

ARTICLE

Colonial Invasion and Environmental Degradation in Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: A Memoir*

Garima Rawat

Department of Applied Science and Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee 247667, India

Corresponding author. Email: garimarawat2302@gmail.com

Vivek Kumar Gaurav

Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee 247667, India

(Received 29 March 2020; revised 24 December 2021; accepted 27 December 2021)

Abstract

The consequences of colonization have been linked to dehumanizing effects on a given people, but they can also be linked to a discourse that favors “depletion” of natural resources as their “utilization.” This article examines colonization as a subtle process of cultural devastation and ecological hegemony in the light of the memoir *Unbowed* by the late Nobel laureate from Africa, Wangari Maathai.¹ Apart from framing the entire discussion with regard to the impact of colonization on environmental degradation, it also provides a glimpse into Maathai's life and works. We have attempted to analyze her thoughts and the efforts shared in her autobiography regarding the conservation of nature and natural resources, from her experiences stretching from the colonial to the postcolonial era.

The little grassroots people can change this world.
—Wangari Maathai

Generally, the term *colonialism* is widely accepted as domination or control of individuals or communities over their behavior/territory through exploitation for economic value, as described in Marxist-Leninist literature and anthropology. The notion of domination is intertwined with the concept of power. Some people have strong feelings about colonialism because it has either been a dirty affair carried out by nasty people or a heroic endeavor carried out by great gentlemen with the noble goal of saving the poor, the savage, and the unfortunate (Horvath 2015).² Historian Alfred Crosby has asserted that colonialists altered indigenous ecosystems, exposed them to foreign markets and species, and restricted them to resist biological and economic invasions (Crosby 2004). Such phenomena destabilized sustainable indigenous cultures by altering cultural practices and extracting natural resources from poor countries (Duquette 2020).³ European colonialism in Africa started in 1870, and by the early twentieth century, much of Africa except Liberia and Ethiopia had been colonized by Europeans.

The primary motivation was economic, which spurred the idea of “the scramble for Africa” (Iweriebor 2011).

The late Professor Wangari Maathai raised her voice for the conservation of indigenous lands, values, and culture on a global scale and worked with many national and international organizations as an environmental and social activist. She was the first East African woman to earn a PhD and wrote a few books based on her life experiences; her career began as an activist while she was still at the university, campaigning for equal benefits for female employees. She founded the Green Belt Movement (GBM) in 1977, which involved 100,000 women activists, establishing 600 community networks, running 6000 nurseries, and planting 30 million trees to remediate environmental damage (Muthuki 2006). The organization continued to work even after her death in September 2011 from ovarian cancer. Her daughter Wanjira Mathai continued her legacy; she is better known as an environmental activist and is the president of the Wangari Maathai Foundation; vice-president and regional director of the World Resources Institute, based in Nairobi, Kenya (World Resources Institute 2021); and a member of the GBM’s board. She carries out her mother’s work and seeks to protect and honor her legacy (World Resources Institute 2021).

This article presents Wangari Maathai’s underlying views and experiences of the connection between colonialism and environmental degradation from her memoir, *Unbowed*, whose title reflects Maathai’s struggle to save the trees and refers to her real-life experiences, indicating the significant changes that took place during the colonial and postcolonial era. Moreover, this article also throws light on Maathai’s views and writings to understand exactly what happened in African countries, specifically in Kenya, Maathai’s home. We were somewhat limited as it was not possible to do an in-depth study of all her contributions because of the number of them to different fields; there is ample opportunity for others to concentrate on them and to further stress how this exceptional individual has influenced the lives of so many people.

I. Invasion of Europeans in Kenya

Modern European colonialism in Africa was motivated by political, social (including religious), and economic factors. Europeans were engaged in power politics in capturing as many African nations as they could and thus achieving the glory they desired. The European race to acquire more colonies, as well as the partition and subsequent conquest of Africa, was sparked by the imperatives of capitalist industrialization, which included the demand for assured sources of raw materials, the hunt for guaranteed markets, and successful investment outlets. As a result of industrialization, numerous social problems arose in Europe: poverty, unemployment, displacement to urban areas, and so on. Since not everyone could be absorbed by the new capitalist industries, acquiring colonies and exporting the “surplus population” was one solution to this challenge (Iweriebor 2011).⁴

In 1885, Britain, along with “great powers” of Europe, met at a Berlin conference to shape what was known as “The Scramble for Africa”—a thirty-year dash to lay claim to the entire continent. Seven European countries—Britain, Belgium, France, Portugal, Italy, Germany, and Spain—with ink and map claimed the African nations and consequently created new nations, albeit micronations. Except for Ethiopia and Liberia, much of Africa had been colonized by the early twentieth century. The aftermath of these partitions kept haunting Africa, and the cold war, postcolonial governance structures, and cultural destruction have become the legacy of colonialism (Maathai 2007, 26).

Africa was subjected to European imperialist aggression, diplomatic pressures, military invasions, and eventual annexation and colonialism between the 1870s and 1900.⁵

Maathai's memoir describes European invasion in the late 1800s. She was born when Kenya was going through a big transformation; old Kenya was becoming newer. Her parents were among the first generation to encounter colonial rule. The British occupation of the country gradually altered the traditional way of life and eroded people's spiritual values; Christian missionaries introduced new ones. Missionaries traveled the whole of Africa to clear the way for Christianity. After their arrival, many explorers, adventurers, fortune seekers, and those in service to the European powers prospecting for riches in Africa came to exploit both nature and humans (Maathai 2007, 8). The new worldview was embraced by Kenyans, and their connections with the old one were broken. This evolved into ignorance of indigenous knowledge and truths. The elimination of indigenous vegetation and invasion of sacred places required more commercial farming practices, thus leading to the degradation of the ecosystem while the people themselves were oblivious to the damage (Du Toit 2019). Christian missionaries from different denominations encouraged this shift in worldview. Their approach was to teach their converts to read, thereby providing them with an advantage over those who could not read. They were no longer listed as illiterate and the British colonial government was, therefore, more appropriate to govern them. There were missions from the Catholic, Presbyterian, and independent churches in the Nyeri district. One of the first local languages into which the Bible was translated and used to teach people to read and write was Kikuyu. Converted Kenyans also altered their behavior in other respects—what they ate, their clothing, and how they cut their hair—all modified to imitate European customs (Maathai 2007, 11). Christianity is historically related to Western culture and is thus seen as an aggravating factor in the environmental crisis. Lyn White has argued that the Bible explicitly led to the environmental crisis faced by the earth and its inhabitants since the anthropocentric perspective was taken from the Bible (White 1967; Du Toit 2019).

Soon after the invasion and partition, fertile highlands were given to the white settlers with the right to intervene in the government's work, while Africans and Asians were banned from direct political participation. British rule involved the partition and handing over of large parts of the land to British settlers, thus reducing the land available to Kenyan subsistence farmers. The British government also levied an income tax payable by Kenyan men in cash, giving them no choice but to leave their homes to go and work to earn cash and thereby become part of a labor force that drove a cash economy (Odari 2011). One of the first generation of men who left their homesteads to go and work for white farmers was Maathai's father. At the age of three, Maathai along with her mother went to live with her father on the British settlers' farm in Nakuru. The Rift Valley was about 100 miles away from where she was born, where her mother continued to cultivate the land allocated to the workers to support her family. During this time Maathai learned much of her mother's knowledge of farming (Maathai 2007, 13, 14, 15). In 1947 when she was about seven years old, Maathai's father sent her to the town of Nyeri (about sixty miles from Nakuru) with her mother and two younger sisters to stay with her uncle. Originally founded by the British as an army base, the town of Nyeri grew into a market for the colonists working on the farms surrounding it. For the little girl, it was the first significant journey out of her familiar setting. The views of the plains filled with grazing animals and the thick forests and plains were an exciting experience (29, 30). Maathai learned about the practices and beliefs of her people in this new world and continued to learn from her mother

about the cultivation of the land, as her mother continued to plant crops to provide her family with food. Maathai got the parcel of land from her mother and enjoyed seeing the plants grow, the bees and the butterflies come to the flowers, and the birds come to eat the seeds. She also noticed changes in the natural environment as the British government began to promote the destruction of large-scale indigenous forests and to replant areas for agricultural use with nonindigenous trees. To the detriment of the natural ecological mechanism that stored and extracted rainwater, exotic trees eventually supplanted indigenous trees. This ultimately contributed to a decline in underground water levels, leading to a decrease in water levels in streams and rivers (37, 39).

II. The Interconnectedness of Environment, Culture, and Colonization

Maathai described in her writings the impact of colonization on natural resources and society. Born in the Aberdare Mountains in Kenya in 1940, Maathai was raised in a close-knit Kikuyu community where fresh, clean water, food, and fuel were ample. As postwar colonialism brought with it European crops and cultivating strategies, the natural environmental balance was disturbed (Du Toit 2019). Today, Africa is suffering from many problems, such as desertification, lack of safe water supplies, hunger, famine, malnutrition, fauna depletion, de-vegetation, and many more (Kushner 2009; Hunt 2014; Adelle and Kotsopoulos 2017). The colonial invasion of Africa introduced Western knowledge and missionary operations that demolished the values and respect imparted to indigenous knowledge and cultural beliefs. African indigenous culture and knowledge were embedded with the practices associated with the conservation of natural resources in the form of their culture, taboos, totems, and respect for ancestral spirits. The strategic propagation of Western colonial knowledge over decades ended up making indigenous people believe that their traditional knowledge and culture were outdated, inferior, superstitious, and evil (Risiro, Tshuma, and Basikiti 2013).

In northern Kenya, pastoralists have lost their herds to starvation, and conflicting tensions are increasing over limited water resources. Maathai, is of course, following a long history of environmental writing and rhetoric by employing pastoral discourse. Despite its flaws, this discourse has been a critical “ground condition” for people fighting the environmental consequences of the modern progress narrative and proposing alternatives (Caminero-Santangelo 2014).⁶ In the Rift Valley, the largest indigenous forest in East Africa, the Mau Forest has lost a quarter of its 400,000 hectares cleared for farmers’ settlements. Its effects have been felt by surrounding farms, the energy sector, as well as Kenya’s famous national parks (Doyle and MacGregor 2013). The indigenous Ogiek community of the Mau Forest has been a victim of the development model of the colonial government, and are still fighting for their traditional forest rights as, according to them, they better understand how to live sustainably with the forest (Mutune et al. 2017).

Wangari Maathai employs in her memoir what Lawrence Buell refers to as an “indigene pastoral” to give narrative structure to her vision for Kenya’s social and environmental regeneration (Buell 1989, 21). She begins her writing with a childhood memory of her native town of Ithite in the central highlands where the human society was supported and characterized by a beautiful, health-giving, and well-managed natural environment. Traditionally, her community was governed by animism and reverence for nature, which is reflected in Maathai’s description of Mount Kenya: “For the Kikuyus, Mount Kenya ... was a sacred place. Everything good came from it: abundant rains, rivers, streams, clean drinking water. . . . As long as the mountain stood, people believed that God was with them and that they would want for nothing” (Maathai 2007, 5).

Maathai's not mentioning colonialism in her description of her childhood days reflects the disastrous impact colonialism later had on the environment from logging, clearing indigenous forests, planting exotic trees, hunting, expanding commercial agriculture, and cultural alteration (Caminero-Santangelo 2014).

Further to this, Maathai mentions one of the Kikuyu rituals:

Shortly after the child was born, a few women attending the birth would go to the farms and harvest a bunch of bananas, full, green, and whole. . . . Along with the bananas, the women would bring. . . . sweet potatoes from her and their gardens and blue-purple sugarcane.

The practice shows that the Kikuyu respect wellness and fullness and that they are mindful that they come from the earth (Maathai 2007, 4).

As shown in the beautiful sketch of the relationship between the fig tree, the stream, and the tadpoles, Maathai also stresses how interconnectedness applies to nonliving entities. Maathai was admonished by her mother as a child to never gather firewood from or around a fig tree, since "that's a tree of God. We don't use it. We don't cut it. We don't burn it" (44). The source of a stream of cool and clear flowing water was a particular fig tree in their vicinity, and Maathai enjoyed spending hours playing there. Edible plants such as arrowroot were planted along the stream and, in the stream, under the large, green leaves, there were a multitude of frog eggs and eventually tadpoles (45). This sketch reflects simply the interconnectedness between the biosphere's living and nonliving elements.

After many years, Maathai discovered that the tree had been removed; as a result, the stream of pure water dried up, and all the life-forms that the tree and the stream helped were gone. She writes: "I've been grieving the loss of fig tree. I have always admired the wisdom of my people. . . . The cultural tradition of keeping the fig trees in place was passed on by women... [I was] supposed to pass it on to my kids" (Maathai 2007, 141). The fig-tree imagery is an example of how cultural and spiritual practices can contribute to biodiversity preservation, even though the people who practice it do not know the scientific basis of their behavior. It is also a very beautiful example of interconnectedness: between people and their environment, between one generation and the next, between various individuals in the environment, living and nonliving.

Kikuyu storytelling has also been an important aspect of cultural traditions. Maathai represented herself as a storyteller, practicing this oral art in many of her public appearances. Her profound ability to tell stories has been depicted and highlighted by the director Gene Rosow and Bill Benson in their film *Dirt: The Movie*. In the film, Maathai tells the story of a hummingbird that, though very tiny, tried to stop a forest fire, while the other, larger animals stood by, paralyzed by the sight of the big blaze. She tells the story in the context of an American-made documentary on the environment so that its reach shouldn't be limited only to Kenyans (Presbey 2013). Telling stories evolved into a comprehensive examination of the Hausa society of northern Nigeria during the jihad era. "The silence of women in colonial archives on both sides of the contemporary border of Nigeria and Niger pushed my research beyond the confines of written documentation" (Ekechi 2020, 754).⁷

Many aspects of the human experience are captured and reflected through storytelling. Some stories recount amazing acts of bravery by a country's heroes, offer life lessons, or expose human faults. Other stories use miraculous events to stimulate the reader's or listener's imagination (Creany 2008, 177). Through her leadership of the

GBM, Maathai as a storyteller becomes a component of change, providing financial support and sustenance to millions of Kenyans (Kirkscey 2009). African storytelling is a great instructional technique for sharing people's wisdom and experience. Far from being only entertaining, the narrative contributes to the development of people's creativity and imagination, the shaping of their behavior, the training of their intellect, and the regulation of their emotions (Chinyowa 2001).

Unfortunately, the practice of orally transmitting culture through storytelling has been replaced by new technologies. Maathai is saddened by this loss, saying, "when I was a child, my surroundings were alive, dynamic, inspiring" (Maathai 2007, 50). This statement illustrates why she had such a profound understanding of the damage individuals experience when their environment is degraded, and their way of life threatened. Maathai views the GBM as promoting hope by emphasizing the importance of individuals advocating for the earth's healing. A short science-fiction movie, *Pumzi*, touches Maathai's vision and discusses the content of the Maathai's Nobel speech 2004. In *Pumzi*, history is reimagined through conceptions of futurity that point to alternatives to existing environmental exploitation trends (Wachira 2020).

African postcolonial ecocritic Okot P'Bitek wrote a very influential poem, "Song of Lawino," in the mid-twentieth century in Acoli, which the poet himself later translated. It was revolutionary in terms of oral tradition and was widely read throughout East Africa. The poem dramatizes the conflicts between modernity and the advocates of African culture (Caminero-Santangelo 2014). The mechanism of oppression is utterly destructive of the dignity of people and their connection to themselves and their environment, whether on a global, community, or family level (Merton and Dater 2008).

Having grown up with the knowledge of Kikuyu traditions and history conveyed during evening storytelling, as did the other children in her group, Maathai illustrates the intimate connection between people and their environment. Unfortunately, these beliefs and traditions have now virtually faded away. Maathai claims, "They were dying even as she was born." When European missionaries came to the central highlands, they taught the local people: "God did not dwell on Mount Kenya, he dwells on a place above the clouds. The proper way to worship him was in church on Sundays. . . . many people accepted the missionary's ideology, outmoded their traditional beliefs, and started degrading Mount Kenya" (Rawat and Mishra 2021).

Her respect for Mount Kenya is one indication of Maathai's devotion to traditional African beliefs. In African religion, indigenous people worshipped landmarks and other natural entities, long before colonization (Ikuenobe 2014). Maathai sees Mount Kenya as a source of inspiration and a holy location, as it had been for centuries before.

The personification of Mount Kenya adds to its intrinsic meaning since we typically personify certain objects or people that we value. Maathai's remarks are an indicator of the depth and strength of her feelings of love and reverence for the place and environment. These emotions can be related to the respect and awe expressed to denote the concept of holiness. For Maathai, these emotions are the basis of her conviction to take care of the land in all possible ways. Further support for this observation is provided by the fact that the work of the GBM that she set up was directed at preserving and caring for the community (Du Toit 2019). In her Nobel Prize speech, Maathai stressed that "Africans, especially, should re-discover positive aspects of their culture." It will give them a sense of belonging, identity, and self-confidence (Nobel Prize 2004).

In Africa, the late 1950s and early 1960s were years of big changes; the colonies were liberated by colonial authorities. Kenya's former Prime Minister, Jomo Kenyatta, delivered his Independence Day speech at Uhuru Park in Nairobi on December 12, 1963.

Although the speech signaled the end of colonial control, it did not signal an end to colonial influence. The speech declared independence, but it did not establish a discursive space for Kenyans to exercise their autonomy and self-determination. He had also published a book, *Facing Mount Kenya*, in 1938. The book was an ethnographic study of his Kikuyu community, which managed to address the political issues between the British and the Kikuyu. It employed ethnography to entice the metropolitan intellectual reader with a contrasting vision of the idealized, if slightly exotic, Kikuyu, who wanted nothing more than that “peaceful tillage of the soil which supplies their material needs and enabled them to perform their traditional ceremonies in undisturbed serenity facing Mount Kenya” (Mutua and Gonzalez 2013).

Maathai’s studies at Mount Scholastica College cultivated in her the ability to think critically and to be open to learning and listening. She was encouraged to further her studies after earning her bachelor’s degree, and pursued her master’s degree in biology at the University of Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh is a large manufacturing town, and after a hundred years of the Industrial Revolution, had suffered the detrimental effects of pollution. Measures to tackle this had already been introduced and gave Maathai her first environmental restoration experience (Maathai 2007, 93). She spent over two years in Pittsburgh, from January 1964 until September 1966. Maathai returned to a country different from the one she had left behind in Kenya, but she was also a different person from the one who had left for America. Her American experience made her aware of issues she had not previously considered, such as racial inequality and issues related to the status of women in society, but also awakened a sense of equality and opportunity in her. She decided to disown her English and religious names in this spirit and return to the maternal and paternal names she had received at birth. This was in reaction to the tradition of disregarding African surnames in colonies (such as Kenya). She was to be known in the future as Wangari Muta (96).

According to Maathai, the colonial settlers’ renaming of landmarks in Africa was partially responsible for people’s indifference toward their traditional values and environmental practices. It generated a schism in African people’s minds and thoughts, especially for kids who were educated in the English language in an educational system focused on Western culture (Maathai 2007, 6). They existed in a dual world, and this break in their thought culminated in disdain for places that for many centuries had been considered sacred and spiritual. People began to view traditional values and wisdom as no longer valid and discarded them; they began to see the environment as a resource to generate income (Ikuenobe 2014). Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, an East African novelist, has also been vocal and sensitized to the colonial past of Africa and argues for African-language literature as the only real voice for Africans. He proclaimed his life’s purpose to write only in Kikuyu or Kiswahili, and after the publication of his much-celebrated work *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Thiong’o 1992), he also adopted his traditional name (James Thiong’o Ngugi to Ngugi Wa Thiong’o).⁸ Such works earned him a reputation as one of Africa’s most eloquent social critics. Ngugi believed that the only alternative Kenyans have is to return to their roots, to the source of their rhythm of speech, and the life and languages of Kenyan people. Encouragement of Kenyan literature will ultimately bring pride to Kenya and prevent Kenyans from being suppressed (Buchanan 1988).

Similarly, part of the GBM’s efforts was to instill in the minds of African people admiration and affection for their soil, culture, language, and tradition. Maathai believed that a profit-oriented mentality poses a danger to the future existence of people and can only be opposed by “[a] change of consciousness that involves rediscovering

that love of nature that animated the minds and souls of our ancestors” (Maathai 2010, 103). Therefore, though the approach used by the Movement to accomplish this was to plant trees, she concluded that its work “is not only about planting trees but also about planting other kinds of seeds—the one[s] needed to heal the wounds inflicted on communities that have robbed them of their self-confidence and self-knowledge” (14).

Colonizers replaced everything that represented local culture: maize replaced millet, and millet porridge, the most common drink of Kikuyu, was replaced by tea. Dancing and non-Christian tradition and festivals were discouraged or banned by the missionaries. Maathai witnessed an almost complete transformation of her culture into an alien culture (Maathai 2007, 11). After the Second World War, veterans came to Kenya and were granted land by British officials as a gesture of thanks for protecting the crown, and by 1950 about 40,000 settlers, mostly from Britain, had moved onto about 2,500 farms that were called the “white highlands,” which included hills outside Nairobi, highlands of the central and western regions, and large tracts of grassland in the Rift Valley. These white settlers changed Africa’s value-based economy to a cash-based economy by forcefully giving way to cash crops like coffee, tea, maize, and so on. The introduction of European agricultural practices and a cash-based economy also changed people’s perception of nature and natural resources: instead of looking at a sign or a tree or an animal and feeling a sense of wonder and awe, people looked at natural phenomena to calculate cash worth or future economic gains (10).

Before the arrival of colonizers, animals, especially goats, were the main form of exchange; later the British established a cash-based exchange system: they didn’t want to be paid in goats so they introduced an income tax system for men in most of the country, which could be paid only in monetary form. This led to the mass migration of men toward cities, leaving behind traditional farming and their families. Those who didn’t move to cities became squatters on the settlers’ farms, working on them and receiving maize flour, milk, and so on in return. The colonial government and the British settlers had all the wealth in their hands, so local people were indirectly forced to work either on the settler farms or in offices so that they could earn money and pay taxes. By the mid-twentieth century (1940), settler farms were the main source of employment (Maathai 2007, 14).

By the 1940s, the colonial government had encroached into the Aberdare Forest of Kenya to establish commercial plantations of foreign trees: they set entire native forests on fire so that they could plant new, nonindigenous species and introduce numerous exotic species like pine, eucalyptus, and black walnut into Kenya; these trees grew faster and contributed to the newly emerging timber and building industries (Kushner 2009). The elimination of indigenous plants, trees, and animals from the natural ecosystem resulted in its degradation, and over the subsequent decades, groundwater levels decreased and rivers and streams either dried up or declined (Maathai 2007, 37, 38).

Maathai’s engagement with farming activities during her childhood might have made her sensitive toward the environment and drove her to establish the GBM; the description of her mother’s instructions reflects how she was made sensitive toward environmental issues. “When the rain came, Maathai’s mother would say: Don’t idle around during these rains, plant something” (38).

In her seminars Maathai reminded her audiences of the riches in their backyards, which may be lost in conditions of environmental imbalance. She recalled “managu, a green vegetable that flourished in maize fields after the harvest.” Maathai’s reference to managu connects her audience with community-centric geography; further, she described, “for me, the pleasures of managu were closer by; small, yellow, juicy berries

sprouted amid the managu leaves. Whenever I was sent with my siblings to look after our sheep and goats as they grazed in the freshly cut fields, I would feast myself silly on those berries!" Maathai then contrasted this positive image of formerly thriving managu with the present day by saying, "unfortunately, one does not see the managu plants a lot these days, one of the negative consequences of over-cultivation and the use of agrochemicals" (16). Chinua Achebe's debut novel, *Things Fall Apart*, also highlighted the dominant theme of 1950s and 1960s African postcolonial literature and its impact on African culture and people. His writings also foreground well-defined African sociopolitical structures before the arrival of Europeans (Okuyade 2013a).

III. Maathai's Indigenous and Critical Approach to Environmental Conservation

The more I looked into the environment, and the more I looked into the problems that people were complaining about, especially women, the more I understood that what we were complaining about were the symptoms. And that we needed to understand the causes of those symptoms.

—Wangari Maathai

Maathai's ecocritical writings prioritized environmental, livelihood, and societal issues. Postcolonial eco-critics, including Maathai, put their hard efforts into reshaping their precolonial geographical identities that had been disrupted by colonial rule and thus made ecocriticism more responsive to cultural differences (Caminero-Santangelo 2014). Evident in Maathai's writings, the loss of forests in Africa has contributed to desertification and affected many other regions of the world, including Europe. Maathai presented the issue of desertification at the UN conference in Nairobi and effectively used a nonviolent approach to advocate social, political, and environmental changes in Kenya (Presbey 2013). Wangari Maathai's journey as an environmentalist started with her joining the Environment Liaison Center as a local board member, a group established in 1974 by a number of international environmental organizations, which helped her develop a holistic perspective toward the environment (Maathai 2003).

Sub-Saharan African farmers have confronted numerous obstacles in maintaining a viable food system and are being exposed to new climate hazards. Farmers had developed, through years of observation and shared knowledge, detailed, complex understandings of environmental conditions and agriculture, including a range of crop varieties that reflected their knowledge of their environment and related ecological conditions (Zimmerer and Young 1998; Mortimore and Adams 2001). Protecting the earth from environmental degradation requires the joint efforts of humanity. The United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in 2015 achieved consensus among 196 countries to limit global warming to less than two degrees Celsius and encouraged countries to reduce their emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (United Nations 2015). The Paris climate agreement came after Wangari Maathai's death, but undoubtedly her work in the GBM since 1970, engaging rural communities with local and global understanding in an endeavor to save the environment, influenced its successful adoption.

Her concern about the excessive use of plastic bags littering parks and streets also led Maathai to focus on the Japanese concept of *mottainai* to support the civic call for protecting the environment, reflecting her role as a sort of cultural broker (Maathai 2007, 35). Through exploring the cultural practices and values of other groups, Maathai highlighted and focused on the shared meanings attached to the cultural and spiritual values

about environmental conservation in Japan and Kenya. Maathai's concept of cultural borrowing enables us to understand her work from a global perspective, which through the *mottainai* principle, helps us to understand the environment holistically.⁹ Her recognition of the importance of cultural knowledge helps in understanding the efforts needed to conserve the environment (Mutua and Omori 2018). The utterance "*mottainai*" (Don't waste! What a waste!) conveys a sense of regret over waste and promotes the idea to reduce, reuse, and recycle. Usually, preserving physical and spiritual resources is a convention considered to sustain the well-being of human life (Mbiti 1991). Maathai promoted the principle locally and globally, including to the United Nations, grassroots organizations, and governments. The concept captures how each one of us can protect the environment through simple, deliberate, conscious effort every day and propagates the works of the GBM by sharing cultural knowledge at local and global levels (Mutua and Omori 2018).

Maathai's growing consciousness of the environment was also strengthened by her academic work: while doing her research, she encountered the problems of landslides and soil erosion outside Nairobi. She also observed that cows were so skinny that their ribs could be counted; there was little grass or other fodder for them to eat where they grazed. Even the inhabitants of the surrounding areas were malnourished, and their plots had low vegetable yields. She observed the same signs of environmental deterioration while visiting her family. Maathai noticed that the loss of topsoil is evident where commercial plantations had replaced indigenous plantations; the land that had been covered by grasses, trees, and bushes when Maathai was growing up was now replaced by tea and coffee plantations. Fig trees, having water-holding capacity in their roots, play an important role in protecting local diversity but have been replaced by tea plantations. At this point, she realized how her people's indigenous knowledge helped preserve the environment and their livelihoods and that all have been discarded by the current generation (Maathai 2007, 121).

A woman researcher at a seminar organized by the National Council for women Kenya NCWK presented a report that highlighted the diseases associated with malnutrition among children in the central region of Kenya. The malnutrition may be linked to a shortage of land to cultivate food crops and related changes in diet to more refined foods, high in carbohydrates but vitamin- and mineral-deficient. The shortage of adequate firewood was another major contributing factor: women could not find enough firewood to cook wholesome foods that took longer to prepare. The colonial shift to cash-based agriculture also contributed. Problems such as access to drinking water, inadequate firewood, and not enough land to grow food crops were addressed in the seminar, which concluded that evident environmental degradation in rural areas has disrupted the livelihoods of all people (Maathai 2007, 23, 24, 25). The experiences of the rural women create ecological stress and numerous societal problems; consequently, these social problems put a burden on women, who play a significant role in the management and use of natural resources at a grassroots level (Muthuki 2006). Maathai decided to find the root cause of the problem in order to address this situation, and came up with, "why not plant trees?" It will heal the environment and provide wood to villagers for various purposes. This is how the GBM began, was nurtured during the global women's movement, and flourished during the decade for women declared by the UN in Mexico City (Maathai 2007, 125). Now the goal was to create public greenbelts and fuelwood plots by local people, particularly women, in the spirit of self-reliance and empowerment, as well as fight against soil erosion (Maathai 2003).

In response to the situation rural women faced, Maathai's environmental activism took her into the political arena and into a confrontation with the political leaders of

her time; she questioned the patriarchal and capitalist leaders of her country (Muthuki 2013). She was able to transmit her environmental messages to intercultural and foreign audiences effectively, showing her ability to gain attention, her energetic leadership, and her exceptional networking abilities (Gorsevski 2012). She is an excellent example of leadership for African women who had become active in traditional politics and more prominent in women's and environmental affairs by 1977. Later, she was elected to the Executive Committee and Standing Committee on Environment and Habitat for the National Council of Women of Kenya, established in 1964 to provide moral support to women (Gorsevski 2012).

Maathai set up and expanded the movement precisely when the United Nations began to focus on women, especially women in rural parts of the world. The UN Women's Conferences in Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995) dealt with factors affecting the lives of women (Muthuki 2006). It was agreed at UN conferences that the issue of gender should be part of all UN initiatives. The relation between women and sustainable development has been recognized, and women's participation is crucial in natural-resource management. Environmental degradation was also recognized as one of the key factors adversely affecting the lives of women and children globally (Muthuki 2006). The UN goals were to have 30% women's political participation by 2005 and predicted that greater representation of women in government would bring about profound changes in male-dominated parliamentary councils (The Nobel Prize 2004, United Nations 2004).

To achieve sustainable development, a country needs to maintain at least ten percent indigenous forest cover. Maathai estimated that Kenya has less than two percent of such forest cover remaining (Brownhill 2007). The national slogan "Harambee" (Kiswahili for "Let us all pull together") was chosen to popularize the concept of tree-planting. Through the Harambee spirit, Kenyans were encouraged to plant trees that safeguard millions of small-scale farmers from deforestation and desertification (Maathai 2007, 130). Maathai's understanding of science and involvement with global environmental movements helped her to understand the cause and effect of environmental destruction and to come up with a way to reverse the process by planting trees (125). This was a pragmatic way to deal with the challenges faced mainly by rural women and to help them meet their basic needs. She has also questioned unsustainable consumption and production patterns, particularly in developed countries, as the main cause of the deterioration of the global environment. The living conditions and consumption patterns of wealthy countries continue to be high because of their continued exploitation of cheap labor and resources in the colonized south (Steady 2014). The GBM has also been active in the Jubilee 2000 movement, wherein almost 40 nations participated, which pushed for the cancellation of third-world debt by the year 2000. To this end, which continues to support the cancellation of the nonpayable debts of less-developed countries, many of them in Africa, who owe the rich of the North (Muthuki 2006).

On June 5, 1977, World Environment Day, a ceremony took place in Kamukunj Park, where seven trees were planted in honor of seven leaders from different ethnic groups. Among the trees planted were: Nandi flame, broad-leaved cordial, African fig tree, and East African yellow wood, which formed the first "green belt" (Maathai 2007, 131). The second "green belt" was organized by the UN Conference on Desertification in Nairobi, on a farm situated northwest of Nairobi in Naivasha that was owned by 800 women (Zelezny and Bailey 2006).

The GBM has employed tree-planting as ecological activism to create a reliable fuel supply for Kenyan rural women. By pushing for a shift in the North's consumption

patterns, the Movement represents African ecofeminist activism in confronting capitalist patriarchy at both national and global ideological levels. The interconnectedness between environmental change, economic development, and gender politics has been an important part of feminist discourse and is a part of feminist political ecology. The theory was inspired by the likes of the GBM, where rural and indigenous women have been actively resisting deforestation, hard hit as they are by environmental degradation. One study was conducted by Rachel Bezner Kerr on the two indigenous crops of Malawi, using feminist political ecology as a lens (Rocheleau 1995). The example of Kenya's GBM illustrates the complicated gender division of "niches" in rural landscapes and production systems, as well as the gendered nature of local sciences of health, food, forestry, and land use. The organization advocates for a feminist political ecology approach to resource management to address the current gender imbalance in resource management and its impact on rural people's ability to maintain diverse livelihoods and complex landscapes as well as to protect the distinct ecosystems on which they and many other species rely (Rocheleau 1995).

By late 1977, due to the influence of tree-planting across Kenya, farmers, schools, and churches were keen to start their own programs; it was the first time that communities started taking ownership of GBM initiatives (Maathai 2003, 134). Within months, the tree-planting concept became so popular that the Movement started to receive huge demand for seedlings. Later, the GBM established its supply of seedlings, most of which were indigenous. Women were encouraged to use their traditional skills and wisdom and to look for seedlings available nearby, expand tree species that met their basic needs, replenish indigenous trees, and protect their local biodiversity (26).

Despite much criticism from foresters, women continued to work; according to the foresters, women don't have a diploma in forestry and so they can't plant and take care of the trees. Maathai told these women: "You don't need a diploma to plant trees, use your woman sense;" it came as a revolution. Not to Maathai's astonishment, these women came up with many innovative ideas and practices, along with the implementation of their traditional wisdom. Women were also encouraged to grow their traditional food, which was nutritionally superior to nonindigenous (exotic) crops that only provide carbohydrates and were not nutritious. Women were also encouraged to speak their local language so that local women could better address the grassroots problems (27, 28).

Maathai has also strongly expressed the importance of language, as it plays an important role in any society, being the vehicle of communication for transmitting culture, knowledge, wisdom, and history. Traditions based on the natural world and its rhythms have been uprooted and displaced in the wake of colonialism and globalization. Maathai used historical facts to convey narratives of Western influence and inequitable social structures and practices that were put in place to harm most Africans while only enriching elites.

The seminars in the GBM helped create what D. J. Chandler and Njoki Wane called "indigenous gender spaces" in which women "work, learn and share" to prioritize growth and other social needs (Chandler and Wane 2002). Therefore, the duty of the facilitator was only to document the points of the participants, then to involve the community in a discussion of where the issues came from and how to find solutions. Referring to a historical trend of accepting an authoritarian government, what came to be called "the wrong bus syndrome" became the primary example used to structure these discussions. L. Merton and A. Dater's documentary offers a rare insight into the generative phase of these seminars (Merton and Dater 2008). So, with time the GBM

not only planted trees but also started planting ideas. The organization didn't want to grow exotic trees; they wanted to grow diverse species of trees, indigenous to a particular area. The interest in tree-planting grew so strong among communities that it later expanded to tree-planting programs on public lands. Around one thousand rows of seedlings were planted to form the green belt of trees to cover barren lands with trees, thus the name Green Belt Movement. Not only did the "belts" keep the soil in place and provide shade and windbreaks, but they also re-created biodiversity and improved the beauty of the landscape (Maathai 2007, 137). The GBM was a concrete expression of Maathai's concern for the environment and a solution formulated to tackle environmental degradation. The organization began planting trees in Kenya "to promote a culture of peace," in recognition of the connection between good governance, environmental health, and the citizens of the country. It is in line with a widespread African practice to regard trees "as a symbol of peace," and thus trees became associated with the drive to restore democracy in Kenya (United Nations 2004). It is symbolic to Maathai that trees have their roots in the soil and reach for the stars, reminding everyone that achieving success does not mean that the roots should be overlooked. Several trees that grow together become a forest. In addition to planting and nurturing new trees, the protection and conservation of trees that still stand in forests around the world is imperative (Maathai 2008).

At the GBM workshops, attention was paid to empowering people to take care of their lives and to find solutions to issues instead of depending on others to do so (Maathai 2007, 173). "By taking action to improve their degraded environment, the women and men of the Green Belt Movement started empowering themselves to protect their lands, to make their voices heard and to improve their circumstances" (Maathai 2008).

With the growth of the GBM, it became evident that the root problems that hampered development in Kenya are the consequences of faulty policies of the government and the legacy of colonialism (Nayar 2015). The short-term gains of clearing forests for the timber industry and settling landless people contribute to the long-term consequences of uncontrolled deforestation. The environment has been an extremely important development issue, as poor people rely heavily and directly on the water and land resources surrounding their communities. Capitalism has been a cornerstone of the economic structure introduced by colonial governments in Africa and has contributed to the exclusion of local subsistence farmers. Postcolonial governments' policies to boost their economies have concentrated mostly on resource utilization and have mostly benefited multinational firms. This has resulted in the depletion and impoverishment of the people relying on the land for their livelihood (Muthuki 2006).

Popular environmental movements in Africa have been organized around the connection between environmental degradation and social justice. Also, they have been overtly connected to anticolonial conflict and were not influenced by mainstream Western environmental organizations. Environmentalist and writer Saro-Wiwa along with Maathai shaped the directions of organizations such as the United Nations and Greenpeace so that they both had a firm environmental component, and their environmentalism was simply not derivative. Their writings can be connected to the long tradition of anticolonial literature of the African continent (Caminerero-Santangelo 2014).

Land-grabbing was on a rise during the 1990s, and illegal allocation of land had become a common practice. Believed to be the lungs of the overcrowded city, the Karura Forest had been an important catchment area and habitat for several species of flora and fauna. There was a campaign against President Moi's plan to privatize the Karura Forest on the northern edge of Kenya's capital, Nairobi. The conflict with

the authorities over land-grabbing in the Karura Forest shows Maathai's concern for the environment (Maathai 2007, 261, 262). She called it an "indivisible" connection between the environment, peace, and democracy, and found the Nobel Peace Prize to be a recognition from the world at large that this relation is crucial (Maathai 2008). *Unbowed* details Maathai's efforts against the construction of the six-story tower in Uhuru Park. "My work to safeguard Uhuru Park enhanced my profile as an advocate for not only the environment but also for human rights," she says (Ochwa-Echel and Onyango 2018). These spiritual values shape the basis of her worldview and direct her actions. The criticisms and campaigns led to her imprisonment and extreme humiliation, but her emplaced rhetoric and characteristics as a major peacebuilder in the environment and social justice realms also helped her gather mass attention, including from university students, the press, and renowned international organizations that led to canceling the project (Karikari and Brown 2018).

Jeremia Njeru has highlighted Wangari Maathai's role as a social and environmental activist. Reacting to the revelations of *The Daily Nation* in 1998, he said, Maathai made "protest visits" to the forest. These visits soon turned into "full-blown protests" and were further framed as a struggle to save the human rights of Kenya (Njeru 2012).¹⁰ Women's empowerment groups of the GBM emphasize that for the betterment of the world, women should join hands. Their participation in electoral politics is just one aspect of bringing better changes: women can come forward anytime for collective/political action in a broad way to bring changes in their world (Du Toit 2019).

Much of Maathai's life was associated with civil society and voluntary organizations, and her association with other nongovernmental organizations (for example, the Norwegian Forestry Society) contributed to the funding of environmental projects. Maathai's formulation of a "ten-step process" essay to start the GBM worked to enable its replication by many communities, which helped them in empowering each other with full enthusiasm and encourage one another to fix things themselves (Du Toit 2019). Therefore, Maathai should not be considered only as an environmentalist; her work should also be seen from a societal lens, as her group-empowerment techniques helped in addressing numerous societal problems. Richard Nixon also saw this movement from the larger context as he thought that most of the disappointed constituencies, including students and other marginalized communities, joined Maathai not because of her environmental concerns but because of her strong activism against plundering public land and polity (Presbey 2013).

Maathai and the GBM were at the forefront of advocating changes in consumption patterns and lifestyles that embrace new values, such as self-sufficiency rather than dependence, cooperation rather than competitiveness, respect for all creatures, and creativity. To rise to macroeconomic standards, dominant growth paradigms continue to be based on Western conceptions of the transformation of infrastructural, administrative, economic, and political variables (Muthuki 2006). Therefore, it is important to look for a new alternative that guarantees that all citizens benefit from economic growth based on a holistic approach to all domains of development, such as social equity, conservation, and equality between women and men. This means that any complete and holistic development framework must recognize the continent's material and nonmaterial development barriers. Remediation of Africa's sociopolitical and economic deterioration also necessitates a moment of cooperation and reconciliation for the past—an effort that is outside the purview of neoliberal economics (Harper-Shipman 2019).

Maathai and the GBM rejected the imposition of genetically modified crops on African soil, and instead promoted indigenous Kenyan systems that contribute to the

conservation of local indigenous biodiversity and sustainability. Further, the GBM is currently involved in educating farmers on sustainable farming methods, such as organic farming, to maintain soil fertility rather than using chemical fertilizers that inhibit soil regenerative capacity (Muthuki 2013). In doing so, while encouraging African indigenous knowledge, Maathai and the GBM promote African cultural diversity. They display resistance to white supremacy and prevailing paradigms of Western development that entail the plundering of both human and natural resources in the Global South. Although the GBM has officially remained a nonpartisan, nonpolitical strategy, is still one of Kenya's leading pro-democracy and human-rights activists. However, though Maathai's prime agenda was always the environment, she also fought for pro-democracy in the early 1990s through the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy and was arrested, beaten, and jailed. She along with her fellow pro-democracy activists protested the imprisonment of political figures until they were freed in 1993. The president was defeated after months of protest and finally, allocation of public lands was banned by mid-august 1999 (Vercida 2019). Maathai's work influenced women to see environmental health as a human right, not a privilege that could be forcibly taken, and immediately won the hearts of women all around Africa, earning her the title "Tree Mother of Africa." In 2002, she was elected to Kenya's parliament with a remarkable 98 percent majority of the vote and later appointed as Assistant Minister for the Environment by Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki (Tavana 2014).

IV. Maathai's wisdom to the world

It would be justice to say that there is a lot to learn from Maathai's work; her writings and passion for environmental conservation make her different from others. *Unbowed* has immense potential to aid understanding and recognition of the societal issues resulting from colonization and its impact on the environment. The fine fabric of societal issues includes feminist issues. However, despite her feminist approach in the GBM, Maathai still is an understudied voice in feminist philosophy and has not received attention from the philosophical community. The reason might be Western influence or dominance; her work has not even been included in lists of mainstream key course readings in environmental humanities. Some specific areas where she could be studied are courses in population, resources, and pollution; environmental movements; social issues and the environment; and personal responsibility and environmental ethics. Since her literary work has been the subject of many interesting studies analyzing her rhetoric, effective narrative, and tropes, as well as gender analyses of the media portrayal of her personality, such courses could also cover some literary aspects of her writings. Her writings can also contribute to postcolonial ecocriticism and ecofeminist theory as these areas reflect issues related to both theories and can help in addressing or reflecting environmental, colonial, and sociocultural issues.

The way Maathai has expressed and written about environmental problems associated with colonization gives us a new dimension to look and think upon; though the idea of applying indigenous practices to conserve the environment might not attract attention across the world, Maathai has effectively expressed its importance. At the end of this journey, we have a different understanding of colonization from an environmental perspective and the problems associated with it. For many decades, throughout the world, developing and underdeveloped countries have been following the European model of development without considering the differences in landscape and biodiversity, so studying Maathai will also help them to consider many aspects while framing developmental policies.

The ultimate influence of GBM has yet to be seen on Kenyan (and now African) culture. But the past years of practice have been instructive, as the GBM has effectively mobilized vast numbers of Kenyans to redress social and environmental ills. In the face of a severely oppressive political system, this consensual orientation enabled the GBM to flourish. Before closing, it is important to say that other environmentalists from Africa also have much to write and teach on the theoretical and practical levels as they can also cover different aspects of colonial history, culture, and environmental problems in Africa. It will widen the understanding of scholars and people in general.

Acknowledgments. I am thankful to IITR digital library for providing me with research articles. Special thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions, which have helped me think deeper about the topic.

Notes

- 1 Two East African writers have now won the Nobel Prize; the first of these of course is Maathai herself (the Peace Prize citation acknowledged her memoir). 2021 brought the literature prize to Abdulrazak Gurnah.
- 2 For further understanding of the relation between social stratification, imperialism, and colonialism, see Horvath 2015.
- 3 For the impact of environmental colonialism on indigenous people, see Duquette 2020.
- 4 For understanding environmental colonialism with some poignant quotes, see Iweriebor 2011.
- 5 For analysis of Maathai's emplaced rhetoric, addressing postcolonial oppressions while emphasizing social justice and peacebuilding activism, see Gorsevski 2012.
- 6 Caminero-Santangelo 2014 attends to the literature of Kenya and specifically to Wangari Maathai's writing. Several other African authors that are relevant to this article appear in Okuyade 2013b.
- 7 For a discussion of African traditional, moral, conservationist values and ways of life, see Ikuenobe 2014.
- 8 Ngugi wa Thiong'o is an obvious example, as a very significant writer of Kenyan fiction but also a critic of Kenyan colonial and postcolonial society (see Buchanan 1988).
- 9 For a discussion of comprehensive development frameworks as a holistic development in Africa, see Harper-Shipman 2019.
- 10 Jeremia Njeru has written extensively on environmental activism in Nairobi, including on Maathai (see Njeru 2012).

References

- Adelle, C., and Kotsopoulos, J. 2017. The EU–South Africa strategic partnership and global environmental governance: Towards effective multilateralism after Copenhagen? *South African Journal of International Affairs* 24 (2): 229–48.
- Brownhill, L. 2007. Gendered struggles for the commons: Food sovereignty, tree-planting and climate change. *Women and Environments International* 74/75 (Spring/Summer): 34–37.
- Buchanan, K. 1988. The gun and the school: Reflections on Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonizing the Mind*. *Race & Class* 30 (2): 61–69.
- Buell, Lawrence. 1989. American pastoral ideology reappraised. *American Literary History* 1 (1): 1–29.
- Caminero-Santangelo, B. 2014. *Different shades of green: African literature, environmental justice, and political ecology*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Chandler, D. J. and Wane, N. 2002. Indigenous gendered spaces: An examination of Kenya. *JENdA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies* 2 (1). <https://www.africaknowledgeproject.org/index.php/jenda/article/view/71>.
- Chinyowa, K. C. 2001. The Sarungano and Shona storytelling: An African theatrical paradigm. *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 21 (1): 18–30.
- Creany, A. D. 2008. The magic of storytelling. Presented at 18th Annual Conference of the European Teacher Education Network, England, April.

- Crosby, Alfred W. 2004. *Ecological imperialism: the biological expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Cambridge University Press.
- Doyle, T., and S. MacGregor, ed. 2013. *Environmental movements around the world: Shades of green in politics and culture*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.
- Duquette, Kelly. 2020. "Environmental colonialism." *Postcolonial Studies at Emory Pages* <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2020/01/21/environmental-colonialism>.
- Du Toit, L. J. 2019. *Evaluating the life of Wangari Maathai (1940-2011) Using the lens of dark green religion*. Master's thesis. University of Johannesburg.
- Ekechi, Felix K. 2020. Review of Mary Wren Bivins, *Telling stories, making histories: Women, words, and Islam in nineteenth-century Hausaland and the Sokoto caliphate*. *The Historian* 70 (4): 753-55.
- Gorsevski, E. W. 2012. Wangari Maathai's emplaced rhetoric: Greening global peacebuilding. *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture* 6 (3): 290-307.
- Harper-Shipman, T. D. 2019. How comprehensive is comprehensive? Using Wangari Maathai as a critique of the World Bank's contemporary development model. *Third World Quarterly* 40 (4): 633-50.
- Horvath, Ronald J. 2015. A definition of colonialism. *Current Anthropology* 13 (1): 45-57.
- Hunt, K. P. 2014. It's more than planting trees, it's planting ideas: Ecofeminist praxis in the Green Belt Movement. *Southern Communication Journal* 79 (3): 235-49.
- Ikuenobe, P. A. 2014. Traditional African environmental ethics and colonial legacy. *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 2 (4): 1-21.
- Iweriebor, Ehiedu E. G. 2011. The colonization of Africa. *The Humanities*: 1-5. <https://docslib.org/doc/10175723/the-colonization-of-africa-author-ehiedu-eg-iweriebor-publish>.
- Karikari, E., and C. Brown. 2018. Sensemaking in turbulent contexts: African student leadership in a post-colonial context. *Communication Studies* 69 (4): 439-52.
- Kirkscey, R. 2009. Accommodating traditional African values and globalization: Narrative as argument in Wangari Maathai's Nobel Prize lecture. *Women & Language* 30 (2): 12-17.
- Kushner, J. L. 2009. *Wangari Maathai: Righteous leader of environmental and social change*. Presented at 50th Annual Adult Education Research Conference. National Louis University, Chicago, May.
- Lyn, White. 1967. The historical roots of ecologic crisis. *Science* 155: 1203-6.
- Maathai, Wangari. 2003. *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the approach and the experience*. New York: Lantern Books.
- Maathai, Wangari 2007. *Unbowed: A memoir*. New York: Anchor.
- Maathai, Wangari 2008. An unbreakable link: Peace, environment and democracy. *Harvard International Review* 29 (4): 24-27.
- Maathai, Wangari 2010. *Replenishing the earth: Spiritual values for healing ourselves and the world*. New York: Doubleday Religion.
- Mbiti, John S. 1991. *Introduction to African religion*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Merton, L., and A. Dater, directors. 2008. *Taking root: The vision of Wangari Maathai*. 80 min. Marlboro Productions.
- Mortimore, M. J., and W. M. Adams. 2001. Farmer adaptation, change and "crisis" in the Sahel. *Global Environmental Change* 11 (1): 49-57.
- Muthuki, Janet Muthoni. 2006. "Rethinking Ecofeminism: Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement in Kenya." Master's thesis. University of Kwazulu-Natal.
- Muthuki, J. M. 2013. Ecological activism in highlighting gendered relations: Wangari Maathai's Green Belt Movement in Kenya. In *Environmental movements around the world: Shades of green in politics and culture*, ed. Timothy Doyle and Sherilyn MacGregor. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.
- Mutua, E. M., and A. Gonzalez. 2013. Ideographs of suppression: Jomo Kenyatta's independence day speech. *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 4 (1): 12-19.
- Mutua, E., and K. Omori. 2018. A cross-cultural approach to environmental and peace work: Wangari Maathai's use of *mottainai* in Kenya. *Journal of Social Encounters* 2 (1): 22-36.
- Mutune, J. M., C. P. Hansen, R. G. Wahome, and D. N. Mungai. 2017. What rights and benefits? The implementation of participatory forest management in Kenya: The case of Eastern Mau Forest Reserve. *Journal of Sustainable Forestry* 36 (3): 230-49.
- Nayar, P. K. 2015. *The postcolonial studies dictionary*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.
- Njeru, J. 2012. Mobilization and protest: The struggle to save Karura Forest in Nairobi, Kenya. *African Geographical Review* 31 (1): 17-32.

- Nobel Prize. 2004. Wangari Maathai—Nobel lecture. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2004/maathai/lecture/>.
- Ochwa-Echel, J., and R. Onyango. 2018. African women and social transformation: Exploring Wangari Maathai's activism. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 12 (6): 93–109.
- Odari, C. J. 2011. *A blessing or curse? The Mboya-Kennedy students' airlift and its implications*. Master's thesis. Miami University.
- Okuyade, O. 2013a. Continuity and renewal in the endless tales of a continent: New voices in the African novel. *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 44 (1): 1–24.
- Okuyade, O., ed. 2013b. *Eco-critical literature: Regreening African landscapes*. New Rochelle, N.Y.: African Heritage Press.
- Presbey, G. M. 2013. Women's empowerment: The insights of Wangari Maathai. *Journal of Global Ethics* 9 (3): 277–92.
- Rawat, G., and S. Mishra. 2021. Spirituality and environment: Significance of indigenous knowledge systems in Africa and challenges. *Literary Endeavour* 12 (1): 56–63.
- Risiro, Joshua, T. Tshuma, and Alphious Basikiti. 2013. Indigenous knowledge systems and environmental management: A case study of Zaka District, Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 2 (1): 19–39.
- Rocheleau, Dianne E. 1995. Gender and biodiversity: A feminist political ecology perspective. *IDS Bulletin* 26 (1): 9–16.
- Steady, Filomina C. 2014. Women, climate change and liberation in Africa. *Race Gender and Class* 21 (1–2): 312–33.
- Tavana. 2014. The tree mother of Africa and her Green Belt Movement. <https://tavaana.org/en/en/content/tree-mother-africa-and-her-green-belt-movement-1>.
- Thiong'o, N. Wa. 1992. *Decolonizing the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- United Nations. 2004. Wangari Maathai—Facts—NobelPrize.Org. The Nobel Peace Prize 2004. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2004/maathai/26050-wangari-maathai-nobel-lecture-2004/>.
- United Nations. 2015. Adoption of the Paris Agreement. <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09r01.pdf>.
- Vercida. 2019. In the spotlight: Wangari Maathai. <https://www.vercida.com/uk/articles/wangari-maathai>.
- Wachira, James. 2020. Wangari Maathai's environmental afrofuturist imaginary in Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi*. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34 (4): 324–36.
- World Resources Institute. 2021. About Wanjira Mathai. <https://www.wri.org/profile/wanjira-mathai>.
- Zelezny, L., and M. Bailey. 2006. A call for women to lead a different environmental movement. *Organization and Environment* 19 (1): 103–9.
- Zimmerer, K. S., and K. R. Young. 1998. *Nature's geography: New lessons for conservation in developing countries*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Garima Rawat is a research scholar in the Department of Applied Science and Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, India. She works in the area of social environmental research, which consists of environmental justice, eco-feminism, indigenous environmental movements, and environmental colonialism. garimarawat2302@gmail.com

Dr. Vivek Kumar Gaurav holds a PhD in environmental engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, India. Currently, he is working as a project scientist at the Indian Council of Medical Research, India. He is also associated with the International Professor Project, an international approach to interconnect resources for professors, students, and universities. gaurav.vivek08@gmail.com

Cite this article: Rawat G, Gaurav VK (2023). Colonial Invasion and Environmental Degradation in Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: A Memoir*. *Hypatia* 38, 405–422. <https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2023.37>