda. He is embraced by the community despite having been a fugitive, and is supported to get back Thandiwe. He is further installed as the new headman since Menyani, the next heir to the throne is also dead. This depiction of love and support shown to Kavumba epitomises a community life that is satisfying, closely-knit, neighbourly, and accepting of the individual. The narrator himself directly shows this closely-knit representation when he talks of being supported to mourn. He says:

Memories of the good old man and his beloved care of the village released my emotions. The villagers were helping me to mourn the father of our village (p.147).

Kavumba's reference to the support given to him shown in the words '*helping me*' and in the term '*our*' shows he belonged to a group that was connected and shared close bonds. By referring to Banda as *the father of our village* and not *my grandfather* depicts the connection and shared ownership rather thus enhancing the representation of the rural as being closely-knit community.

The text further shows unity, shared values, and cooperation as key elements when the narrator describes a new era that was beginning in the village and where the Bwalo-keeper harangues everyone to be a part of it:

A new era was beginning in our village. The Bwalo-keeper harangued the villagers. He told them that they would have a busy time in the following weeks. There would be many ceremonies. First would come the funeral ceremony to mourn both Headman Banda and Menyani. Then they would hold a thanksgiving service at the shrine because Thunga had saved me from the war. After that, I would be installed as the new village headman. The village was not ruined; Thunga had ensured its survival (ibid p.156).

The term '*they*' as used in the above quote represents a group of people sharing something in common. The Bwalo-keeper does not mean they excluding him. In this case, the word '*they*,' links the people, to the actions they are to do as a group. He is reflecting a bond and connection to shared practices of mourning, thanksgiving and celebration. We can, therefore, argue that the author uses it for communal identity emphasising the shared values, collective identity and a sense of mutual understanding among members.

Family systems is also another aspect used by Masiye to show the social aspect of the rural as a closely-knit community. He depicts family structures that include both extended and nuclear:

In addition to my mother, Father had two more wives and like most polygamists, he spent much of his time with them (p.9).

Menyani's polygamous marriage specifically highlights the nature of family systems in the rural setting as starting with husband and wife in contrast with the urban life where women can even ask men to just sleep with them without the desire of establishing a family. The narrator says:

We were on our way to Lusaka the capital of the country... Our driver was a nuisance. Each time we came to a village, he would jump out of the lorry and conceitedly strut to a nearby hut. Pretty luscious girls would emerge to flirt with him, their attractive faces sparkling as they gave him calabashes of beer. The driver was drunk. More girls surrounded him...they were requesting the driver to take them to Lusaka even though they had no money. They promised to repay him by sleeping with him (p.97).

Masiye here depicts contrasting social lifestyles of the rural and the urban. The rural family ties are established by properly organised marriage systems thereby depicting the rural as stable and the urban as chaotic or unpredictable. The girls in the villages want to go to the city but not for marriage or establishing families but for prestige and exploring the urban way of life.

The family system is also depicted through the lineage system that determines ascension to leadership position. Political leadership is by descent not appointment. When Banda dies, his son Menyani is expected to take up the leadership of the village. However, this does not happen as Menyani dies and his son Kavumba, who is supposed to take up the throne is rumoured to have died. Despite this situation, the community does not seem to have a solution to replace the leader. They uphold the system of lineage determining leadership even when there is a crisis of not having a leader. The survival of this traditional system, in the face of modernisation, is symbolic of cultural resistance to the adaptation of a new order. Resistance is seen when the village community remain reluctant to abandon their

culture and tradition even when they face a crisis. There is a leadership crisis because tradition demands that a member of the royal family takes up leadership.

The finding that the rural is represented as a closely-knit community has implication in theme and idealisation of the rural. In representing this, and applying Genette's theory, the author's mood or attitude not just highlight the rural as a communally-oriented space but he also elevates the representation of the rural as a supportive environment, where one is interconnected with others and feels loved and belonging in contrast to the urban life where people are unwanted, unsupported and mistreated. This attitude towards the rural shapes and influences the reader's perspectives about the rural and may be grounded in history where the rural was viewed as socially knit. This perspective is recorded by Woods (2011), who argue that historically, the rural communities have often been perceived as close-knit and caring surrounded by the simplicity and peacefulness of the natural environment. This representation of the rural space is actually juxtaposed as idyllic when compared to the individualised urban space.

4.1.5 The Rural as Lacking and Backward

The rural in *Before Dawn* is also represented as lacking and being backward. The villagers lack clothing and wear tattered clothes. They have no money and no food and are backward in terms of wealth, as compared to the Copperbelt and Lusaka where these are available. This is evidenced in the appearance of the people and their movement to the towns that are depicted urban. The narrator says:

The defaulters of Banda's village are back! It's not little wealth they have. By our local standards, it was indeed much wealth. Their wives were proudly arrayed in colourful new clothes, the like of which had never before appeared in our village. The forced arrest of their husbands had in a way, been a blessing to them. Without it they would perhaps have continued to wear tattered rags or bark cloth (p. 70). Occasionally, one would return resplendent and completely unrecognisable in a smart European suit. The villagers would gather around him, staring at these extravagant clothes (p.82). Men, the stories we hear are true. It's only us still wearing rags. Most villages are deserted. And we sit here! (p.85).

These illustrative quotes represent the rural space as lacking and backward both materially and culturally. The rural still hold on to the traditional culture, way of life, and clothing when others have moved. The text shows a culture transition and how various people in the rural space adapt to it.

Another way the backwardness is represented is in lack of movement and movement by foot. The narrator says that in this rural place, they (including the narrator) do not migrate or move around, except as we see later, one man, Menyani. He is actually even despised by his village counterparts for not being a part of the rural life. This lack of movement shows a way of life for generations, an existing culture among the people of Chiparamba Valley. In the culture of the people of Chiparamba, mobility is not a way of life; the community's identity and practices do not include moving away from home. This representation depicts the rural not only as physical location but also as a homogeneity. And this is the reason Menyani is actually despised. His movement is depicted as distorting the culture or homogeneity of the community and makes him a stranger to his traditional way of life. He is actually referred to as a stranger by his own father and his son:

Then headman Banda continued, you are almost a stranger here at the Bwalo. That's why people call you a lone hunter. You must sit at the Bwalo (p.10).

It was clear that Menyani regarded the Bwalo with contempt. His periods of absence at the Chipata administrative centre had made him a stranger to his own people and culture and he is despised for it. The finding of the representation of the rural as lacking and backwards corresponds to Conroy's (2020) study *Avisual fictional representations of rural life: A case study of the Archers*, where he found that in *The Archers* the Grundy family is frequently depicted as grappling with financial difficulties, a theme that resonates with real-world challenges faced by rural communities. He noted that key elements of this portrayal include economic struggles where the Grundys are often shown dealing with debt, insufficient income, and the constant threat of losing their farm. According to Jackson (2020) struggles faced by the rural inhabitants are depicted with a sense of authenticity, reflecting common issues faced by small-scale farmers and rural labourers in real life. This study agrees with Conroy's conclusion that the elements of rural struggles as depicted in fiction highlight the tension between realism and dramatisation in representing rural poverty, raising questions about the impact of such portrayals on audience perceptions or on readers. The depictions further enhance the understanding of the disparities between the rural and the urban shaping the way readers interpret them.

In terms of theoretical implication, Masiye's utilisation of what Genette calls intradiegetic narrators, makes representation realistic rather than subjective. Using Foloko to describe the city and its way of life validates in some way Kavumba's narration of events throughout the story. When we hear it from Foloko, we believe it and it influences the interpretation of the rural as lacking and backward. It is not a subjective but objective representation using various characters that enables Masiye to achieve this representation.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The findings reveal that the rural and the urban have been represented using physical setting, social elements, and cultural and traditional elements, and economic status of each space. With regard to the social representation, the rural in the selected texts have been depicted as closely-knit, with strong traditional values, and family bonds, and communal in nature but lacking, backward and rigid or conservative. Traditional elements have also been used in the representation of the rural and urban. The rural is represented as a site of traditional culture, while the urban is depicted as a place of modern culture. Traditional beliefs, language, rituals, and other cultural practices and norms were depicted as taking place in rural than in urban. The study shows that the representation of the rural in Masiye's *Before Dawn* reinforce stereotypes by depicting rural areas as backward, lacking and as having a monolithic culture which is represented through traditional aspects. The findings imply that the rural has diverse experiences and identities of rural inhabitants, which are usually shaped by both internal and external forces and interactions.

In keeping in step with Kuehl and Eppley, the literary representation of the rural in *Before Dawn* does move beyond stereotypes such as those identified by Kuehl and Eppley, and toward authentic portrayals that reflect the realities and diversity of rural Zambia by including in the texts a new culture that influences actions of characters such as moving away from the village to the city. The motif of travel is not simply to acquire new things but the author uses it in a functional way to represent a change of narrative perspective from being stereotypical. Characters no longer live and die in the rural space and can now have access to an outside world which influences their change of culture.

The findings help us to understand that there is this space and there are other spaces in the story and that the narrative is not only constantly shifting between times but between multiple locations. From Genette narrative theory these reflect the narrative perspective shifting between various narrators as they shift to these locations. The locations become a set of connections, journeys, and memories that not only reflect Kavumba's life but which shape our understanding of the representation of the rural in *Before Dawn* and allow us to analyse the concepts of time and space in the text. This view corroborates Jackson's argument that the theme of place in fictions guides much exploration in rural history and local history. He argues that attempts have been made to create definitions and typologies of place, but these have had to contend with the diverse, complex and dynamic realities of historical pattern and process, local and regional. Nonetheless, historians and those in other disciplines have evolved different approaches and ideologies to the concept of place; thereby making literary studies able to consider various themes, approaches and ideologies and how they can inform the investigation of places in fictional constructions.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that future research should be undertaken and should focus on comparative analyses between Zambian fiction and literature from other Southern African countries. Such studies could explore differences in portrayal, and the influence of regional socio-political contexts on the depiction of rural and urban spaces in Zambian fiction.

REFERENCES

- Bandopadhyay, K., & Das, S. (n.d.). Expansion of space, place and society: A study of rural representation in literature. Retrieved July 3, 2024, from https://scotopia.in/journal/journalbkend/paperlist/kathakaliv-6_issue-2.pdf
- Beckstein, M. (2017). The concept of a living tradition. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 20(4), 491–510. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/esta/20/4>
- Conroy, S. (2020). Avisual fictional representations of rural life: A case study visibility description. *Journal of Cultural Studies Dynamics*. Retrieved April 26, 2020, from <https://www.academia.edu/122383598/AvisualfictionalrepresentationsofrurallifeAcasestudy>
- Jackson, A. (2020). Conceptualising place in historical fact and creative fiction: Rural communities and regional landscapes in Bernard Samuel Gilbert's Old England. *Rural History*, 31(2), 195–209.
- Kuehl, R., & Eppley, K. (2024). Representing rural: A critical content analysis of contemporary middle grade novels set in rural places. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 58(4), 379–404.
- Macola, G. (2005). Imagining village life in Zambian fiction. *Cambridge Anthropology*, 25(1), 1–10. Retrieved April 18, 2026, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23820717>
- Majdoubi, I. E. L. (2024). Spatial dynamics in African literature: Analyzing rural and urban representations in colonial and postcolonial contexts. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, 7(8), 6670–6673. Retrieved from <https://ijsshr.in/v7i8/Doc/102.pdf>



- McNulty, N. (2005). Reading the city: Analysing literary space in selected post-apartheid urban narratives (Master's thesis). University of KwaZulu-Natal. Retrieved April 23, 2026, from <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:142835099>
- Shi, L., & Zhu, Q. W. (2018). Urban space and representation in literary study. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 6, 223–229. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2018.69015>
- Sryfi, M. (2018). Rethinking space: The representation of the city in the Moroccan novel in Arabic reading Muhammad Zafzaf and Muhammad Shukri (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA.
- Woods, M. (2011). *Rural*. London: Routledge.