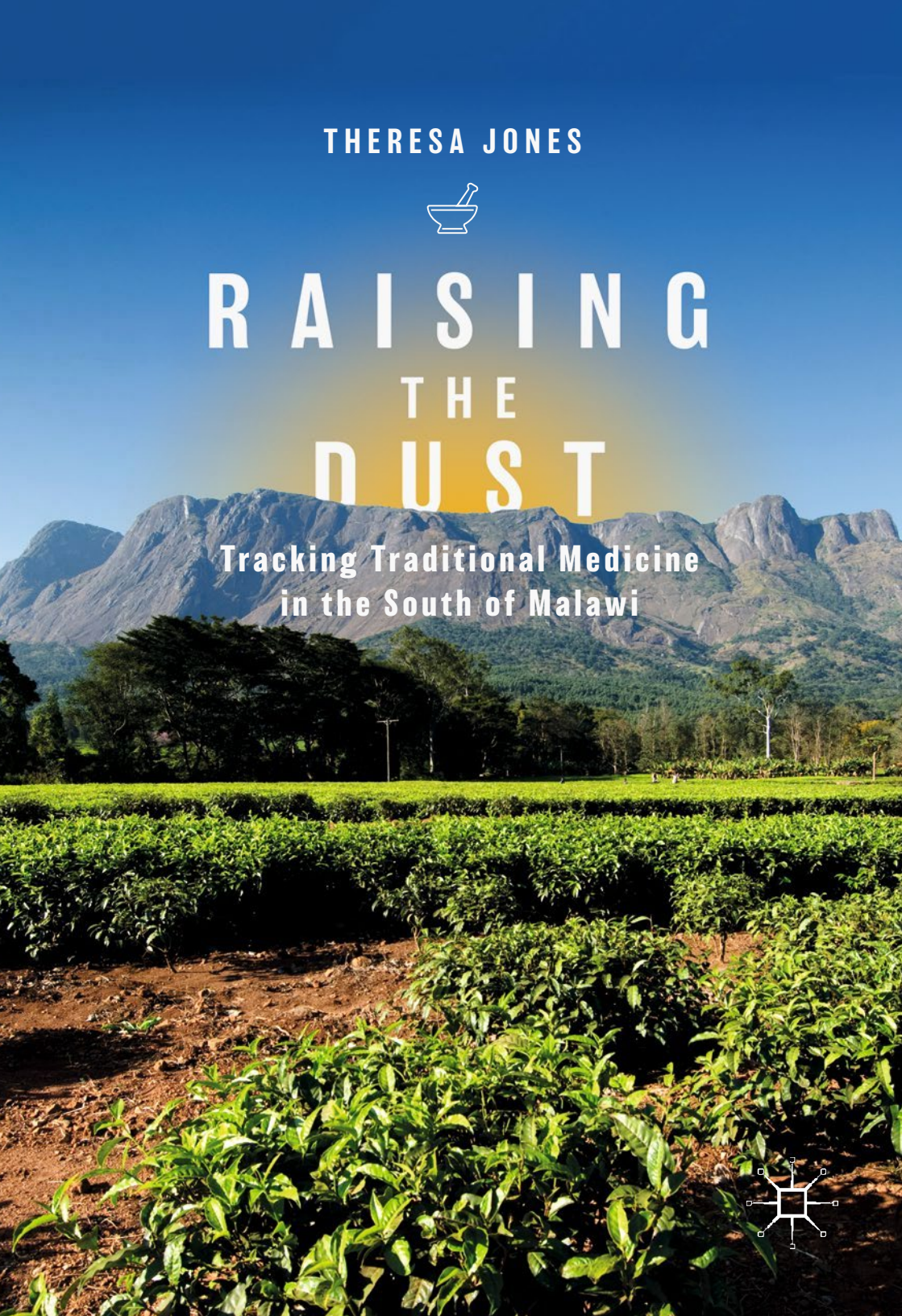
THERESA JONES
RAISING
THE
DUST
Tracking Traditional Medicine
in the South of Malawi

Raising the Dust

Theresa Jones

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Tracking Traditional Medicine in the South of Malawi

palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-981-10-8419-5 ISBN 978-981-10-8420-1 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-8420-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018936709

Cover illustration: LatitudeStock / Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. part of Springer Nature.
The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

To a healthy future for my grandsons Xavier and Kade,
those grandchildren I am yet to meet,
and for all earth's children.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the people of the Mulanje Mountain Biosphere Reserve, particularly the Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust (MMCT), and to the traditional healers who have contributed their valuable time, knowledge, faith and energy to this research inquiry. To David Nangoma, former Research Officer at the MMCT, thank you for teaching me to take everyday life a little less seriously and for helping me to understand the awesome power of the spoken word. To Hastings Maloya (deceased), former Communications Officer at the MMCT, I am grateful to you for the early work you did, connecting me with the area, and for checking in with me to make sure that things were progressing well along the way. The personal name of each of the interview participants is included in this acknowledgement so that each person stands out as adding a valuable contribution to the book. To Dr Jacqui Howell, former colleague and now life-time friend, thank you for casting your sharp eyes and scientific rigour over the manuscript, reading it thoroughly, once again. To the many other people who have contributed their time, energy and ideas to this book, I cannot name you all individually but your input is sincerely appreciated, and remembered, and in many places adds valuable insight and meaning to the narrative. My deepest and sincerest gratitude extends to you all.

In Nessa village, many thanks to;

Aope, Benala, Binosi, Davies, Eleni, Eline, Evance, Faney, Goliath, Kedison, Keneth, Lisita, Mary M., Mary W., Mercy, Monica, Mose, Nizia, Odeta, Rabeka, Rubina, Samuel, Stonio, Terezina, Wizimani and Zione. Many thanks also to Mr Killy, for the hours of translation and organisation you put into assisting with the completion of the interviews in Nessa Village.

In the Phalombe district, many thanks go to;

Asumbeji, Benadetar, Charles, Dagalasi, Fanilesi, Faresi, Jackson C., Jackson N., Jayuilasi, Linile, Ryson and Singano. Many thanks also to Mr Liwasa for the time you put into liaising, translating and providing transport for me in the Phalome interviews.

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Abbreviations

ATM	African traditional medicine
AUS$	Australian dollar value
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CHAM	Christian Health Association of Malawi
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
FRIM	Forestry Research Institute of Malawi
GDP	Gross domestic product
HAM	Herbalist Association of Malawi
IPRs	Intellectual property rights
MAB	Man and the Biosphere
MMCT	Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust
MoH	Ministry of Health
MTHUO	Malawi Traditional Healers Umbrella Organisation
NCST	National Commission for Science and Technology
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NHBG	National Herbarium and Botanic Gardens
NTFP	Non-timber forest products
TBA	Traditional birth attendant
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organisation
US$	United States dollar value
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development

WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organisation
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

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1

Unwrapping

Introduction

"Raising the Dust" investigates the socioecological aspects of traditional medicine in the Mulanje Mountain Biosphere Reserve, in the south of Malawi. It seeks to understand how the practice of traditional medicine, particularly holistic and relational approaches, can contribute to enhanced health and wellbeing, thereby increasing our understanding of the relationship between humans and nature. In this sense the book aims to add to growing interests in cross-cultural health and wellbeing narratives, passed down through the generations, promoting ethnomedical[1] knowledge, practices and beliefs. In a unique manner, the book sifts through, reviews, re-examines and recycles a number of different, yet inevitably related theoretical 'soap wrappers' in the cross-cultural health debate. In so doing, it seeks to 're-plant' a useful variety of ecological ideas into how we think about health and wellbeing, over the long term.

This journey began a long time ago, in South Africa, when I was around five years old and first started exploring the world through everyday things, like soap wrappers and colourful packets of seeds. I remember spending my time carefully sorting through soap wrappers so I could

T. Jones, *Raising the Dust*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-8420-1_1

repurpose them as note pads and anxiously waiting for new packets of flower and vegetable seeds to plant in my very first patch of dirt. From an early age I felt a sense of not-quite-belonging and looked towards nature to help me find my place in the world. This enduring sense of placelessness made me conscious of the need for harmony and groundedness with the rest of life. There was something about the earth that made me feel alive, and as I watched the seeds I had planted grow roots and become embedded in the soil, I felt a connection with the rest of nature. By observing nature in this way, I learnt the importance of wholeness and this enduring need for harmony and balance has motivated my interest in health and healing ever since. My own understanding of the interconnectedness of everyday life, learnt through observing nature in this way, underpins this health narrative.

Chivaura (2006) explains that just as tortoises carry their homes around on their backs, we carry our worldviews with us wherever we go. In some ways this book is a reflection of my own tortoise-like experiences. On one level it draws on my early childhood curiosities about the world around me, a world that was an adventurous place, to be discovered and enjoyed. In my eagerness to get from place to place I walked too soon and often ended up at the bottom of the wooden stairs in the double story house where we lived. Francis, the maid who worked for our family at the time, would pick me up and make me a double-decker jam sandwich and a warm cup of tea and I would soon return to my explorations. I always seemed to want to know more about what lay beyond the things I could immediately see; up the tree, under the bush, deep in the soil, over there, and so on. I was always uncovering and discovering new things in my environment and at times found myself in recovery from my earthly adventures.

By the time I went to school I had bent knees and turned in toes and had knocked out my two new front teeth from wanting to take in all of life's experiences. My mother worried about my adventurous spirit and she often had to use her nursing skills to patch up my misadventures. Despite these injuries and misfortunes, in my mind the world was still a safe and sacred place. I inevitably grew up and as I became more socially and politically aware, once more my views about the world around me changed and evolved. My childhood sense of the world as a harmonious,

exciting and abundant place became constrained by *apartheid*, a system of politically enforced racial segregation. My birth certificate classified me as a 'White' South African, separate from my fellow 'Black', 'Indian' and 'Coloured' citizens. Apartheid separated not only people, but cultures and traditions and as I grew to adulthood, I began questioning these artificial divisions and became increasingly interested in learning about how so called 'other' communities lived. This curiosity led me to study anthropology as a way of trying to better understand the worldviews and experiences of my fellow citizens.

"Raising the Dust" capitalises on my own struggles to make sense of the ways in which seemingly disparate aspects of life can somehow "hang together" (Evanhoff 2005:71). I struggled to make sense of apartheid and rejected outright its notion of separateness, turning back to those interconnected, interrelated and holistic approaches to life that made more sense to me. I became interested in ecological approaches to health and healing and pursued these interests through studies of so-called "alternative" medicine. These studies also left gaps, and more often than not, raised important questions about peace, justice, equality and sustainability. I yearned for understanding, for that something more that was missing. As I thought about these things, I returned to my early childhood notions of the world as a safe, harmonious and peaceful place, where I had learned to belong. How had I come to feel grounded, and alive in such a segregated and fragmented world, I wondered?

After years of thinking about these questions, it seemed that one way to find the answers was to return to where it all began. Having lived in a wealthy, industrialised country like Australia for more than two decades, much of what I knew as a child had become overly sanitised and standardised. To recover the answers to my persistent concerns, I felt a growing need to talk directly with people who still hold knowledge about these things. Since I had learned so much about life from traditional healers and conservationists from an early age, I turned to them once more to be reminded of the things I had lost touch with. This inquiry draws on my experiences of that assumed knowledge, seeking to understand it critically and analytically.

My interest in traditional medicine is partly prompted by my close friendship with Togo, a traditional healer from South Africa. I had not had any contact with my friend since immigrating to Australia in the early 1990s but one day she unexpectedly contacted me through a dream. Not my own dream, but through the dream of a trusted colleague. While at work one morning at a local community health service, my colleague, a clinically trained nurse, came to me and told me that she had dreamt about me the previous night and that:

> *in that dream I saw this woman, she was standing before me with her hands placed on her hips, swaying from side to side and shaking her head. This joyful woman has instructed me to ask you why you have not yet started your research?*

Dreams are an important way of passing indigenous knowledge on to others and using an old photo, the bio-medically trained nurse helped me to identify the woman she saw in her dream as my friend Togo, who I knew as Sarah. My colleague had no way of knowing who Sarah was and her insightful dream surprised me sufficiently to begin this research inquiry.

Structure of the Book

This book comprises ten chapters. Chapter 1 presents the main aims and ideas of the book and broadly defines the ecological thinking that informs the topic. In so doing, it begins to outline the conceptual framework of the inquiry. Chapter 2 gives an explanation of the ethnographic methodology applied to the research and sets out the qualitative methods used. It also provides a description of the research process, highlighting the ways in which the interviews were set up and details the fieldwork context of the inquiry. Chapter 2 begins to challenge some of the initial research assumptions, in light of these everyday realities. These first two chapters outline the framework of the inquiry and set up the parameters for data collection and interpretation. The fieldwork is reported in Chaps. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, providing an analysis of the main findings in the context of the participants' everyday lived experiences. Consistent with the ethnographic methodology

informing this narrative inquiry, the findings are woven into the analysis so as to allow the main themes to emerge in a grounded way. Additionally, Chap. 8 moves the analysis towards a deeper discussion of these findings, highlighting the state of the Mulanje Mountain Biosphere Reserve, in light of these realities. Chapter 9 reflects back on the ecological theory framing the topic, reviewing it as necessary. The concluding chapter provides a summary, draws attention to some of the strengths and limitations of the book and suggests a direction for further research.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Before proceeding, it will be useful to provide a number of what Booth refers to as "dirty" definitions (1999:90). Their meanings, and the ways in which they inform the subject, will become clearer as the narrative unfolds. Throughout this book, traditional ecological knowledge is considered as it is presented in the literature in terms of; worldviews, use of resources and the transfer of knowledge. Traditional ecological knowledge is dynamic,[2] yet distinctly recognisable, reflecting as it does the constantly shifting relationships between people and the environments they inhabit. As an aspect of this outlook, traditional medical knowledge is unique in the way that it is organized, beginning with a thorough knowledge of local species and extending outwards towards an understanding of functional relationships and wider ecological processes. Traditional knowledge tends to have few formally internalised processes and is applied and transmitted almost entirely, through practice. Since it is transmitted orally, and through observation, some see it as being fragile. For instance, Buenz (2005) explains that the unrecorded knowledge held by traditional healers and other spiritual leaders often dies with them. This has prompted prominent African philosopher, Gyekye, to call for the personally acquired, esoteric knowledge of medicinal plants to be "rescued from the quagmire of mysticism and spirituality" (1997:37), so as to make it more accessible and relevant to the living community. Simwaka et al. (2007) emphasise that despite these vulnerabilities, in Malawi, traditional ecological knowledge is not easily subject to any kind of fragmentation, and it is its inherent holism that defines it more clearly.

Traditional ecological knowledge is often equated with local knowledge since it reflects the ways in which people understand and relate to their home environment. This risks confining it to within people's immediate geographic settings, thereby failing to recognise its broader ecological meaning. Berkes argues that it might be more accurate to regard it as a subset of local knowledge, since the term 'local' conveys "neither the ecological aspects of the concept, nor a sense of the temporal dimensions and cumulative cultural transmissions" (1999:8). Instead, Berkes defines traditional ecological knowledge as, "knowledge of the natural milieu firmly rooted in the reality of an accumulation of concrete, personal experience as opposed to book-learning" (1999:6). We can refine this definition further, by expressing it as a:

> cumulative body of knowledge, practice and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment. (Berkes et al. 2000:1252)

Since traditional ecological knowledge reflects a systems approach, which is not easily subject to fragmentation, it is often described as a holistic outlook.[3] Dove (2000) argues that despite this holism, it is by no means homogenous, but instead a complex view of the world that has become hybridised by other outlooks. The idea of traditional ecological knowledge thus remains problematic, especially from a scientific framework. Berkes suggests that the concept becomes more tenable when understood and applied more broadly, as knowledge "however acquired, of relationships of living beings with one another and with their environment" (1999:6). Traditional ecological knowledge systems are characterised by:

> embeddedness of knowledge, in the local cultural milieu; boundedness of local knowledge in space and time; the importance of community; lack of separation between nature and culture, and between subject and object, commitment or attachment to the local environment as a unique and irreplaceable place; and a noninstrumental approach to nature. (Berkes 1999:10)

Pigg (1995) notes that local knowledge, like the knowledge of traditional healers, is often coded, in acronyms, like TMPs (traditional medical practitioners) and TBAs (traditional birth attendants) suited to development speak, and capturing development goals, but overlooking significant cultural meanings. Lewis (1988) finds the acronym 'TEK', used to describe traditional ecological knowledge, particularly unfortunate, implying as it does that it may be less valid than so called 'high tech' or 'pure' sciences. Berkes et al. (2000), Posey (2004) and Sillitoe (2002) insist that such arbitrary science/non-science demarcations are futile. Thornton (2009) points out that when it comes to indigenous medical practices these distinctions are particularly tenuous because traditional healers view their knowledge as a kind of science, with its own empirical standards that change with time. All ecological knowledge is of course 'interdisciplinary' by nature, so these theoretical boundaries have become blurred by their intrinsic interconnections, and in this book, they are thus viewed as a continuum of ideas.

The term "knowledge of the land", used by Berkes (1999:6), might better describe indigenous people's associations with the natural environment. Posey explains that from an indigenous outlook these connections are expressed as a "fundamental dynamic of human, spiritual and Earth life" (2002:29). The concept of 'land' is thus complex,[4] reflecting as it does the extensive interrelationships between people and their living environments. Langton tells us that Australian Aboriginal biogeography, for instance, is founded on an "engagement with the non-human world through the lens of the *a priori*, sacred landscape, peopled by spiritual Beings and imbued with the essence of both human and non-human beings" (2003:93). It is this holistic view of the land, expressed as a mind, body, spiritual place that informs this book.

Indigenous people assert that they have held harmonious links with the land, especially in contrast to what some consider to be the "pathological" (Hay 2002:20) relationships between the highly industrialised parts of the west and the rest of nature. Idealising traditional views can be problematic however because, of course, knowledge of the environment does not automatically lead to sound ecological management practices (Berkes et al. 2000; Healy 1988). Berkes (1999) and Ellen and Harris (2000) note that exaggerated claims of wisdom have even damaged the

status of traditional ecological knowledge. Furthermore, Butler (2006) argues that promoting it as *the* solution to the environmental crisis places an unfair burden on local communities, ultimately dooming them to fail and effacing colonial states of the impacts of colonisation, imperialism and, more recently, globalisation. Despite the potential for universalising traditional wisdom, and the obvious risks of failing to adequately acknowledge the legacy of global processes on local people, I agree with Berkes (1999), and other ecologists, that in the current age, as long as it is not taken out of context, understanding and valuing the holism inherent in traditional ecological ways of knowing and being holds much insight for a healthier, more sustainable future. On this basis, I have selected traditional medicine as an appropriate conceptual lens with which to view the link between human and ecological health.

Defining Traditional Medicine

The traditional medicine discussed in this book refers to what the World Health Organisation (WHO 2002) in its *Traditional Medicine Strategy: 2002–2005* regards as those indigenous knowledges and practices that respond to the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional health needs of the community. As a holistic approach to health and wellbeing it considers:

> *all* aspects of the patient's life, including their relationship with other people, with the natural environment, and the supernatural forces, as well as any physical or emotional symptoms in order to establish a total context of illness. (Simwaka et al. 2007:157; italics in original)

In the West, traditional medicine is often referred to as a 'mind, body and spirit' approach highlighting the holistic nature of traditional healing methods, as opposed to the biomedical model. Access to traditional medicine, defined by the totality of people's knowledge, practices and beliefs, can be viewed as a cultural right (Chisala 2005). In most African[5] countries it is the first option for people's primary health care needs (Strangeland et al. 2008; van der Geest 1997). Traditional healers often act as the

bridge between the community and the public health system but as Light, Sparg, Stafford and van Staden emphasise, in many countries, indigenous medicine "still forms the backbone of rural healthcare" (2005:127). The WHO estimates that up to eighty per cent of the population in many countries relies on traditional medicine. In Malawi, this figure may be as high as ninety (Meke, Sangona and Thanganyika, Forestry Research Institute of Malawi [FRIM] 2007), mainly because people living in the rural areas rely almost entirely on it, either through personal choice, or because of a lack of access to biomedical resources (Fassil 2004).

By virtue of their practices, African traditional healers combine spiritual, mental, physical, herbal and nutritional approaches to health. Furthermore, they have strong ethical principles, believing that it is their duty to develop life "in all its forms and to alleviate suffering" (Ross 2008:386). In southern Africa, in addition to promoting holistic approaches to health, traditional healers endorse the message that nature's laws must be obeyed as an essential aspect of maintaining a positive state of health and wellbeing (Ross 2008). In other words, traditional healers play a significant role in enhancing ecological processes and facilitating harmonious human/nature associations (Anyinam 1995). Drawing on the definition of traditional medicine as a total, or complete, approach to health, this book thus takes a broad view to investigating the interrelationships that underpin people's ethnomedical knowledge, practices and beliefs, through an interactive, narrative inquiry, emphasising these strengths.

Defining Health

Our ideas about positive health and well-being cannot be easily quantified; they must be interpreted. Although it may be said that the notion of health is highly subjective, in this book the term 'health' is used qualitatively to infer a positive state of emotional, physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing, as experienced over time. The preamble to the WHO constitution defines it as a "state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO 1948). This definition has remained the same since the late nineteen-forties,

despite the significant changes that have occurred since then. Although the WHO statement appears to be inclusive of all aspects of health, Cornish (2004) points out that it is aggregative, not holistic. Aggregate models consider the social *and* the physical *and* the emotional *and* the mental aspects of health without necessarily emphasising or responding to them in a holistic or integral way. Furthermore, this longstanding definition notably omits any reference to the role of the natural environment in maintaining health.

The World Health Organisation's constitution states that the health of all peoples is "fundamental to the attainment of peace and security" (WHO 1948:1). Furthermore, it highlights that achieving these goals requires "the fullest co-operation of individuals and States".[6] *Our Common Future* (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) 1987) provided us with a chance to develop these global health objectives further by reinforcing the idea that health, peace and justice are linked. The World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002, reaffirmed these principles once again by reporting an "urgent need to address the causes of ill health, including environmental causes" (United Nations 2002:39). The correlations between positive health and living harmoniously are obvious, but as King (2010) argues, the significance of the relationship between human health and the state of the natural environment remains underexplored.

Linking Human and Ecological Health

Since the premise of this book is that there is a strong relationship between human and ecological health, it is necessary to consider a range of ecological ideas that inform this view. In this book, in addition to tracking traditional ecological knowledge, I have included a variety of what might be considered radical ecological theories and approaches. Radical ecological theory brings together a collection of ideas about human/nature relationships. Such 'nature thinking' goes back a long way in western philosophy. 'Nature thinking' refers to an assortment of earth-based ideas, brought together in a range of descriptors used to identify contemporary ecological thinking. Henry Thoreau (1817–1862) and John Muir

(1838–1914) were amongst the first to use this approach to challenge what they perceived to be overly anthropocentric, exploitative, human relationships with nature (Pretty 2002). These ideas are seen to be radical in as much as they challenge mainstream western assumptions that humans have an intrinsic right to dominate over the rest of the natural world. Early western ecocentric ways of thinking about the world were viewed as 'nature mysticism', and some observers still dismiss them as a form of "nature worship" (Janik 1995:105). Nevertheless, these early nature thinkers have had a significant influence on the environmental movement and on contemporary eco-philosophy. They have set the tone for ecological thinkers, highlighting the ongoing need for reciprocity, harmony, and balance, all important themes in the current health/ecology debate, particularly those illuminating more integral and holistic outlooks.

According to Booth (1992), contemporary ecological thinking has been 'grandmothered', or linked together, under these holistic perspectives. They have been brought together, somewhat eclectically, through a shared effort to construct a theory of humanity that is, "located *within* the natural world and that describes human-nature interactions as something other than exploitative, hierarchical or resource-orientated" (Booth 1992:6; original emphasis). As stated, I refer to these eclectic ideas as radical ecology, since they challenge the dominant western ways of relating with the earth, that being, mastery over the natural world, in terms of its scientific, technological or purely economic value. All radical ecological theorists are interested in understanding and seeking to achieve less exploitative relationships between humans and the rest of nature be they; eco-therapists, eco-feminists, holistic scientists, restoration ecologists or any of the many spiritual ecologists, as well as those who adopt from the many forms of social and human ecology, differing only in how they approach these aims.

Rejecting human/nature anthropocentricity, radical ecological theorists draw inspiration from Arne Naess's (1912–2009) early deep ecological ideas - which began evolving in the 1970s - to more recent interpretations of James Lovelock's Gaia theory, emphasising the mutual relationship between humans and the environments they inhabit. Whilst this book draws on a range of these overlapping paradigms and perspectives, it is

focussed specifically on the main ideas to emerge in the decade or so after the publication of *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987), referred to above. This was a period of heightened ecological thinking, during which a broad range of interdisciplinary environmental discourses "blossomed" (Gardener 2002:6), particularly between spirituality and sustainability advocates. For example, during the 1990s both spirituality and sustainability came to be seen as important motivations for both personal and social change. Bignall (2008) argues that since they both interrogate the widespread, yet uncritical assumptions, of the benefits of science and technology in the modern world, they provide us with an alternative framework for understanding and, importantly, achieving healthier, more balanced, socially just and ecologically sustainable human/nature relations.

The well-known peace activist Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) declared that the earth could provide for everyone's need but not everyone's greed. Radical ecological thinkers thus often relate their arguments to Gandhi's peaceful principles (Naess 1995a; Plumwood 2002). According to Merchant, any form of radical ecology addresses socioecological justice as it seeks "a new ethic of the nurture of nature, and the nurture of people" (2005:1). She argues that it provides a way out of the current crisis, helping us to "formulate answers to the dilemmas of self in society, society in self and self-versus society" (2005:13). For radical ecologists, essentially, this means seeing the self as part of, rather than apart from nature, as Gandhi and other early ecological thinkers had. Radical ecology is both a movement and a philosophy (Naess 1995b; Rothenberg 1995), which provides a useful critique of the tendency in western society to dichotomise humanist versus naturalist orientations whilst overlooking the spiritual dimension. Whilst such a critique is compatible with Gandhi's philosophy of peace, justice and interconnectedness, it also relates strongly with the original peace and justice principles declared in the WHO constitution and stated internationally in *Our Common Future* in 1987. Furthermore, it also resonates with the indigenous values of reciprocity and respect for life, as described in the definition of traditional ecological knowledge above.

The deep ecology movement, the ideological antecedent of radical ecology, was influenced by the thinking of the early modernist philosophers of the likes of Kant (1727–1804), Hegel (1777–1831), Heidegger

(1889–1976) and Nietzsche (1844–1900). Gare (2000) argues that deep ecology, the view that humans are an equal and intrinsic part of the rest of nature, is helpful in deconstructing western self/other dualities. Merchant explains that deep ecologists have called for a "total transformation in science and worldviews that will replace the mechanistic framework of domination with an ecological framework of interconnectedness and reciprocity" (2005:11). The two main themes that deep ecologists use to challenge mechanistic views are; self-realization (Devall 1995; Eckersley 1990; Naess 1995a; Sutton 2004) and an intuitive knowledge of what they describe as "biocentric egalitarianism" (Fox 1995:270). Self-realization is a consciousness of the process of transforming the Self[7] beyond the ego in order to connect with wider ecological relationships (Greenwood 1990). Biocentric egalitarianism is likewise described as an eco-centric view (Baxter 1996; McLaughlin 1995) where all beings are of equal intrinsic value (Rodman 1995; Rothenberg 1995), and all aspects of life are interrelated (Adams 2007), as they are in indigenous outlooks in general, and in particular, in the everyday African outlooks presented in this book.

As the founder of the deep ecology movement, Arne Naess (1995a) identifies the following salient themes underpinning the movement as being; the intrinsic value of all human and non-human life; the significance of biodiversity; the proposition of smaller populations; as well as a greater awareness of the importance of living sustainably. In order to address these themes, Naess contends there is a need for policy reforms in the economic, technical and ideological structures of society. On the need for ideological change, Naess (1995a) insists that it requires a greater appreciation of quality of life factors, like positive health and wellbeing, a more peaceful existence and greater sense of security and more hope for the future. He calls for a fundamental shift in western thinking towards understanding that there is a "profound difference between bigness and greatness" (Naess 1995a:70). According to deep ecologists, the importance of living in a healthy and safe environment is to be valued over striving for the ever increasing standards of living that drive industrial expansion (McLaughlin 1995). Since deep ecology recognises both the spiritual and material aspects of life, its principles and philosophies reflect a similar kind of "emotional and sensory engagement" with the spiritual

and material landscapes, that as Bradley points out, indigenous peoples have always "[found] themselves living in" (2011:46). Deep ecology might thus be seen as a kind of indigenous way of knowing and being that westerners are trying to reconnect with today.

The core eco-centric principles of the deep ecology platform, that being, self-realization and the equality of all beings, brings radical ecology into the centre of the biodiversity debate, and into mainstream sustainability discourse (Nazarea 2006). The discussion overlaps in the shared belief in the benefits of living a full, satisfying, healthy and sustainable life, in association with other beings. Sagan and Margulis (1993) draw on the deep ecological term *biophilia* – the human affinity for nature – as a measure of optimal health and wellbeing. While all deep ecologists insist that an individual can only exist in consociation with other beings (Abram 1987, 1997; Adams 2007), Morris (1991) notes that this was not a new idea since the process philosopher George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) had already developed an integral theory of understanding the self-in-society. Deep ecology differs from other process oriented approaches, however, since it extends the idea of the self, beyond the self-in-society, to include the rest of nature. A deep ecological view of self-realisation is thus not an ego, or human-centric outlook, but rather, as Naess (1995a) suggests, it is similar to a Gandhian view of the world, where the self is decentred and connected, reciprocally, to all other beings.

The Australian eco-philosopher Freya Mathews (1995) develops the Self-identification thesis further by arguing that if a person's identity is connected to the identity of other beings, then their chances for self-realisation logically depend on the existence of these other beings. Deep ecologists insist that in order to actualise the potential for Self-realisation, humans must therefore recognise their interdependency with other beings.[8] Self-interest is thus always driven by the need for self-maintenance, self-realisation and survival (Mathews 1995). By arguing that nature also has a need for self-maintenance and survival, deep ecologists are attributing a *conatus*[9] (Mathews 1995:129), *telos* (Rodman 1995:126) or purpose to nature.

The term 'deep ecology' is semantically broad, encompassing, as it does an eclectic range of spiritual and other transpersonal ecologies (Eckersley 1990; Fox 1990). Deep, and other spiritual ecologies have been criticized

for being theoretically weak but Greenwood explains that the term 'transpersonal', used to group various spiritual outlooks, does not apply to a narrow spiritual interpretation, and that rather, it means the simultaneous awareness of both subjective and objective experience. She relates it to Durkheim's sociology of religion and Jung's psychology of religion, arguing that "these aspects are not mutually exclusive" (Greenwood 1990:484). McLaughlin (1995) likewise insists that deep ecology is an active movement, informed by a critical philosophy towards social and ecological change. However, by themselves, as many radical ecologists, spiritual or otherwise, would agree, neither the spiritual, nor the social aspects alone, can bring about a lasting change in global relations, nor can they substitute for engaging ethically and politically. To this end, Plumwood (2002) and Ruether (1992) note that spirituality, particularly human centred spirituality, has so far failed to deliver any tangible quality of life improvements. A greater understanding of the complex interrelationships between humans and nature is required in order to address these issues.

Since people are essentially part of their living environments, the continuing public interest in environmentalism is not surprising. Rachel Carlson's *Silent Spring* (1962) provided fertile ground for the emergence of a new, more publically aware, political environmentalism. *Silent Spring* tells an alarming story of the poisoning of the earth, through the indiscriminate use of chemicals to control the cycles of nature. Dossey (2004) notes that after this publication, Florence Nightingale's earlier pioneering work to educate people on the need for a clean and safe environment took on a broader ecological context. Ausubel (2004) suggests that this is when public interest in health gained social and political momentum. This was inevitable because, as Shiva (1997) argues, the main contribution from the modern environmental movement has been to show that there are no separations between humans and nature; nature provides the very conditions for health and regeneration. Hawken (2007) thus argues that all aspects of the movement must challenge unfair political processes and address the social and environmental justice issues which create the right conditions for health in the first place.

Around the same time of Carson's publication, the first pictures of the earth, taken from out of space, were being made available to the public.

Images of the 'Blue Planet' (Litfin 2010; Sachs 1999), characterised as they were by soil, sea, clouds and greenery (WCED 1987), challenged perceptions of the earth as an inert, mechanical and functional place. Many began seeing it instead as an interconnected, living and breathing organism, of which humans are an integral part. Alves and Rosa (2007) point out that despite the obvious risks brought to light by these early environmental moves, the human cause of harm to the biosphere has still not been adequately addressed. Despite the increasing interest in public health and safety, and a growing recognition that the earth functions as a living, breathing organism, techno-industrial processes continue to damage the planet's diverse life supporting systems at an alarming rate.

The *Our Common Future* report (WCED 1987) highlights increasing interest in the concept of sustainable development, the idea that ecological and economic development goals are not incompatible, and that moreover, they go hand in hand with human health and wellbeing. Although the publication gives international recognition to the idea that health, justice, peace and security are linked (Wetlesen 1999), Sachs (1999) argues that as important as these initial principles were, they are no longer a part of development efforts. The euro-centric "west is best" (Furze et al. 1996:4) assumptions that formed the basis of this important United Nations report, initially aimed at achieving a more socially just and ecologically sustainable future, are thus increasingly being challenged, and in light of the ongoing instability and conflict in the world, require a duly circumspect approach.[10]

Nevertheless, the two terms that have come to dominate the environmental debate are, 'sustainable development' and 'sustainability'. The former is identified in common language use as development that meets the needs of the current generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED 1987). Hadorn, Bradley, Pohl, Rist and Wiseman describe sustainable development as a "socio-political model for societal changes" (2006:120). The term has, however, since lost its overarching meaning, with its bias towards a consumer directed economic growth model (Terborgh 2000). Sachs (1999:71) and Schmidt (2005:4) agree that the term is oxymoronic and Anderson (2010) argues that it becomes equally absurd when it implies the unrealistic goal of doing absolutely nothing unsustainable.

The basic definition of the related term 'sustainability' refers to a system's capacity for self-maintenance over time. Nelson (2004) defines it in an indigenous sense, as reciprocity, the critical link between biological, cultural and psychological diversity. Fricker suggests that it is something quite grand, "a dynamic, a state of collective grace, a facet of Gaia, even of Spirit" (2006:191). Use of the term has become ambiguous (Schmidt 2005), because it means different things to different people now (Furze et al. 1996; Lafferty and Langhelle 1999). According to some, both terms fail to capture the existential dimensions of living more sustainably (Fricker 2006; Hadorn et al. 2006; Schmidt 2005), a key aspect of health. In this book, these terms are thus used cautiously, mindful of their obvious ambiguities.

This book has two broad aims. Firstly, it seeks to explore and better understand the critical links between traditional medicine and healthy socioecological practices by specifically observing such realities in the south of Malawi. Secondly, it aims to add to already existing "epistemological bridges" (Bradley 2012:29) between western and traditional health outlooks, as described by Mehl-Madrona (2007) and Nelson (2004). I have positioned myself, not on either side of these outlooks, as is often than case when thinking about the various cross-cultural health outlooks, but within this natural continuum of ideas and approaches. In positioning myself within the continuum of these outlooks, and seeking to elucidate the potential for, in particular, African traditional medicine, to enhance health and wellbeing over the long term, I ask the question: "What more can we learn about the relationship between human and ecological health by tracking traditional medicine in the south of Malawi"?

Research Setting

The fieldwork for this book took place in Malawi, a small land-locked country, located in the central east region of southern Africa. Malawi is one of the least developed countries in the world (Fassil 2004). More than ninety percent of the population earns less than US$2 per day (Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust [MMCT] and the Department

of Forestry 2012). Malawi's GDP rose significantly between the years 2004–2008 (Ministry of Health 2011) yet relative to Australia, Malawi has a very low GDP, ranks poorly on most development scales and fails to meet many quality of life indicators. Health outcomes remain particularly poor and life expectancy has not improved significantly, despite government investment in public health (Maliwichi-Nyirenda and Maliwichi 2009). The country is rich in both cultural and biological diversity (Malawi Government 2006) but the majority of the population lives an agrarian existence (Kalipeni 1997; MMCT and the Department of Forestry 2012) and most people struggle to access the resources they need to sustain a rich and healthy quality of life.

The Mulanje Mountain Biosphere Reserve, located in the southern region of Malawi, provides the specific context for the inquiry. Mulanje Mountain, Malawi's "Island in the Sky" (Wisborg and Jumbe 2010:7) stands out as a distinctive feature of the landscape. The 650 square kilometre massif peaks at over 3000 metres above sea level. The mountain is culturally and ecologically significant but pressures on local resources due to poverty, population density and other complex social, political, economic and environmental factors threaten the future of the region (Wisborg and Jumbe 2010). The area has been managed by the Department of Forestry since 1927. In 2000 it was declared a protected area (Bayliss et al. 2007) under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program. The Mulanje Mountain Conservation Trust (MMCT) has co-managed the region with the Department of Forestry ever since. The reserve's current boundary is roughly the same as it was in 1927 but it has since been divided into a number of separate zones, roughly in accordance with UNESCO's MAB guidelines (Price et al. 2010).

Biosphere Reserves are different from other internationally designated protected areas because their objectives explicitly include sustainable development (Price et al. 2010). UNESCO's internationally networked MAB program aims to show the potential for balanced relationships between humans and nature, whilst at the same time promoting international cooperation and peace. The objectives of the MAB program reflect the shift in focus from conservation as a protective practice, towards conservation with development (Hay-Edie and Hadley 1998). However, West et al. (2006) argue that protected areas such as