Chapter 13
The Biafar heathen. The location and fertility of the land and the character and industry of its inhabitants.

Nothing affords a more lively proof of the benignity or otherwise of a locality than the nature, good or bad, of its inhabitants. If this principle, revealed to us by philosophical truth, is correct, then the province of the Biafar heathen is in no respect inferior to the very best of localities. (a) It is almost completely flat, though a few hills can be found in certain parts. It is pleasant and refreshing throughout on account of the breezes which visit the parts nearest the sea. It has no lack of streams or of springs of excellent water, among them those of Biguba, a long-standing Portuguese settlement. Just how favorable and healthy the climate is here, can be gathered from the doctrine which I wish to present at this point, in order that it may provide a general rule for the assessment of localities in relation to their good or bad influences (on man). For this purpose the common theory of geographical zones must be accepted, the zones being five according to the careful analysis of geographers. (b)

We shall be discussing the torrid zone - so called by reason of the continual sunshine which strikes it directly (i.e. at right angles) and turns it brown, heating it up more than any other zone. To learn its characteristics, the first logical step and specific inquiry is to see whether all torrid lands are inhabited. Of this there can be no doubt, for we can be certain that there is no land which is made uninhabitable by excessive heat or undue cold. This is shown by the fact that across the equator, which is in the middle of the torrid zone, lie a good part of Africa and Peru and many islands, such as S.Tome, Sumatra, Borneo and some of the Maluccas, all of these being inhabited lands. Correspondingly one may take it as confirmed that around the poles - the areas we call the frigid zones, each stretching 23°41', or over 412 leagues - the cold is not so excessive that it is impossible to live there. On the contrary, it is stated by Holau Magnus, one-time archbishop of Upsala, who should be trustworthy because he came from that land and because he had penetrated to 85°, writing in his Historia which describes the peoples of the North, that men live in the middle of the northern frigid

(a) The lands inhabited by the Biafares belong to the patrimony of the Bijago people.
(b) How to tell a site is truly healthy. And which one is. See the discussion in this chapter, notabiliter ex sententia geographorum (especially the views of geographers).
zone. Now the same may be presumed of the zone around the other pole, since the Cabo de Bom Sinal, beyond the Straits of Magellan, which lies in that direction, does not have cold so excessive that Europeans cannot tolerate it. And those who are born there and have long experience of it must even become accustomed to it.

The second stage is to examine into the aspects and characteristics of zones and thus to discover which parts of the earth are healthier and more favorable to life. For it is certain that there are some lands in which men live longer, or have /f.42/ greater skills and better inclinations, than in others; and that in some lands men are black and in others white; and that at one place they are cruel and inhuman, but at another thoroughly well-disposed and gentle. As regards these differences, although some are the effects in large part of ancestry, and others arise from lack of trade and cultural contact, two elements which teach civilised order, yet it cannot be denied that they (ultimately) derive, like all other differences, from the characteristics of the land of birth.\(^{(c)}\) In respect of ease of habitation, the frigid zones are less suitable to live in than all the others. This arises from the great cold, which, because it is contrary and hostile to human life, makes these lands least healthy and shortens the span of life. The torrid zone is good to live in and better than the temperate frigid meridians, for this reason. In the torrid zone the heat of the day is tempered by the cool of the night, the favorable influences of the cold planets, Saturn and the Moon, being more effective in this area because they impinge on it at an angle closer to the perpendicular than on any other part of the earth. Hence, according to Avicenna and other philosophers, it is healthier and better suited for human life. Also there are persons who say that this is the best and most healthy land of all those on earth because they suspect that here is found the Earthly Paradise, even though this is raised above the earth.

Nevertheless the North temperate zone in which we (Europeans) live is the best suited of all, and within it the best areas are those at 55°, or rather, at 36° of latitude. The reason is that the temperate zones lack excessive heat and cold, and hence are considered healthier and better. In them men live longer, have greater skills and better

\(^{(c)}\) Juntino, in *Expositio Sphaerae Sacro Bosci*, chapter 20.
inclinations, and are white and of a reasonable stature. Yet there are
differences between places, so that those who live further North are,
generally speaking, larger in body and fairer in complexion, although
skills and the circumstances of life they are more rustic and less
spirited. In just the same way there is diversity among the men liv-
ing in the torrid zone, since in some parts the people are very black and
others white - which philosophers find hard to explain. We can sum
up by asserting with complete conviction that the earth's temperate zone
is healthiest, followed by the torrid zone. But, to go into details,
can point to places within /£.42v/ these zones and even places on the
same parallel of latitude - that is, points in the heavens correspon-
ding to certain terrestrial planes - some of which are healthy enough, while
others are very prejudicial to health and particularly so at one season
of the year. Taking Serra Leoa as an instance, the latter is the case
at the Port of St John the Evangelist, commonly called Mitombo, as daily
experience shows.

This is not due to the influences of the heavens through the zone
in which they lie. But it arises from accessory causes modifying these,
such as the fact that certain places are near lagoons - whose evaporati
is very harmful and causes sudden death or dangerous illnesses - or are
either exposed to unhealthy winds on one side or else are blocked off by
forest from healthy and refreshing winds. Or they may have unsatis-
factory drinking water, or be very remotely located in the interior.
Also ill-health may arise from eating fruits not in perfect condition,
either because of excessive humidity which has delayed ripening or
because of excessive heat which brings them on too early, and this is
very prejudicial to health. If we consider lands in relation to the
health of the individual, we can say that generally a person is most
healthy where he was born, and this is why those sick with lingering
diseases which fail to respond to physical remedies are as a rule
ordered by their doctors to return to their native land. And so to
conclude, we will say that the land is most healthy which is moderately
humid and lies near the sea; is open to winds which in that place are
healthy yet is protected against harmful ones; has a good supply of
water but no lagoon nearby, and is neither very hilly and mountainous
nor very flat, yet has a few hills. It clearly follows that, merely in
terms of possessing such features, the most favorable and healthy land
is that of our Biafar heathen, to which the particular requirements we
have pointed out all apply.
Before we go on to discuss the fertility of the land, let us pause to answer those who ask why, in the same zone and on the same parallel, there are blacks in some parts but not in others. Some say that this arises from features of the land, the heat of the sun and influences of the heavens, which may modify the special qualities of the earth imposed by God on certain places at the beginning of the world. This is why we are inclined to say that in the course of time the first men became light or dark on account of the (differing) features of the earth and the heat of the sun, and their children afterwards inherited this from them. In the same way it can be understood why some men have curly hair and others not. This will suffice towards a full understanding of the character of localities and of those who inhabit them.

Now let us discuss the fertility of the land. It is the same as is general throughout Guinea, although there is little rice; the staple foodstuff, *funde*, together with *milho branco* (white millet) and *massaroca*, both very healthy foods, being more common. The earthcrops are yams and *macarras*. Varying quantities of these are grown, depending on the skill of the inhabitants, some of whom are very hard-working as well as being well-disposed. It has been claimed that the people of Biafar are outstanding in this latter respect, which might be gathered from what the Lord has written upon their physical features, for this people has the most handsome features throughout West Ethiopia. To contemplate the bearing, the smile, the dignity and the fine physical proportions of a Biafar, coupled with his mildness of character and his devotion to the person who brought him up, gives one much to think about. It is astonishing how forgetful they are, in their own land, regarding their parents and relatives, who are shadowy figures in their recollection compared with those they recognise (as their guardians) and under whose authority they find themselves. I myself was greatly struck by the attitude of a young boy whom I brought up in Serra Leoa. Whenever I encouraged him, out of love for his motherland, to speak about the succession to the kingdom, a matter which might some day involve him as he was the son of a very important individual, his reply was always exactly the same, that to him his motherland and his kingdom were myself and the (other) *padres*. My experience of him matched this answer, for I found him completely trustworthy in matters of moment and

(d) Pumpkins, beans, a few bananas.
he was my regular companion on my missionary journeys, when we both endured travails. These he bore with great joy, and his zeal and singular modesty drew the attention of all when he assisted at mass, by preparing the sacraments and carrying out all the other tasks of a good sacristan, which he did to perfection. People said to me: "Padre, there's nothing like this in the whole world!". A devoted priest said: "I have been across the East Indies and nowhere have I seen a youth of such ability, such bearing and such perfect behaviour. Your Reverence has the best service within your house you could wish for, and what does the church lack when it has this Ignatius?". This is a striking instance of the character of these Biafares.

Their occupations and their way of life in peacetime, general and individual, are those normal among the other heathen, that is, they are farmers, fishermen, weavers and blacksmiths. They have no need of tailors because they wear little variety of dress, their normal garments being goatskins, although their leading men wear tunics. They are skilled in raising cattle, as well as goats, sheep and hens. In certain localities they hold fairs, for instance, at Guinela and Bruto and in the sea-ports where whites live. At these fairs the products of the land are traded for bolls of cotton and strips of cotton-cloth, the currency of these people; for cola; for black cloth from Gambia, Goaul and the Jalofos; and for various sorts of barafulas. The country produces slaves, and some of the best quality, as has been stated, and large numbers are provided for different destinations, even though the Bijago have decimated the tribe through their continuous assaults, which have put to fire and sword whole villages. Because of these assaults the people live in the hinterland in their huts, and remain in great fear of these savages.

(e) A large fair, once a week throughout the kingdom, wherever Portuguese live, apart from the normal fairs. The large one is held in their villages.
Their form of bringing up their children and their social discipline are those of the other inhabitants of Ethiopia, but those of the Biafar are more refined. Their family life is not different in style from that of the others. Affection, and such generosity as the means of each afford, are not absent. All of them are in disposition spirited and haughty, as is not least evident in their habit of hiding their feelings and dissimulating. Each and all of them present a true portrait of hypocrisy, one that could not be truer. See a Biafar and his exterior appearance is saintly; raise the curtain and you find all hell within. Lying is their commonest attribute, or perhaps I should say that this diabolic vice is rooted in them, to such an extent that they are recognised as the biggest liars in all this Ethiopia, the individuals with least regard for the truth. Considerable doubt about their capacity to progress in the faith can be entertained, since once the faith is received it increasingly hunts out the secrets of its enemy, that is, their sins. And this is a process so painful for the Biafar that he devotes his efforts to concealing his evil dispositions.