

**RETHINKING ECOFEMINISM:
WANGARI MAATHAI AND
THE GREEN BELT
MOVEMENT IN KENYA**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research article, unless otherwise indicated in the text, is my own original work. This research has not previously been submitted to any other institution for degree purposes.

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ABSTRACT

Issues of the environment have received increasing attention as demonstrated by the rise of the ecological movement in response to the threat of overpopulation, intensive agricultural methods and chemical pollution, all of which are reinforced by industrialization. Ecofeminist theories assert that industrialisation and capitalism have resulted in the oppression of both women and nature. Ecofeminism therefore represents a critique of patriarchal frameworks as well as a grassroots political movement with strategies to bring about an ecological revolution. However, ecofeminism as articulated in the West has been criticised for homogenizing and essentialising women. This study conceives ecofeminism from an African perspective by examining the work of Maathai and her Green Belt Movement (GBM) in relation to the Kenyan context. The study examines the effect of hegemonic practices such as colonialism and capitalism on the environment and gender relations. The study motivates the argument that Maathai's GBM offers a critique of industrialism and capitalist patriarchy occasioned by colonialism as well as a response to sustainability. The study advances the argument that the GBM represents a rethinking of the homogenizing imperative of western ecofeminism. The central hypothesis of this article is that Wangari Maathai's GBM is an African ecofeminist activism, which through environmental issues and interventions highlights gender relations and challenges patriarchy within national and global ideological structures.

Key words

Environment, ecofeminism, African feminism, development, sustainable development, gender

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DEDICATION

To my late mother,

Margaret Wagaki Muthuki (31 July 1948 – 09 December 2005)

for her legacy of discipline and diligence as well as for believing in me.

Proverbs 31: 27- *She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.*

Proverbs 31: 31- *Give her of the fruit of her hands and let her own works praise her in the gates.*

Because of my mother's diligence, I am who I am today.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Topic and Problem formulation

Issues of the environment and ecology have increasingly become the subject of much debate and activism in recent times as demonstrated by the existence of a vast critical literature in the field (see for example, Bramwell, 1989; Dobson, 1992; Ponting, 1991; Porritt, 1991). Environmentalism and ecologism though used interchangeably are distinctive terms. Environmentalism prioritizes green issues within existing political and economic structures by advocating for appropriate legislation and voluntary adoption of environmentally sound practices (see also Beder, 1991; Gaard, 1998). However, environmentalists seem to have no clearly defined or articulated political or ideological agenda.

Ecologists and the ecological movement on the other hand believe that a reorganization of the political, social and economic system would be more effective. It would therefore appear that ecologists reinforce a stronger focus on agency, mobilization and political restructuring in order to achieve change in relation to the environment. The ecological movement, which dates from the 1960s and 1970s, was a response to the threat of overpopulation, intensive agricultural methods and chemical pollution reinforced by industrialization. This threat is evident with the destruction of rainforests, the poisoning of oceans and the extinction of many living species. Ecological activism has also been reinforced by recent occurrences such as the effects of the depletion of the ozone layer, global warming, proliferation of nuclear weapons and the impact of fuel emissions. These aspects raise concerns for dangers to the biosphere and ultimately human existence. Such dangers have resulted in the creation of a political response and political action to preserve the environment and its inhabitants (Beder, 1991; Gaard, 1998). In the context of this study therefore, I illustrate and motivate how ecological activism is deeply connected to an *anthropocentric* (human-centric) understanding as well as a *gendered* and indeed a *feminist* understanding.

Ecological feminism or ecofeminism as a feminist approach to environmental ethics has received increasing attention since the inception of the term *ecofeminisme* by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974. Ecofeminism is a response to the perception that both women and the

environment have been devalued in western capitalist patriarchy (Cuomo, 1996; Gaard, 1993; Salleh, 1988; Warren, 1990). According to Etkins (1992), Mies (1998), Shiva (1988), Mies and Shiva (1993) western patriarchy directed exclusively at profits, has subjugated sustenance economy based on creative organic nature and on indigenous knowledge possessed by women and the marketing surplus, which maintains the integrity of nature in the name of development. This has consequently led to the impoverishment of women and the diminishing of their status relative to men.

Ecofeminists advance the view that women are closer to nature and hence are more suitable to environmental management. The association between women and nature is then seen as a source of women's empowerment and environmental liberation. Consequently, strategies to emancipate both women and nature have been based on reclaiming nature and women as powerful forces. Indeed, grassroots women and environmental movements such as the *Chipko*¹ (tree-hugging) movement in India and the Green Belt Movement (hereafter GBM) in Kenya have been mobilized to this effect (Gaard, 1993 & Shiva, 1988). Such movements are often seen as central to effective social change, ecological revolution and empowerment for women.

Critics of ecofeminism on the other hand argue that *ecofeminism* essentializes women in that it assumes that the association between women and nature is natural and it does not examine whether the relationship has been structurally imposed upon them. As indicated by Thomas-Slayter & Rocheleau (1995), the differentiated socio-cultural construction of relationships between women and men means that the connections between them and the environment work out differently for either sex. A gender perspective is therefore essential to describe, reinterpret and understand the way women relate to the environment as it enables one to see from the viewpoint of the roles that society has historically assigned to men and women. Gender is a social construct and derives its meaning from specific historical and material conditions such as colonialism.

¹The Chipko movement is an environmental grassroots movement in India where women literally hug trees to demonstrate the 'feminine principle'. Women do this to motivate that they are more suited to environmental management and conservation than men. 'Hugging' trees is usually a form of resistance to tree fellers and women protest by hugging the trees in order to prevent trees from being cut.

Moreover, women's socially inscribed identities in Africa take very different forms from women's socially inscribed identities in the west. African women's official identities frequently challenge the myths and notions linked to western notions of femininity (see for example, Ongudipe-Leslie, 1994; Oyewumi, 1997). Therefore, ecofeminism from an African point of view can also be seen to be a resistance to western imperialism and its legacy within African culture.

Further to this, ecofeminism is also seen as homogenizing women by treating women as a separate category in dealing with environmental issues, thereby ignoring differences of class, culture, race, region and resource content amongst them. Consequently, ecofeminism assumes that all women have the same relationship with the environment (see for example James, 1996; Goudie & Kilian, 1996) and ecofeminism does not make a distinction between the urban women who may be driven by consumerist ethics and rural women who easily identify with nature. As will be explained later, both the terms "rural" and "urban" are colonial constructs.

Clearly then, the relationship between women and the environment is complex and multi-layered and calls for a rethinking of ecofeminist messages. Rethinking entails the dual process of deconstruction and re-construction and hence providing the possibility of agency for women. This study therefore conceives ecofeminism/s as a grassroots political movement for social change that discerns interconnections among all forms of oppression such as colonialism, sexism (patriarchy), classism, racism and attempts to come up with strategies for action directed towards an ecological revolution and sustainable development (see Birkeland, 1993; Gaard, 1993; Lahar, 1991 and Salleh, 1988). An African ecological perspective needs to interrogate the role of historical circumstances such as colonial rule on the environment and gender roles. Such a perspective requires an integrative approach to gender which involves an examination of how organizations work at the community level based on gender defined roles and relations.

In the context of this study, I examine the gendered relations in environmental issues in Kenya and how they have been shaped by historical circumstances such as colonialism and the introduction of a capitalist economy. These issues are examined in relation to Maathai and her work with the GBM (see 4.1) as an ecological movement, which calls for a reorganisation of the political, social and

economic system and hence is an emancipatory politics. In the section that follows, I examine Maathai, the GBM and the recognition her work and organization received with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

1.2 Maathai, the Green Belt Movement and the Nobel Peace Prize

There seems to be the sense that via recourse to earth struggles, a dual struggle of women is generated from ecological activism as is reflected in the life and work of Maathai and her GBM (see also 4.1). Maathai² is an environmental activist, the 2004 Nobel peace laureate and the founder of the GBM, a grassroots environmental and social justice organization in Kenya. The GBM uses tree planting as a strategy for environmental conservation, provision of fuel, clean water and income for rural women as well as for providing a platform for women in leadership through capacity building. Maathai and the GBM have also used tree planting in pressing for democratic reform in advocacy activities towards preventing forest destruction, bringing to end poor governance and human rights atrocities such as tribal clashes and corruption, especially the illegal allocation of public land (see Maathai, 2004a). Therefore, Maathai has been a strong force in Kenya's environmental and political arenas. She is also known as *mama miti*, a Swahili name meaning the mother of trees (see Van der Walt, 2005).

²Wangari Muta Maathai was born in Nyeri, Kenya. She became the chair of the Department of Veterinary Anatomy and an associate Professor in 1976. Maathai has a string of many firsts, which she has achieved throughout her life. She was the first woman in East and Central Africa to obtain a Master of Science degree. In 1971 she became the first woman to earn a Ph.D. from the University of Nairobi and the first woman to serve as senior lecturer at the institution. In 1976, she became the first woman to hold an associate professorship at the university and the first woman to be invited to chair a department (The department of Veterinary Anatomy). She was active in the National Council of Women in Kenya in 1976-87 and was its chair in 1981-87. Maathai has also received many honors, including the Woman of the Year Award in 1983, The Right Livelihood Award (or the Alternative Nobel Prize) in 1984, the Better World Society Award for the Protection of the Global Environment in 1986, the Wind Star Award for the Environment in 1988, the Woman of the World Award in 1989, the Goldman Environmental Prize in 1991, and the Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End to Hunger in 1991. She was listed on both UNEP's (United Nations Environmental Programme) Global 500 Roll of Honor and the National Council of Women of Kenya's Honours List in 1987, and in 1990 she received an honorary doctorate from Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts. In 1993, she was awarded the Jane Addams International Women's Leadership Award, which is given to women who personify the pioneering spirit of Jane Addams, the first American woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize (Fadanusi, 2005). She is currently the Member of Parliament for Tetu constituency in Nyeri district of central Kenya and was Deputy Minister in the ministry of environment, natural resources and wildlife until the 23rd of November 2005 when President Kibaki sacked the entire cabinet after the government lost in a referendum concerning the constitution. She has declined her reappointment in the interest of advocating for peace between disagreeing former coalition partners in government.

In 2004 Maathai became the first woman out of only six Africans to win the Nobel Peace Prize. She joined other African Peace Prize Laureates namely Albert Luthuli, Anwar Sadat, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Frederik Willem de Klerk and Kofi Annan. The Norwegian Nobel committee decided to award her the Nobel Prize for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace (Norwegian Nobel Committee, 2004). However, the award of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize to Maathai sparked controversy because many failed to see the connection between environmentalism and peace. Critics felt that awarding the prize to Maathai for fighting deforestation and advocacy for democracy and women's rights de-emphasised the current condition of the world. Tyler (2004) explains that at a time when the world is experiencing war, notably the conflict in the Middle East, it seemed conflicting to critics for politics to be overlooked in this award. Indeed Maathai (2004b), in commenting on receiving the Nobel peace prize stated:

This is not an area that is normally honoured by the Norwegian Nobel Committee and so this major shift that the Committee made was extremely overwhelming because it captured an extremely huge constituency, throughout the world, of organizations, grassroots groups, major international organizations that work for these three areas that the committee connected—that is to say the environment, democracy, and peace. To me, to find myself at this moment in the company of the people who have been honoured because they have worked in these areas really overwhelmed me, to know that the environment has been brought to the central focus.

Environmentalism and politics though they may appear different are in fact intimately connected as most environmental movements are deeply political as shown in the case of the GBM. Environmental concerns often stem from political issues and lead to political activism as will be demonstrated in later sections of this argument. Further, both ultimately are directed towards serving the public with a focus on alleviating conflict and creating peace.

In awarding Maathai the Nobel Peace Prize, the Nobel committee also placed emphasis on the importance of human rights in international politics. Peace, it seems, can only last where human rights are respected. Of even greater emphasis are the rights of women and other marginalized groups in the world today. In many societies, gender concerns are usually relegated as secondary to national concerns. This consequently has an impact on policy formulation and implementation with women being marginalized. Maathai (2004b) corroborates further:

I'm quite sure that, with this kind of a prize, a lot of prejudices against women are automatically removed. I can say without exaggeration that everybody in this country, and I'm sure many people in Africa are extremely happy, and are associating themselves with the prize – both men and women. And I'm sure that, at such a time, men appreciate the role that women can play. I know that, for many men in this country, they're very proud. And they associate themselves with what the women have been doing. And this is something that I had already seen in the work that many men associate themselves. So, I think that, at a certain level, when women are dealing too with real issues, and when those issues are recognized, that there is no longer the gender bias, and that both men and the women converge in their appreciation.

Maathai articulates a gender perspective in which women's knowledge, experiences and perceptions are given validity and foregrounded in analysing and presenting issues. Gender equality and equity are not only a question of fundamental human rights and social justice, but are essential to the functioning of the environment as well (see Chiuri *et al*, 1992; Morna, 1992 and Toroitich, 2004). Women, particularly those living in the rural areas, play a major role in managing natural resources such as soil, water, forests and energy. Their tasks in agriculture as well as in the household make them daily managers of the environment. Therefore, as the world's food producers, women have a stake in the preservation of the environment and in environmentally sustainable development. Land and water resources form the basis of all farming systems, and their preservation is crucial to sustained and improved food production (see Jiggins, 1994).

However, due to the subordinate role played by women in society, their participation in planning, implementation, management, maintenance and evaluation of development and environmental programmes is limited. Consequently, in an unequal society, the impact of environmental degradation falls disproportionately on women. Gendered divisions of labour, land and other resources have meant that women have been uniquely and disproportionately affected by ecological destruction (Wangari, Thomas-Slayter & Rocheleau, 1996). The division of labour between men and women in the global South³ changed with shifts in the economic structure of production such

³ The use of the term "South" to refer to developing countries collectively has been part of the shorthand of international relations since the 1970's. It has been developed in place of the term "third world" which is seen as being out of date, colonialist, and inaccurate. The term "global South" rests on the fact that all of the industrialized nations with the exception of Australia and New Zealand lie to the North of its developing countries. These developing countries include those in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The term does not imply that all developing countries are similar and can be lumped in one category. What it implies is that though the developing countries range across the spectrum in every economic, political and social attribute, they share a group of challenges namely being less industrialized and technologically advanced as compared to the North (UNDP, 2004).

as the expansion of cash crops for the market, at the expense of subsistence crops for the family consequently leading to the interference of the sustainable practices of African communities (see Boserup, 1970; Maathai, 2004a).

Evident in Maathai's work therefore is a critique of and response to industrialism (which led to colonialism), capitalism and sustainability. In my project, I demonstrate that the work of Maathai and the GBM reflects a critique of capitalism and patriarchy. I examine how Maathai's work in the GBM advances a radical, socialist politics to challenge the social structures that result in the downgrading of the earth and its resources and consequently marginalize women. I critically examine the effect of hegemonic experiences such as colonialism and resultant African states on environment issues and gender relations in Kenya. In my study, I also address the conflict between *state* interests and *gender* interests with specific reference to Maathai's role in challenging the state on the issues of gender equity and social concern (see Nzomo, 1997). According to Cravey (1998), the state has been claimed to be both capitalistic and patriarchal. Cravey (1998) further asserts that state formation is a gendered process and therefore gender is implicated in many facets of the state including a **gendered** division of labour within state apparatus, gendered structures of power and the interplay between social movements and state policies (see also Oyewumi, 1997).

Therefore, the key hypothesis of this article is that Maathai's GBM is an African ecofeminist activism, which through environmental issues and interventions highlights gender relations and challenges patriarchy within national and global ideological structures.

1.3 Methodology

This is a critical, evaluative and qualitative study principally of Maathai and the GBM in the foregrounding of gender issues in her life and work. To motivate the argument, the study reviews selected critical and theoretical literature on ecofeminism/s and African feminism/s to describe the contextual foundation of the article in relation to my hypothesis (see also primary sources for evidence of the critical literature).

The study examines existing literature on ecofeminism/s as a theory (and praxis) that critiques patriarchal conceptual frameworks, which are responsible for the twin oppressions of women and the environment and consequently oppression of the global South and its women. The argument entails a review of selected literature to provide a description of the biographical and empirical aspects of Maathai and the GBM (see primary sources). This article is informed by interpretations of ecofeminism that emphasize a critique of patriarchal frameworks, which prioritize men over women; hence justifying the subordination of women. The study is also informed by interpretations of ecofeminism as a practical movement for social change that discerns interconnections among all forms of oppression as well as a grassroots movement with strategies for action directed towards an ecological revolution and sustainable development (see Gaard, 1993; Salleh, 1988).

I conceive ecofeminism/s from an African feminist position as a resistance to western hegemony. The article is therefore underpinned by an interpretation of African feminism/s, which is shaped by African women's resistance to western hegemony and its legacy within African culture. The study borrows from literature on African feminism to interpret women's struggle for increased participation in the nascent democratic structures (see for example: Arndt, 2002; Kaplan, Alarcón and Moallem, 1999; Kolawole, 1997; Mikell, 1997; Ongudipe-Leslie, 1994; Oyewumi, 1997). An analysis of Maathai is provided in order to tease out the gendered aspect of tree planting as an ecofeminist project and to draw some conclusions on the possible 'impact' of Maathai's GBM in developing a critical discourse on and rethinking of ecofeminism within an African feminist perspective.

Selected and relevant theories and concepts in relation to the empirical aspects of ecofeminism/s and African feminism in Maathai's GBM are provided to advance the gendered meanings of such a movement. As mentioned earlier, gender relations are crucial to understanding the impact on the environment due to the fact that women's lives vary greatly from those of men because of patterns of socialization related to gender. The argument is informed also by the concept of the environment and environmental degradation in examining the GBM's role in mobilizing community consciousness for self-determination; equity, improved livelihoods and environmental conservation through tree planting. Further, the study offers a critique of western capitalist paradigm, which sees nature as a resource to be exploited for unending growth and development in examining Maathai's

advocacy for an alternative development model through tree planting and biodiversity conservation. The study is equally informed by the concept of sustainable development. By the latter I mean economic development, which ensures that environmental depletion and degradation does not occur. I am informed by Braidotti *et al* (1994), who define sustainable development as development that meets present needs without compromising future generation's ability to meet theirs. Further to this, I borrow from The International Council of Local Environmental Initiatives which goes on to define sustainable development as development that delivers environmental, social and economic services to all residents of a community without threatening the viability of natural, built and social systems upon which the delivery of these services depends (Bond, 2000). In this respect, I examine Maathai's advocacy for the change of consumption patterns and on lifestyles embracing of new values such as self-sufficiency instead of dependency, cooperation instead of competitiveness, respect for all creatures and creativity.

The argument in this article is structured into six sections. The *first* section motivated the topic, problem and methodology by profiling Maathai (her Nobel Peace Award) and the GBM briefly. The *second* section examines Maathai and the GBM in rethinking ecofeminism in Kenya. The *third* section examines and describes the impact of hegemonic experiences such as colonialism and capitalism and their legacy in environment and gender relations in Kenya. The *fourth* section addresses Maathai and the GBM's focus in using environmental interventions to highlight gendered relations in Kenya. The *fifth* and *sixth* sections respectively assess the implications of Maathai's work in the GBM for gender and development in Kenya and a few tentative conclusions are made.

In the following section, I begin by reviewing feminist theories (ecofeminism and African feminism) in connection with gender and the environment.

2. WANGARI MAATHAI AND THE GREEN BELT MOVEMENT: RETHINKING ECOFEMINISM

2.1 Ecofeminism/s

Ecofeminism is a coming together of the radical ecology and feminist movements. Warren (1990) and Zimmerman *et al* (1993) explain that radical ecology sees the environmental crisis as rooted in anthropocentrism that presumes humans to be above nature which is then exploited for unending growth and development through modern science and technology. Feminism, as we have come to understand it, is a movement directed against the deeply exploitative and oppressive man-woman relation, which is interwoven with all other social relations. Ecofeminism therefore sees androcentrism (male-centeredness) as the root of the oppression of both women and the environment.

Ecofeminism is not a homogenous movement however, but involves a variety of subject positions that are rooted in different feminist practices. These different practices reflect not only different feminist perspectives (such as liberal, traditional Marxist, radical, socialist, black and third World feminism) but they also reflect diverse understandings of the nature of and solution to pressing environmental problems (see Warren, 1987). Nevertheless, according to Warren (1987) despite important differences among ecofeminists and the feminisms from which they gain their inspiration, most ecofeminists agree that there are important connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding crucial to feminism, environmentalism, and environmental philosophy. The debate then is whether the woman-nature connections are natural or structurally imposed upon them.

Some ecofeminists (see for example Merchant, 1980) see the cause of woman-nature connections as caused by historical circumstances such as the scientific revolution through which the old world order characterised by cooperation between humans and nature was replaced by a reductionism, "mechanistic world view of modern science," which sanctioned the exploitation of nature, unchecked commercial and industrial expansion, and the subordination of women. Another group of ecofeminists (see for example Plumwood 1991; Ruether 1974; Salleh, 1988) see these connections as based on hierarchical value dualisms including reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature,

human/nature, and man/woman dichotomies. These theorists argue that whatever is historically associated with emotion, body, nature, and women is regarded as inferior to that which is (historically) associated with reason, mind, culture, human (i.e., male) and men. Such value dualisms and value hierarchies are then expanded to larger oppressive conceptual frameworks such as sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism as well as "naturism," i.e., the unjustified domination of nonhuman nature (see Warren 1987,1990). Other feminists (see for example Roach, 1996; Salleh, 1988) see the woman-nature connections as rooted in language. Nature has always been perceived as female and hence the gendered terms "mother nature" and "mother earth". On the other hand, women are naturalised and seen as closer to nature due to their physiological connection to birth and childcare. Salleh (1988) continues to argue that feminisation of nature and naturalisation of women has led to the oppression of both.

The other basis for woman-nature connections follows from epistemological claims noted between women and nature. Women are seen to have more knowledge about earth systems than men thus making them better qualified as experts in handling the environment. Ecofeminists such as Shiva (1988) argue that women are by nature more nurturing and therefore more equipped to manage the environment. This ecofeminist position does not seek equality with men as with liberal feminism, but aims for liberation of women as women. Shiva (1988) believes that women are in essence more nurturing, peaceful, co-operative and closer to nature than men. She attributes this to the 'feminine principle' a term originating from Hindu cosmology denoting woman as a life-giving force. This force, she believes, has been replaced by a male-based model mentioned earlier patterned along patriarchal conceptual frameworks, which are characterised by value dualisms and hierarchies (see Salleh, 1988). Shiva (1988) therefore asserts that this model ought to be replaced by the feminine principle in order to emancipate women and the environment.

The view that women are more nurturing and therefore more equipped to handle the environment has however been contested by feminists who see it as essentialist and hence leading to further oppression of women. Critics of ecofeminism such as Alaimo (1994) and Plant (1989) argue that ecofeminism essentializes women in that it assumes that the association between women and nature is natural. The association of women with nature is seen as dominating and not liberating, because it reinforces patriarchy. For example Alaimo (1994), in examining Haraway, whose work attempts to problematize the distinction between nature, culture and technology, argues that the views

embraced by ecofeminists do not challenge categories of nature and culture and are completely compatible with continued male oppression. Alaimo (1994) further argues that ecofeminism embraces dualities, as they exist between culture and nature and goes on to validate the 'natural' side without questioning the underlying politics or power dynamic inherent in the duality. This then leaves ecofeminism open to the possibility of being used to reinforce traditional patriarchal assumptions and categorises women as passive and without agency.

Indeed, for some feminists (see for example Alaimo, 1994; Lahar 1991) the solution is to create an alliance rather than identification between women and nature and assert the political agency of both. Alaimo (1994) explains that by envisioning women and nature as political allies, an environmental feminism would emphasize the importance of women as political activists and stress the agency of nature. As earlier mentioned the term *ecofeminisme* was introduced by Francoise d'Eaubonne to bring attention to women's potential for ecological revolution. Lahar (1991) therefore sees women-nature connections as political and ecofeminism as a grassroots political movement motivated by pressing pragmatic concerns. These include women's and environmental health, to science, development and technology, the treatment of animals, and peace, antinuclear, antimilitarist activism.

Ecological feminism or ecofeminism therefore represents a variety of positions that make visible different sorts of woman-nature connections. The varieties of ecofeminist perspectives on the environment can therefore be seen as an attempt to take seriously such grassroots activism and political concerns by developing analyses of domination that explain, clarify, and guide that praxis. My argument therefore views the GBM as grassroots political movement that discerns interconnections among all forms of oppression with strategies for action directed towards an ecological revolution and sustainable development (see also Gaard, 1993; Salleh, 1988). This conception is essential to an examination of Maathai and the GBM in Kenya who, as stated previously, use tree planting as an ecofeminist activism to advocate for social change, ecological revolution and empowerment for women. I conceive Maathai's GBM as an alliance between women and nature in asserting the political agency of both (see also 4.1). In the next section, I develop some of the preceding issues by turning to African feminism in relation to gender, environment and the GBM.

2.2 African feminism/s

Alongside ecological feminists, African feminists also highlight earth cultures and the preservation of natural resources. They contend for involvement in the management of over half of the world's resources so that sustainable development can be realized (see Mikell, 1997). African feminism therefore outlines the importance of caring relationships or holistic relationships as advocated for by Maathai.

African Feminisms reflects a developing discourse in feminism that repeatedly questions and challenges the potential homogenizing imperative of Western scholarship (see for example: Amadiume, 1987; Arndt, 2002; Kolawole, 1997; Mikell, 1997; Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997; Oyewumi, 1997). Indeed, one of the central arguments of the critique of western feminism by Black feminists in the United Kingdom and feminist women of colour in the United States was that western feminism was preoccupied with inequalities arising on the basis of gender relations, to the exclusion of race, class and other dimensions of social inequality (see Carby 1982, Moraga and Anzaldua 1981). "Third world" women accuse mainstream western feminists of looking at women's experiences as homogeneous, based on the perspectives of middle-class white western women (Carby, 1982, Moraga and Anzaldua, 1981). Mohanty (1991) advocates for the commonality of struggle for women in the global South against specific exploitative structures and systems given complex histories of slavery, imperialism and the presence of neo-colonial configurations. In agreement with Mies (1988) on the exploitative nature of housework occasioned by colonialist imperatives of *private* and *public* dichotomies (discussed in subsequent sections) she calls for feminist solidarity in the global South in order to critique capitalism.

African feminism falls within the discourse of "third world" feminism. Consequently, African feminism is shaped by African women's resistance to western hegemony and its legacy within African culture. It has grown out of a history of women's integration in corporate and agrarian based societies, which had strong cultural heritages, but were however disrupted by colonialism. African feminisms hold the view that the erosion of women's power is caused by the intrusion of foreign systems with different gender orientation and new paradigms of power organization(see

Amadiume, 1987; Arndt, 2002; Kolawole, 1997; Mikell, 1997; Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997; Oyewumi, 1997).

Gender hierarchy, though evident in traditional African culture, became more pronounced during colonial rule. Oyewumi (1997) points out that colonial practice stemmed from the worldview of the *human* over the *non-human* or subhuman and the *masculine* over the *feminine* and the *modern* or progressive over the *traditional*. Oyewumi (1997) also points out that colonization was a process in which male hegemony was instituted and legitimized within African societies. Colonial rule brought about *public*⁴ versus *private*⁵ sphere distinctions in gender roles in Africa. For example, during European colonization, African men were given increased recognition relative to women for instance in terms of education and employment (see Mies, 1998; Oyewumi, 1997; Shaw, 1995). With the introduction of a capitalist economy, women experienced marginalization and were reduced to economic dependence (Mikell, 1997; Mies, 1998; Shiva, 1988). Colonial rule was therefore characterized by the exclusion of women from the newly created colonial public sphere.

Colonial rule also left the legacy of a patriarchal state, a system that African male political leaders adopted at independence (see Oyewumi, 1997). Consequently, African systems continue to represent systems that prioritize and uphold male privilege. Therefore, African feminism is also characterized by African women's resistance to African male political leaders who have attempted to respond to western hegemony by further limiting and exploiting women. Moreover, African feminism is also characterized by women's struggle for increased participation in the nascent democratic structures. This is exemplified in Maathai and the GBM's work in using tree planting to press for democratic reform. Democracy is crucial to the sustainability of the environment because government policies require the inclusion of the people affected by them, especially women in decision-making, implementation and policing (Morna, 1992).

⁴ The public sphere refers to the domain of social life in which people can engage in deliberating about and acting upon issues of social and political concern with the aim of influencing policy formation. The public sphere has traditionally been regarded as a masculinized domain (Fairclough, 2003).

⁵ The private sphere refers to the domain of social life that involves domestic responsibilities such as childcare, food preparation and housekeeping and has traditionally been regarded as women's domain (Forgarty *et al* ,1971).

However, African women's struggle for increased participation in shaping African destiny is seen as externally motivated. Adhiambo-Oduol (2001) explains that a major debate continues to rage over the relevance or indeed appropriateness of feminist discourse in the African context. The African male political leaders speak of pressure to adopt western economic, political and gender models as opposed to their own cultural models and therefore interpret gender reform efforts as responses to external influence and manipulation. For instance, Maathai in her advocacy work with the GBM, was once accused of being a puppet of foreign masters out to destabilize the country during president Moi's regime (see Fadahunsi, 2005).

Consequently, feminism as a tool for naming and addressing the social injustice experienced by women needs to fit the African reality. African feminists then have to find the balance between fighting for greater public involvement for themselves on the one hand and supporting the autonomy of African states in making decisions on the other (Mikell, 1997). Adhiambo-Oduol (2001) indicates that contrary to popular opinion that African feminists have borrowed wholesale from the west in the area of feminism. There is evidence that feminism has evolved through a process of using gender as an analytical framework in the African experience.

The women's movement in Kenya is a good indicator of this process of evolution. Here, one can discern the struggle, tension and progress experienced by African women in pre-colonial times, through colonialism to independence. The former in my view is evident in Maathai's GBM as will be discussed in later sections.

2.3 African Ecofeminism/s

Ecofeminism/s has mostly been articulated mostly by western scholars (see for example Gaard, 1993; Merchant, 1980; Salleh, 1988 and Warren, 1987). Within their scholarship there is the tendency to view women as a homogenous group (see Goudie and Kilian, 1996 and James, 1996). An African ecofeminist perspective then serves as a major factor in destabilizing the homogenizing imperative of western scholarship in the sense that specific historical circumstances such as colonialism create ecological stress and a variety of social problems that place a heavy burden on women of the global South. Garcia-Guadilla and Pilar (1995) point out that "third world" women's environmental organizations approach environmental issues from a "third world" perspective of

poverty, quality-of-life, and day-to-day domestic problems. In specific Kenyan women have had to face problems such as overgrazing, desertification and soil erosion resulting in their walking longer distances in search of fuel wood and clean water something that many western women have not had to face (see Annabel, 1991).

Therefore as a Kenyan Gender studies student, I base my work on the Kenyan experiences of the impact of colonialism on Kenyan women, women's roles in food production, changing land tenure patterns, the impact of colonial policies on women's right to land, the marginalizing impact of commercialization and commodity production on Kenyan women. I also introduce a gender perspective in interpreting the relationship between Kenyan women and their environment by critically examining deep-rooted gender ideologies on appropriate roles for men and women. Traditional gender roles such as food and firewood gathering link women to environment management.

Moreover, African feminism/s, though resisting imperial oppression, does not automatically speak to the experiences of all African women. The GBM as an African ecofeminist movement distinguishes itself from the feminist movement, which is seen as elitist by identifying with the needs of rural women. I therefore develop the argument that Maathai and the GBM demonstrate a rethinking of ecofeminism/s within an African feminist perspective. In this regard, the following section examines Maathai and the GBM in relation to the impact of the hegemonic experience of colonialism and its legacy on the environment and gender relations in Kenya.

3. WANGARI MAATHAI AND THE GREEN BELT MOVEMENT: THE EFFECT OF HEGEMONIC EXPERIENCES ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND GENDER RELATIONS IN KENYA

3.1 Maathai on environmental challenges facing Kenya

Maathai (2004a), in reflecting on the environmental challenges facing Kenya asserts that few forests are left as a result of deforestation. Kenya is located in Eastern Africa and has a size of 582,644 square kilometres. Kenya's relief is varied with altitudes ranging from sea level to slightly over

5000 metres. Its relief features include plateaus, plains, highlands, the lake basin and the rift valley. The natural vegetation of the country includes heath and moor land, savannah grassland, scrub, semi desert and forest. Currently the total forested area in Kenya covers about 1.7% with scrub and semi desert covering the largest area. The level recommended by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) is about 10% at the very minimum (see Gilson, 2005).

Maathai in an interview with Fadahunsi (2005) explains that forests provide numerous services to humanity, namely ecological balance of the earth by absorbing carbon, preventing loss of soil and subsequent desertification and offering safeguards against flooding. They also provide reservoirs for genetic resources, they control rainfall patterns and serve as catchment areas for freshwater and rivers. Forests therefore have been a source of wealth and inspiration throughout centuries and the decline of ecosystems worldwide has led to adverse effects such as drastic climate change. In Kenya specifically, the clearing up of forests has led to the drying up of rivers and streams, loss of biodiversity, and erratic rainfall. Indeed, in her Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech Maathai (2004b) states:

I reflect on my childhood experience when I would visit a stream next to our home to fetch water for my mother. I would drink water straight from the stream. Playing among the arrowroot leaves I tried in vain to pick up the strands of frogs' eggs, believing they were beads. But every time I put my little fingers under them they would break. Later, I saw thousands of tadpoles: black, energetic and wriggling through the clear water against the background of the brown earth. This is the world I inherited from my parents. Today, over 50 years later, the stream has dried up, women walk long distances for water, which is not always clean, and children will never know what they have lost.

From Maathai's account, her home, which is in the Mount Kenya region, was once a place vibrant with nature's biodiversity such as a stream, tadpoles and fertile soils ensuring a regular food supply. The close proximity of the stream to her home meant that she could easily fetch water. It is instructive to note that Maathai mentions that she is the one who would fetch water for her mother. The fact that she fetched water for her mother on behalf of the family suggests that water and food management was the woman's role. This notwithstanding, the role appears to have been easily carried out due to the availability of nature's abundance. Therefore, the destruction of nature's abundance led to the complication of women's lives since given their association with food and water management, they had to walk longer distances in search of clean water and food.

This destruction was occasioned by the deforestation of the forests in Mount Kenya as well as in other forests in the country. Maathai's political conscience was stimulated when she realized that the government had destroyed huge parts of Kenya's forests in order to plant cash crops. Indeed, Maathai and the GBM have been at the frontline in fighting against forest destruction in Mount Kenya. In particular Maathai has been opposed to the *shamba*⁶ system, which has been advocated by politicians encouraging their constituents to cultivate in forests, thereby diminishing the forest cover. In her view the practice has been rife with corruption and has put species, watersheds, soil and even local climates at risk (Fadahunsi, 2005). The *shamba* system was introduced by the British and maintained by Kenya's post-independence rulers.

Thomas-Slayter & Rocheleau (1995), reiterate that destruction of the forest cover began with the advent of British colonial rule. Kenya was colonized and ruled by the British from the late nineteenth century until 1963 when the country received independence. Changes brought about by colonialism led to a shift in land uses and consequently an increase in the sedimentation of major rivers, depletion of forests, soil and water resources available to the poor. Further to this, the colonial system interfered with the social structures of African communities, especially gender relations in agriculture and environmental management. Gender relations being social relations are historically grounded and hence culturally bound (see Oyewumi, 1997). In the next section, I therefore briefly turn to examine environmental issues and gender relations in pre-colonial Kenya and the impact of colonization on gender construction in Kenyan societies.

3.2 Pre-colonial Kenya, environment and gender

The pre-colonial period in Kenya was characterized by a great amount of wildlife and plant species as well as human communities that sustained themselves and their environment for themselves and for posterity. The communities and the environment did not co-exist easily but the pre-colonial people purposefully made use of certain land management strategies, forms of traditional

⁶ "Shamba" is a Swahili word which means "field". The term "shamba system" is generally defined in Kenya as a form of agro forestry through which farmers are encouraged to cultivate crops on previously clear cut forest land on condition that they replant the forest trees. After three years of cultivating, the trees are expected to be grown enough to overshadow the agricultural crops. The farmer then moves out of the allocated plot and is eligible for another plot to be cleared (Fadahunsi, 2005).

knowledge and mutually beneficial relationships with various cultural groups to maintain ecological and socio-cultural sustainability (Emmons, 1996).

Therefore, as Wamalwa (1991) in her examination of traditional natural resource management systems in Eastern Africa indicates, Kenyan pre-colonial society was geared towards conservation. Moreover, during pre-colonial Kenya, land was communally owned through indigenous forms of land tenure and natural resource management systems. Individuals did not have private rights to land. Instead, a political group or lineage authority was responsible for ensuring all community members had fair access to the land. The fair allocation was done through clan lineage. Each clan was given specific areas and all the members, including the women who were married to members of the clan, were able to acquire land for use. This ensured that every household had access to plots in diverse micro-ecosystems in the area (Chandler & Njoki, 2002).

Kenyan traditional societies therefore tended to reinforce holistic views of the world and encouraged techniques that would lead to sustainable resource management for years prior to British colonial rule. These techniques did not require much in terms of specialization of occupation, though differentiation of occupations did exist between men and women. Mikell (1997) indicates that the women were symbolically linked to the earth, fire and water, three of the four elements in traditional culture. This division relegated women to the more laborious tasks of food preparation, fuel wood gathering and tilling the soil. Due to their role as food and firewood gatherers, women were then involved in developing strategies based on limited resources and population density that allowed for the healthy co-existence of communities. Men were given the responsibility for the fourth symbolic element, namely the air which carried speech and therefore gave them more opportunities for public and community leadership.

However, in the agricultural cycle, the sexual division of labour ensured that men took part in agricultural production. Maathai (2004a) explains that both men and women practiced farming but they grew different crops. Women were in charge of annual crops, which they stored in granaries, while men were in charge of perennial crops like yams, cassava and bananas, which they stored on the farm. Moreover, according to Maathai (2004a) the social structure of these communities was such that it was difficult to make distinctions between domestic and public economic gender roles. It then appears that both women and men's rights were carefully defined and mediated within social structures of sub clan, clan or ethnic community even though there were uneven relations of power

between men and women. It seems, therefore, that Kenyan pre-colonial societies can be said to have maintained a system of ecological and social sustainability with both men and women participating in their different capacities. Though they both had differing roles in environmental management, they were both involved in the agricultural process. In the next section, I further develop some of the above issues by examining the disruption of the pre-colonial systems with the advent of British colonial rule.

3.3 Colonial Kenya, environment and gender

The indigenous systems of ecological and social sustainability were disrupted by British colonial rule. According to Mies (1998), industrial development in Europe necessitated permanent occupation of the colonies by colonial powers and the destruction of the local natural economy. The old world order of cooperation between humans and nature was replaced by a mechanistic worldview of modern science, which led to the death of nature by sanctioning unchecked commercial and industrial expansion consequently leading to environmental destruction (Merchant, 1980). British colonial efforts in Kenya were therefore based on a patriarchal and capitalist socio-economic ideological framework that emphasised the domination and domestication of nature and the imposition of extractive and exploitative relationships that benefited British economic and technological expansion at the expense of the sustainability of human and natural resources. (Emmons, 1996; Oyewumi, 1997).

The concept of nature as a resource to be dominated and exploited for human beings was imposed upon the Kenyan land during the British colonial period with far-reaching consequences. Kanogo (1992) points out that in this regard, the colonial period was characterized by a reorganization of traditional land tenure and agricultural systems and a massive redistribution of land for the benefit of white settlers that had devastating effects on the majority of Kenyan rural communities.

During the colonial rule, the British government allocated themselves land, which they referred to as the White highlands. The Colonial Land Acts resulted in the repossession of communal land considered uncultivated and uninhabited by the British from Kenyans and made it government property (see Bates, 1989; Chirui, 1996). The colonial government then introduced individual land ownership by demarcating land and issuing title deeds. Consequently, many people were

dispossessed of their community land and were denied user rights when the European settlers legitimated their ownership through colonial legislation.

Demarcation of land complicated women's lives in that they could no longer freely harvest branches from trees for firewood, as they were now privately owned under English law. Before the Land Adjudication Acts in Kenya of the 1950s, collecting fuel wood was a free, communal act and there was little or no commercialization of fuel wood or charcoal (Riley & Brokensha, 1988). Further to this, the disruption of a collective land-tenure system and of fallow shifting cultivation interfered with the free access to land use enjoyed by women through their lineage or marriage. Colonialism therefore denied women land and tree rights (Chandler & Njoki, 2002). These changes severely influenced natural resource management, agricultural practices and women's access to fuel wood. They also forced women to deal with severely decreased land supply, use of cash crops for money that was destructive to the soil, and environmental degradation on an unprecedented scale (see Kanogo, 1992). Cash crop farming excluded women, as their own indigenous sustenance economies were destroyed. Consequently, social and economic changes brought about by capitalism eroded the peasant and artisan way of life, in which men and women worked together in the home. Colonial rule left a legacy of dependency, degradation and impoverishment as local home industries, formerly in the hands of women, were destroyed by the import of commodities from England.

Further to this, the British government introduced different types of taxes. The heads of families, mostly men, were required to pay the head tax in monetary terms. Cash economy was a new phenomenon as it marked the beginning of migratory patterns in colonial Kenya. The men moved in search of work in white settler plantations, leaving women behind to care for the family. This migration of men in search of waged labour increasingly placed the responsibilities of local environmental management on women, a task, which according to Maathai (2004a) had traditionally been divided between men and women. Moreover, though women were involved in environmental management, they were alienated from the process of effectively managing these resources as they were not allowed to own natural resources, or land, or make decisions without male consent concerning these resources under British patriarchal rule. Mies (1998) reiterates that the sexism of British colonialism created an atmosphere of patriarchy that left women out of land use deliberation, even though they were in the best position to discuss the importance of land tenure

and management from their individual sociocultural roles in most African societies. British patriarchal colonial rule therefore served to heighten and reinforce gender divisions by preventing women from owning land and managing resources without male consent. This consequently led to the prevention of women from effectively and sustainably managing local natural resources.

Male wage labour and migration produced a new social identity for women as dependent on men. Access to education ensured men's access to cash since wage labour was intended to benefit men. However, women were excluded due to commercialisation of land as they had no access to cash and could not purchase land. Women were then reduced to the status of the dependent housewife. Colonial rule therefore, in my view, manipulated gender divisions in environmental management as it entrenched the division of the *public* and the *private* in economic gender roles. Moreover, women's labour in the home was unpaid and perceived to be subordinate to men's labour in the marketplace. Mies (1998) maintains that western capitalist patriarchal structure owes its wealth to the unpaid labours of women.

Colonization was a process by which male hegemony was instituted and legitimized in African societies, thereby leaving a legacy of a patriarchal state. The colonial state was patriarchal in many ways. For instance, the colonial personnel were male. Arndt (2002) observes that the institutions of direct control of colonial rule such as the military, the judiciary and the administrative services were overwhelmingly masculine. Though both African men and women were conquered and excluded from higher echelons of colonial state structures, African men were represented at the lower levels of government. A few European women were present in professional capacities as nurses but were excluded from administration. African women leaders on the other hand were in no way involved in administration. African women were dominated, exploited and made inferior as Africans together with African men, and then separately marginalized as African women (see also Oyewumi, 1997). Oyewumi (1997) further asserts that socio-economic disadvantage and gender subordination are intertwined. Therefore for women, colonization had a dual imperative: racial inferiority and gender subordination. Oyewumi (1997) continues to argue that the imposition of the European state system and its legal and bureaucratic machinery is the most enduring legacy of European colonial rule in Africa. The Nation state system is a legacy of European traditions of governance and economic organization. In the next section, I therefore examine the legacy of colonial rule on the environment and gender relations in post-colonial Kenya.

3.4 Post -colonial Kenya, environment and gender

According to Emmon (1996) the most destructive aspect of colonialism was the internalization of colonial and capital-centred worldviews by the Kenyan people. The colonial administrators ensured that the indigenous governments who took over the government, embraced capitalist principles of socio-economic organization and would therefore continue supplying Britain with resources and cheap exports. This served to create internal colonies and perpetuate old colonial relationships. The end of the colonial period therefore did not lead to the end of British exploitation of Kenyan resources, human labour and systems of production. Consequently, Kenya has continued to relate with Britain in a way to preserve British capitalist interests and socioeconomic dominance in the global economy (Ahluwalia, 1996; Bates, 1989; Berman & Lonsdale, 1992; Emmon, 1996).

Kenya's postcolonial presidents have been effective in perpetuating capital-based dependency relationships between the North and the South in the postcolonial era. This is evidenced by the economic policies instituted under the Kenyatta and Moi regimes, which favoured foreign investments, foreign ownership of resources and capitalist principles of production and resource exploitation in Kenya. These policies have led to environmental degradation and impoverishment in Kenya. Etkins (1992) corroborates that resource extraction does not benefit indigenous people but the wealthy governments and foreign companies and the elites of the South resulting in great disparities in resource and income distribution (see Githiji, 2000; Ogot & Ochieng, 1995). The diversion of natural resources to market economies then generates a scarcity for ecological stability and creates new forms of poverty (Berman & Lonsdale, 1992; Gertzel, 1970; Hartmann, 2002; Shiva, 1988). Consequently, policies favouring foreign ownership of resources lack sustainable solutions to the problems of the majority of the Kenyan people, especially the ones living in the rural areas.

Rural indigenous women in Kenya continue to experience scarcity in relation to fuel wood procurement for their household use, which includes issues related to significant environmental strain, demanding workloads, health and nutrition concerns and the overlooked specifics of knowledge and use requirements. Deforestation and reforestation of monoculture species⁷ for

⁷In agriculture "monoculture" describes planting and cultivation of a single species over a substantial area, or the practice of relying on a very small number of species for commercial agriculture. The rise of monoculture in modern

purposes of commercial production has led to the diminishing of indigenous forests. This has affected women's ability to maintain a subsistence household. Indigenous trees provide a variety of trees for food, fodder household utensils, dyes, and medicines whereas monoculture species do not (Maathai, 2004a; Warren, 1990).

Demand for wood fuel energy has frequently been cited as the most common cause of deforestation in developing countries, at least as reflected in western literature (see for example, Allen & Barnes, 1985; Cline-Cole *et al*, 1990; Timberlake, 1985). Firewood is estimated to provide 75 per cent of the energy used in sub-Sahara Africa. With such high demand, the consumption of wood as a fuel outstrips the regeneration of forest cover (Allen & Barnes, 1985). Moreover, many family members in rural Kenya who cannot find gainful employment have resorted to charcoal burning. Charcoal burning has consequently contributed gravely to deforestation. However, Fortmann (1996) argues that women do not typically fell trees for fuel wood, but men fell trees for charcoal sales. Fuel wood consumption for household use therefore plays a minor role in deforestation, compared to farming, pasture and grazing land, timber, logging, housing and charcoal production (Riley & Brokensha, 1988).

Reforestation programs and/or tree planting schemes often disseminated through government agricultural extension workers or rural development projects funded by non-governmental agencies attempt to address the fuel wood crisis, but to little avail (Chandler & Njoki, 2002). Maathai (2004a) explains that government foresters insist on using technical terms in teaching the basics of tree planting nursery management to semi-illiterate women. This then makes more difficult for women to implement what they have learnt.

As Jiggins (1994) asserts, in a male dominated world, masculine ideals and definitions are taken as normative and, in the absence of strong female leadership, patterns of male preference reassert themselves in policy, bureaucracy and implementation. In contrast, the women's movement creates management styles and organizational structures that allow for democracy and diversity. These movements have a great impact on socioeconomic dimensions of humans such as the GBM in

agriculture has been the result of improved technology, with machinery for tilling, planting, pest control and harvesting, generally being much cheaper and more efficient than human labour. Monocultures are criticized by ecologists because of their susceptibility to disease and insects, the large amount of chemical inputs often required to sustain them, and lower biodiversity (diversity of life in all its forms and at all levels of organization). Ecological movements advocate for more diverse cropping systems (see Wikipedia, 2006).

Kenya in developing tree nurseries and tree planting campaigns. Indeed, Maathai (2004a) confirms that women, through the GBM, have become innovative in using techniques unacceptable to professional foresters (usually male). Kenyan women have played a major role in tree planting such as establishing exotic wood plantations such as pines, eucalyptus, and cypress which are the basis of the country's timber industry today. Both the colonial and the current education system have promoted exotic biological diversity of trees and crops for rapid economic returns at the expense of indigenous species. The GBM has confronted the challenge to persuade farmers to plant indigenous trees in order to conserve local biodiversity (see Dankelman & Davidson, 1988; Maathai, 2004a).

However, in spite of their great role in tree planting, when it comes to paid employment, women are left with menial and less well paid jobs and are rarely involved in management, ownership or professional positions. The main decision and policy makers are men and hence matters of importance to women are given low priority. In the changes that have taken place such as privatization of land and social, political and economic links to the west, men have been given more sharply defined preferences in the balance of rights and responsibilities (Thomas-Slayter & Rocheleau, 1995). Exclusion of women from the public sphere, a legacy of colonial rule (see Oycwumi, 1997), results in policies in which women's knowledge and their interests are ignored in decision-making and development planning. For instance as Dankelman & Davidson (1988), claim that forest planners have ensured that enough timber is supplied for building and industry but have until recently failed to plan for fuel wood needs.

Chiuri *et al* (1992) suggest that women have been disregarded because their beliefs in sustainable management challenge the capitalist mentality of the concept of nature as a commercial resource, which human beings can exploit to meet their needs. Furthermore, as Dankelman & Davidson (1988) argue, the exclusion of women at policy-making levels is a result of conditioning such that certain types of jobs such as forestry are a male preserve. The consequence is that the current environmental dilemma lies on an imbalanced reliance on masculine values and experience, and the power of patriarchy. Therefore, lasting and effective conservation and development of the environment must involve women who are the primary environmental managers in Kenya as well as their holistic, traditional approaches to natural resource management (Chiuri *et al*, 1992).

The next section further develops the preceding argument by highlighting the involvement of the women's groups in environmental management with specific reference to Maathai and the GBM.

4. WANGARI MAATHAI AND THE GREEN BELT MOVEMENT: ENVIRONMENTAL INTERVENTIONS IN HIGHLIGHTING GENDERED RELATIONS IN KENYA

Kenya's women are currently involved in the process of redefining their identities, their roles and meaning of gender. According to Thomas-Slayter & Rocheleau (1995), this process entails strengthening their sense of human agency individually and through collective action with an emphasis on cooperation, struggle and sometimes resistance. Kenyan women are increasingly involved, not only in activities to manage and expand resources, but in political and social action as well. Local organizations and grassroots movement are seen as central to effective social change and empowerment of women. It is often through women leaders and organizations that women speak out against environmental destruction and advocate for a peaceful and healthy planet. Such organizations and movements focus on practical needs such as provision of water and fuel sources. They also operate in environmental, economic and social arenas. And Maathai and the GBM are at the forefront in advocating for a reorganization of political, social and economic aspects related to women in Kenya.

4.1 The Green Belt Movement

As indicated earlier, the GBM is a grassroots non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Kenya that focuses on environmental conservation, community development and capacity building mainly through a nationwide grassroots tree planting campaign as its core activity. The GBM was conceived and nurtured in the National Council of Women in Kenya (NCWK)⁸ in 1977. The formation was in response to needs identified by Kenyan rural women such as lack of firewood, clean drinking water, balanced diets, shelter and income.

In the following section, I briefly outline the operations of the GBM in response to the needs identified by rural women through its various programmes.

⁸NCWK was formed in 1964 to forge a common front through which common issues and objectives could be promoted, especially those concerning women. NCWK was a forum where African women could meet and discuss their future in post-colonial Kenya. Currently it provides a common forum for action for many of the national women's organizations and groups, both rural and urban (see Maathai, 2004a).

4.1.1 The Green Belt Movement's goals and programmes

The GBM goal is to establish public green belts and fuel wood plots by local people, especially women in the spirit of self-reliance and empowerment as well as to combat soil erosion. The movement over a period of nearly thirty years has mobilized poor women to plant an estimated thirty million trees. Tree planting therefore has served to provide fuel, food, shelter, building materials, fencing material and income to support their children's education through the sale of timber, firewood and fodder. The tree planting activity also creates employment and improves soils and watersheds (Maathai, 2004a).

Furthermore, the GBM has used tree planting as an entry point to community development. Whilst tree planting has always been the central activity, the GBM programmes have expanded to include civic education, advocacy, food security, green belt eco-safaris, and "women for change". In the area of civic education, the GBM has established a pilot civic education and advocacy project to raise public awareness on the need to protect the environment and be active participants in the political process by voting. The GBM Learning Centre in Nairobi offers seminars on good governance, advocacy, culture, environment and environmental justice (Maathai, 2004a).

Through its advocacy programmes, the GBM has initiated advocacy activities since the late 1980s directed towards preventing forest destruction, ending poor governance and ending human rights atrocities such as tribal clashes and corruption. In 1997, the GBM established a Pan-African Green Network to share the GBM approach through two-week training workshops. The overall goal of the programme was to share the approach while raising awareness on the importance of conserving local biodiversity.

"Women for change" is the newest GBM program. Commissioned in early 2003, the program aims to assist, especially young girls and women, to confront the challenges of growing up, such as to make complex decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, and to gain knowledge and skills to protect themselves against HIV and AIDS. The programme also aims to facilitate the establishment of income generating activities such as tree planting, bee keeping and food processing to engender economic empowerment. Tree planting has also been useful in providing a platform for women in leadership. According to Maathai (2004a), through their involvement in the GBM, women gain some degree of power over their lives, especially their social and economic position

and relevance in the family. I direct the next section to Maathai's and the GBM's advocacy activities in highlighting women's issues through environmental interventions.

4.2 Maathai, the Green Belt Movement and women

Maathai (2004a) indicates that, though deprived in various aspects women have gained self-confidence through their work in the GBM. She states that the GBM has trained thousands of women in environmental conservation and management. As a result, some of the women have initiated group projects, for instance revolving funds, while others have become independent leaders and decision-makers capable of addressing community related issues. In speaking about the success of the GBM in relation to women's involvement, Maathai (2004a: 37) highlights her commitment to and leadership of a grassroots, people-based African ecofeminism:

I placed my faith in the rural women of Kenya from the very beginning, and they have been key to the success of the Green Belt Movement. Through this very hands-on method of growing and planting trees, women have seen that they have real choices about whether they are going to sustain and restore the environment or destroy it. In the process of education that takes place when someone joins the Green Belt Movement, women have become aware that planting trees or fighting to save forests from being chopped down is part of a larger mission to create a society that respects democracy, decency, adherence to the rule of law, human rights, and the rights of women. Women also take on leadership roles, running nurseries, working with foresters, planning and implementing community-based projects for water harvesting and food security. All of these experiences contribute to their developing more confidence in themselves and more power over the direction of their lives.

It is worth noting that Maathai states that she has placed her faith in rural women. Ecofeminism as explained earlier in the introduction has been critiqued for homogenizing women by not considering issues such as class and resource content among women. As James (1996) indicates, ecofeminism assumes that all women have the same relationship with the environment and seems not to make a sufficient distinction between the urban women who may be driven by consumerist ethics and rural women who easily identify with nature. Maathai and the GBM as an ecofeminist activism make a departure from this homogenization by identifying a group of rural women and focusing on their needs. However, the word rural is problematic as one cannot define whether rural women are termed as such by their proximity to the urban areas or in terms of their ability to access economic, social and other needs. For instance, it is difficult to classify women living in the slums of Nairobi

city as either urban or rural. Indeed, ecofeminism has also been accused of defining the environment as ecologically based, resulting in a rural bias, hence ignoring the issues of urban areas such as women living in the slums (see Goudie & Kilian, 1996).

Moreover, as Shivji (2005) maintains, the urban and the rural were not originally so but are colonial constructs. Colonial divisions presented the urban as *modern* or metropolitan whereas the rural was presented as *traditional* or customary. The challenge for Africa and indeed Kenya has consequently been to bridge the gap between these colonial divisions. Therefore Maathai and the GBM's focus on the needs of rural women can be described as an African ecofeminist project that highlights a legacy of colonial rule that resulted in the creation of the rural/urban divide which has served to polarize women further. Moreover, the continuing presence of women in agricultural and other rural activities rather than in the professions and other income-generating activities is evidence of the legacy of colonial rule in marginalizing women. Therefore, Maathai and the GBM as an ecological activism provide agency by advocating for women's involvement in community organization given their roles in the agricultural processes, rural livelihood systems and management of natural resources.

Further, women have not only been excluded from the environmental arena but in state decisions as well. As earlier mentioned a generation of feminist theorists has now argued that the state is both capitalist and patriarchal (see Cravey, 1998). Oyewumi (1997) attributes a patriarchal state to the legacy of colonialism. I pick up on the issues by now examining Maathai and the GBM work in challenging a capitalist and patriarchal state and consequently highlighting gendered relations.

4.3 Maathai and the Green Belt Movement in challenging a capitalist and patriarchal state

Maathai, in my view, has been at the forefront in opposing the capitalist mindset of the Kenyan government. As mentioned earlier, the Kenyan government has tended to favour capitalist principles of production and resource exploitation, which benefits few individuals in government and foreign investors. The GBM has been involved in advocacy activities against environmental degradation. One such activity was the effort against the government's decision to construct a multi-million dollar high-rise complex in Uhuru Park in the middle of Nairobi city in 1989. According to

Maathai the construction of the multi million high-rise building would have obliterated much of Uhuru Park, one of Nairobi's largest green belts (Fadahunsi, 2005).

As a result of her opposition to this project, Maathai encountered the wrath of a male dominated Kenyan parliament. The former Kenyan president called her a “mad woman” and accused her of being a puppet of foreign masters and a threat to the order and the security of the country (Mbaria, 2004). The government censured the GBM and it was denounced as “subversive” with its members being described as a group of “ill-informed divorcees” (Nzomo, 1997). Many male parliamentarians ridiculed Maathai as a frustrated divorcee⁹ who had no credentials to challenge a state decision. According to Davison (1996:7) the then president, Daniel Arap Moi declared that it was “un-African and unimaginable for a woman to challenge or oppose men”. President Moi held the opinion that male authority was divinely determined and should therefore not be challenged. Further to this, Maathai was also criticized by other women from the ruling party who denounced her as a violator of African tradition for refusing to be submissive. Kenyan traditional societies are patriarchal with the man being regarded as the head and the woman being expected to be subservient. According to Toroitich (2004), in almost every Kenyan culture, the female is seen as inferior and always ranked among children. Since women and children are considered lesser beings, they are required to serve the men. Men on the other hand are seen as authoritative decision makers in the private and public spheres whose authority is not to be questioned (Kenya Country Gender Profile, 1994). Women who dare challenge this ‘norm’ are usually assaulted in order to keep them out of the public sphere as is demonstrated by the opposition faced by Maathai in her GBM advocacy activities.

More so, divorce is culturally stigmatised and a divorced woman in Kenyan society is considered a disgrace, someone who lacks social respectability in contrast to a ‘decent’ woman who is expected to uphold her marriage at all costs. Evidence of gender inequality can be seen from the fact that though President Moi was separated and eventually divorced from his wife, this information was never used against him in his political career. However, Maathai in her advocacy work would be dismissed on account of her marital status.

⁹Maathai's former husband is said to have divorced her on the grounds that she was “too educated, too strong, too successful, too stubborn and too hard to control”. The Kenyan society advances that the typical African woman is supposed to be dependent, submissive and not better than her husband (Fadahunsi, 2005).

During this time, some parliamentarians went further to threaten Maathai with female genital mutilation¹⁰. Mbaria (2004) indicates that Maathai, in dismissing threats by a Member of Parliament who threatened to circumcise her if she set foot in his constituency, replied:

I'm sick and tired of men who are so incompetent that every time they feel the heat because women are challenging them, they have to check their genitalia to reassure themselves. I'm not interested in that part of the anatomy. The issues I'm dealing with require the utilization of the anatomy of whatever lies above the neck. If you don't have anything there, leave me alone.

Maathai refers to men reassuring themselves through their male genitalia. The meaning of the penis as a phallic symbol is meant to represent male generative powers. Men are positioned as men insofar as they are seen to have the phallus. The symbolic phallus is the concept of being the ultimate man. In cultural terms, phallocentrism is used to describe a male-centred doctrine or behaviour sometimes referred to as patriarchy (see Pettigrew & Raffoul, 1996). Salleh (1988), in his examination of patriarchal conceptual frameworks indicates that women are usually associated with the body and men with the mind and reason.

It is instructive to note that biological differences are of major importance when it comes to guaranteeing patriarchal social structure from the sexual division of labour to forms of femininity and women's positioning society (Weedon, 1987). Though Maathai had greater academic and professional credentials than most of her male counterparts in the Kenyan parliament who criticized her, they preferred to deal with her not on the basis of her intellectual capacity, but rather as a woman who in the Kenyan patriarchal society is supposed to be subordinate to a man.

However, Maathai deconstructs the dualities of mind versus body and man versus woman respectively by saying that she prefers to engage in the realm of reason. Indeed Maathai's academic and professional qualifications as mentioned earlier have continued to challenge the norms of the Kenyan patriarchal society which associate men with the mind and reason, and women with emotion and irrationality. This serves to deconstruct the essentialism in ecofeminism as presented

¹⁰Female genital mutilation is also referred to as female circumcision, genital cutting or excision. It is a coming of age ritual that signifies a girl's entry into womanhood. It involves partial or total excision of the external female genitalia. It is performed by a female elder using a razor, a knife or a piece of glass usually without anaesthetic while several women hold the girl down. The process is painful, robs the girl of her sexual pleasure and frequently causes medical problems such as haemorrhaging, infection, urinary incontinence, infertility and complications at childbirth. Genital cutting is seen as a way of ensuring that a woman is clean, chaste and ready for marriage. Uncut women are associated with promiscuity and viewed as women who lack social respectability (see Abusharaf, 2001; Boyle, 2002).

by ecofeminists such as Shiva (1988) who, as mentioned earlier, talks of the feminine principle emanating from the female body. Maathai's GBM suggests instead a correspondence with Alaimo (1994) rather than an identification between women and nature in respect of Shiva (1988) (see also 2.1). Therefore Maathai, through her GBM offers the possibility of agency for women in ecological activism. Further, Maathai and her work with the GBM underscores an African feminist ecological activism that resists Kenyan patriarchal oppression of women, which is entrenched within culture as well as within capitalist patriarchy, a legacy of colonialism.

Ecofeminism in Africa is constituted around issues concerning the legacy of colonialism in African culture such as changing land tenure patterns and the impact of colonial policies on women's right to land. The next section motivates Maathai's work in relation to issues of land and gender in Kenya.

4.4 Maathai, land, conflict and gender in Kenya

Land issues in Kenya are complex and can be traced back to historical circumstances namely colonialism. As stated earlier, during British colonial rule the British government formally annexed Kenyan land. Customary land tenure holders consequently lost their land to individual or private registered landholders. Conflict concerning resources such as land can therefore be traced to the historical circumstances of colonialism and may be identified in the form of squatters, ethnic boundaries and land clashes (see Berman & Lonsdale, 1992; Pettigrew & Rafoul, 1996; Shaw, 1995). This is evident in the case of the land clashes that rocked various parts of western Kenya and the Rift Valley in 1993 between differing ethnic communities. During this time, Maathai challenged the government through organizing victims of the violence. Through the GBM, she used the tree as a symbol of peace and conflict resolution during the ethnic conflicts to reconcile disputing communities. Maathai (2004a) claims that mismanagement of the environment due to undemocratic practices leads to conflict over scarce resources and the abuse of human rights. In Maathai's view, it is always the women who shoulder the main burden of poverty and conflict.

The situation is complicated further by the fact that worldwide, and especially in the developing world, women have unequal rights and insecure access to land and other natural resources in spite of their role in conservation, use and management of natural resources. The integration of women in environmental management therefore cannot be attained without examining the gendered relations

in land issues. In the next section I turn to the issue of gender relations and land issues in Kenya more specifically.

4.4.1 Gender and land issues in Kenya

Gender relations in Kenya, as I have maintained so far, have been characterised by inequitable and discriminatory practices against women. These practices are embodied within legal and administrative frameworks in government as well as in customs and traditions of the various ethnic communities. One of the most pronounced aspects of gender discrimination is in the area of resource allocation and management. According to the Kenya Land Alliance (2002), women play a pivotal role in agricultural development in Kenya, which is the backbone of Kenya's economy. Women work more than men by providing 80% -90% of labour in subsistence production and over 70% of labour in cash crop production. However, less than 5% of the land is registered in the names of women. Land tenure is such that title deeds in Kenya's patriarchal set up are allocated in the name of heads of families who are usually men. Titled land is a gendered issue because land is transferred to male individuals such as husbands, fathers and sons without provision for women's access to such rights and privileges. Registered land titles in an individual male's name means that in a liberalized land market, the man may sell the land without consulting his family or community members.

Culture and customs continue to support and reinforce patrilineal inheritance and male control and decision-making, hence excluding women from rights to inherit land. Due to unequal power relations in the family, most matrimonial property is registered in the name of a male spouse. Also, land distribution to the landless or to resettlement schemes often leaves women out in favour of male heads of households. Moreover, existing institutions such as land committees, land arbitrators and land boards are dominated by men. Consequently, women's representation in such structures is limited (Kenya Land Alliance, 2002).

Clearly then, the empowerment of women to become stakeholders in the reform of land policies is the only way women can be involved in transforming land and other natural resources into assets that sustain ecological as well as national economic viability. Maathai claims that when resources are wasted and not shared equally, it is a violation of human rights (see Van der Walt, 2005). Therefore, as the Kenya Land Alliance (2002) indicates, there has to be the full participation of all

people in the fundamental decisions that affect their daily lives, such as land ownership, management and use.

To this effect, Maathai and the GBM's ecological activism in an African feminist perspective, advocates for and educates people about human rights and democracy. The next section examines Maathai and the GBM advocacy work for democratic reform.

4.5 Maathai, democratic reform and gender

The GBM, as explained so far, represents an ecological activism within an African feminist model in the struggle to participate in Kenya's democratic structures as well as in highlighting environmental issues. This is evident in the use of tree planting to motivate democratic reform. Indeed, in her Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech Maathai (2004b), confirms that although initially the GBM's tree planting activities did not address issues of democracy and peace, it soon became apparent that responsible governance of the environment was impossible without democratic change and reform.

This is most noticeable in the case where the GBM in 1992 gave support to the mothers of political prisoners who demonstrated in Uhuru Park for the release of their sons. Their sons had been jailed for advocating for democracy, better management of resources, an end to corruption and the introduction of a multiparty political system in order to develop democratic space. Trees of peace were planted at Nairobi's Uhuru Park, at Freedom Corner, and in many parts of the country to demand the release of prisoners of conscience and a peaceful transition to democracy (Maathai, 2004a).

Women's determination and courage was equally visible as they launched a hunger strike and set up a camp in Uhuru Park at a corner they named the 'freedom corner' to demand for the release of their sons. Most of these women were rural women, with some being illiterate. Four days after the women commenced their strike, the government decided to break up the camp and the women were violently beaten up. The beating continued even after the women, who were unarmed, defended themselves by stripping naked, an act that is believed in some Kenyan cultures to bring on a curse (Maathai, 2004a). Mikell (1997) corroborates that African women use cultural practices that they feel will empower them. From this account, it is evident that women's recourse to old customary

methods of shaming men into socially appropriate behaviour is a reflection of women's increased vulnerability as they protest against the oppressive policies of their governments. The women's hunger strike raised the people's awareness of political prisoners and the need to stop human rights violations in democratizing societies. Most importantly, the strike confirmed women's ability to persevere in pursuit of a strongly felt cause, despite the reality of violent opposition from the male leaders.

Kenyan male leaders for the large part exhibit resistance in responding to women's political demands as shown by the breaking up of the camp at Uhuru Park and torturing of the women. Male politicians perceive the pressure to democratize and open up public participation to women as externally derived (in other words, a western and foreign influence), and as one that produces female responses that do not stem from indigenous Kenyan experiences and gender roles. Indeed, African male leaders also feel the pressure to rewrite political agendas to encourage pluralism and to include the interests of women, the impoverished and other diverse groups as derived from advanced western states (see Mikell, 1997). African women therefore have to tread the delicate balance between trying to achieve greater public representation for themselves while supporting the rights of African states to be autonomous decision makers. Maathai and the GBM can then be seen as an African ecofeminist activism in their bid to advocate for democracy in Kenya's political and economic structures while still resisting western imperialism. In the following section, I examine Maathai in relation to political involvement and gender.

4.6 Maathai, political involvement and gender

Based on the experiences of Maathai and women in the GBM, it would seem that Kenyan women have had difficulty in entering patriarchal decision-making structures. African women face the challenge of trying to achieve a consensus amongst themselves on how to respond to the persistent gender hierarchy in ways that are personally liberating as well as politically positive (see Mikell, 1997). Involvement in organizations such as the GBM has enabled women to meet critical domestic needs as well as to meet the challenge of increased involvement in the market and cash economy. This is by their collective labour through which they can generate income for the group members through revolving credit schemes and by providing required labour inputs for their own farms at peak times in the agricultural cycle.

However, though women organizations are strong in managing particular resources, they are lacking in terms of obtaining access to the national political system. The Kenyan constitution assures equal political rights for women but there is a conspicuous absence of women in decision-making positions in the government. Politics within Kenya remains entrapped by western constructions of institutions and the practice of politics (see Ahluwalia, 1996; Nzomo, 1997; Thomas-Slayter & Rocheleau, 1995). As earlier mentioned, the state inherited the public and private separation. Consequently, most major institutions and bureaucracies of modern states tend to be male dominated. Men's ideological perceptions still frame women as supportive, nurturing, submissive, subordinate and domestic, not as political persons or authority figures. This systematic representation of women as unfit to hold decision-making positions has been used to keep women powerless and to justify the perpetuation of their subordination and exploitation (Toroitich, 2004).

Male politicians and the ruling parties effectively co-opt the conservative leaders within women organizations while marginalizing the radical ones. For instance the national women's movement organization, *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* (The Progress of Women) was co-opted by the previous Kanu regime and was for some time named *Kanu/Maendeleo ya Wanawake* (see Aubrey, 1997; Nzomo, 1997). The co-option of women's groups is expected to show that women's acceptance of subordinate private roles should inform them in their public roles.

In view of the existing barriers to African women's participation, Kenyan women have employed informal as well as formal channels of political expression in dealing with successive states and governments. Maathai for a long time chose to work outside the state apparatus. Maathai and the GBM can therefore be seen to be representative of the ecological movement, which believes that a reorganization of the political, social and economic system would be more effective as opposed to environmentalism, which merely prioritizes green issues within existing political and economic structures. The GBM therefore can be seen to provide agency for women in the earth struggles. This, as explained, is evident in Maathai's fight for the introduction of a multiparty system in Kenya as opposed to a state with one-party rule.

Indeed, in 1997 in the second multiparty elections, Maathai decided to challenge the system once more by running for the Kenyan presidency. She was not only harassed, but she was displaced from the race when false reports (perhaps propaganda) of her withdrawal were widely distributed. However, in December 2002, Maathai was elected to parliament with an overwhelming 98% of the

vote after Mwai Kibaki defeated Maathai's long-time political nemesis, Daniel Arap Moi. She was subsequently appointed Assistant Minister for the Environment, Natural Resources and Wildlife in Kenya's ninth parliament. It is important to note that even with her academic and professional qualifications; she was still not appointed to a full ministerial post. Instead a male member of a leading party in the coalition government who had no background in environmental issues was appointed to the post for the sake of regional and political expediency.

Therefore, Kenyan women are quite conversant with the struggle to overcome gender hierarchies. Mikell (1997) explains that African women grapple with various issues. On the one hand they have to deal with how to affirm their own identities while transforming societal notions of gender and familial roles. On the other hand they are concerned about economic and political troubles facing their communities and nations. The economic and political crisis facing Africa, has its roots in distorted political economies and policies inherited from the colonial period such as replacement of subsistence farming by commercial farming. African women have borne the brunt of these crises as is evidenced by their lower status relative to that of men for instance in educational levels. Western economists and political advisers have consequently used the statistical evidence of African women's status as proof of the absence of women in development and as an indicator of the areas in which these societies need to change. It would appear, based on the work of Maathai and the GBM, that the type of African ecofeminism advanced, is strongly rooted in development, if not sustainable development. It is this that I briefly turn to.

5. WANGARI MAATHAI AND THE GREEN BELT MOVEMENT: DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND GENDER

5.1 Maathai, development, environment and gender

Njiro (1999) explains development as involving the dynamic process of improving human life through systematic changes geared at the betterment of human life that involves individuals as well as societies. On the other hand, Shiva (1988) describes development is a post-colonial project based on a western style of progress that is defined as access to the market economy and capitalism. Capitalist growth is not possible without colonies and therefore development is a continuation of the process of colonization. Consequently, as Maathai (2004) reiterates, development is still perceived as extensive farming of cash crops, expensive hydroelectric dams, hotels, supermarkets, and luxury

items, which plunder human resourcefulness and natural resources. Therefore, the growth and development model in the rich industrialized countries in the west is based on a colonial world order basically of exploitation by colonial capital (see also Gilson, 2005).

Dominant, western concepts of economic development and natural resource utilization were elevated to the level of universal applicability and hence applied in a different context of newly independent third world countries (Shiva, 1988). Consequently, development has been seen to consist of modernizing the traditional society (see Snyder & Tadese, 1995). Shivji(2005) points out that the dominance of the modernization paradigm was challenged by young academics coming out of post-independence universities. The traditional, they argued, was not quite traditional, nor the modern quite modern; rather both belonged to the system of international capitalism which reproduced development in the urban areas and underdevelopment in the rural areas (see Shivji, 2005).

As Shiva (1988) argues, science and development are not universal categories of progress but are special projects of modern western patriarchy. This development comes with its own hierarchy and hegemony as evidenced by words such as advanced/less advanced and developed/underdeveloped. For example people are seen as poor (or less advanced) if they eat millets (grown by women and nutritionally superior) rather than commercially produced and distributed processed foods sold by global agri-business. The fact that subsistence farming does not participate greatly in the market economy has led to the perception that subsistence living is poverty. This perception has legitimized the development process as a poverty removal project (Shiva, 1988).

It is instructive to note that this growth model of development neglects women's work, which cannot be counted in the gross domestic product (GDP). For example, Boserup (1970), in documenting how women's impoverishment increased during colonial rule points out that women have been left out due to industrialization and import substitution policies. Further to this, a market driven capitalist development has led to policies such as privatization of public industries, trade liberalization, foreign investments and mergers. This has led to increasing concentration of capital in large multi national corporations resulting in a shift towards more globalised economies. In countries with high levels of foreign debt, these policies have been implemented in the form of structural adjustment programs in order to deal with the debt burden and debt repayment (see Agonafer, 1994; Ahluwalia, 1996; Bates, 1989; Beneria, 2003; Ogot & Ochieng, 1995).

The burden of adjustment to structural adjustment policies has not been equally distributed among the population and has not been gender neutral either. Gender dimensions of the costs of adjustment include intensification of women's domestic work and the interruption of children's education and especially for girls as well as an increase of women's labour force participation in informal work (see Beneria, 2003:50). For instance, according to Beneria (2003:117), in 1998 in Kenya the percentage of women in employment in the informal sector was 60.3%. Earnings in the informal sector are lower than the formal sector, with no consistency in work contracts. Due to their limited mobility and narrower range of options in the labour market, women work in lower cadre levels offering greater labour force security for firms at lower wages. Globalization has also had a negative impact on job opportunities. This can be seen in the case of the widespread retrenchment of nationals, particularly women who occupy low cadre jobs. The western paradigm of development has therefore served to marginalize African women in a global economy.

Nevertheless, what has probably redefined the African woman the most is her investment in local level development. The crisis of development and the shrinkage of the African state have inevitably propelled women into the development stage as key actors. Women's main platform has been the local level self-help groups, which in a sense have become the lifeblood of development processes in rural Africa. For instance, the GBM, through tree planting as an African ecofeminist activism has demonstrated women's capacity to play leading roles in communal, regional and national development. The women from the global South can therefore be seen to formulate their own ideas regarding women's development within the framework of an alternative development model. As seen from experiences of the women in the global South, modes of action attributed to science and development are not universal but are projects of male western origin historically as well as ideologically (see Shiva, 1988). Maathai and the GBM however have been at the forefront in resisting western imperialism by advocating for indigenous Kenyan systems, which lead to the protection of indigenous local biodiversity and sustainability. For instance, the GBM is involved in educating farmers on sustainable farming methods such as organic farming to maintain soil fertility instead of using chemical fertilizers, which inhibit the regenerative capacity of the soil (see Maathai, 2004a). Given the fact that 'development' is key to the work of the GBM, in the penultimate section of the argument I consider how sustainable development is advanced in the work of the organisation.

5.2 Maathai, sustainable development, environment and gender

The Norwegian Nobel Committee, in deciding to award the Nobel Peace Prize for 2004 to Maathai, based their decision on her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace. These three key descriptors highlight to a large extent her achievements. In her acceptance speech, Maathai (2004b) asserted that there can be no development without sustainable management of the environment. Thomas-Slayter & Rocheleau (1995) recount that, from the mid 1960's the government of Kenya recognized the importance of its natural resource base. This is reflected by the location of both the UN Environment Program (UNEP) and Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI) in Nairobi. However, the 1980s have been characterised as "a lost development decade" in Kenya with unsustainable development, increasing deforestation, desertification, degradation of soils, depletion of wildlife, reduction of biodiversity and escalation of industrial pollution (see Maathai, 2004a; Thomas-Slayter & Rocheleau, 1995).

The focus is now on sustainable development and ways to link sustainable environmental use with socioeconomic development and responsibility of the present generation for the welfare of future generations (see Braidotti *et al*, 1994). Jommo (1993) argues that strategies towards sustainable development should begin at the indigenous knowledge base of grassroots communities with women being acknowledged as important repositories of this knowledge (see also Brienes, Gieryz & Reardon, 1999). This has consequently led to the women in development (WID) approach which advocates for the recognition and valuing of women's work, both unpaid economic activity and domestic tasks (see Bullock (1994). However, as can be seen in the case of the GBM, women specific programmes encounter male resistance. In some cases this can be a threat to the success of women's projects and development in male dominated societies especially in Africa where women are seen as subordinate.

Therefore, the Gender and development (GAD) approach has come to replace an approach that was focused on women alone separated from the social and economic systems to which they belong. As Pearson (1993:292) warns, "[...] we cannot think in terms of analyzing development and then looking at its effect on women [...]. All policies, however technical or neutral they appear to be, will have gendered implications." Gender sensitive policies are therefore needed in order to incorporate women's issues into mainstream policy as opposed to treating them as separate issues.

Indeed Maathai (2004a) concurs by asserting that policies that target women only cannot achieve the best results, but that the involvement of men is essential. In an interview with Africa Renewal (2004), Maathai indicated that gender equality is essential for countries' economies and the success of development initiatives. Further, at the second UN World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985, a series of workshops on 'Women, Environment and Development' concluded that the growth of women's power and sustainability of development are ecologically related, thereby linking gender, environment and sustainable development (see Women Watch, 1997).

Therefore as Gourdie & Killian (1996) point out, gender is a pre-requisite for sustainable decisions and as Patel (1996) reiterates, to promote sustainable development, policies must ensure gender equality in all aspects of society, including promotion of women's literacy, education, training, nutrition and health (see also Pearson, 1993).

However, the concept of sustainable development still faces challenges in a growth-oriented industrial, world market system (see Khosla, 2002; Loots, 2004; Loots & Witt, 2005; Mies, 1986; Njiro, 2002). Bond (2002) indicates that, the sustainable development discourse is underpinned by material interest and political power. Therefore, the failure of sustainable development in Africa can be linked to existing power relations that privilege the elite and companies through the capitalist mode of production. Global structures such as the United Nations have failed to achieve sustainable development by transferring global governance and power into the hands of a few, mostly men, based in industrialized countries. Indeed, Maathai (2004a) confirms that that the crises in the development process of Africa are due to dealing with it from the perspective of the leaders at the top rather than at the grassroots level. She has therefore been critical of the manner in which western governments have dispensed aid to developing countries, to governments which are corrupt and squander resources that ought to be improving the lives of ordinary people. Etkins (1992) and George (1992) concur by stating that in the third world, 'bad aid' destroys self-sufficiency and the basis for good aid consequently leading to hunger and poverty.

For women, Jiggins(1994) argues that, a sustainable world is one in which societies address issues of excessive consumption, expenditures for destruction, and inequities based on class, race, gender, or ethnicity. Maathai has been involved in advocacy for the change of consumption patterns and on lifestyles that embrace new values such as self-sufficiency instead of dependency, cooperation instead of competitiveness, respect for all creatures and creativity (see Pambazuka News, 2005).

The living standards and consumption patterns of the rich countries of the North continue to be high because of the colonized South and the continuation of its exploitation of cheap labour and resources (see Maathai, 2004a; Mies, 1993). Towards this end, the GBM was involved in the Jubilee 2000 campaign which continues to advocate for the cancellation of the unpayable debts of the less developed countries, many of which are in Africa, who owe to the rich in the North (see, Maathai, 2004a). Therefore, a definition of sustainability that encompasses principles of social and economic justice can contribute to a more productive dialogue among nations as they discuss population and development issues (see Jiggins, 1994).

Further, the implementation of sustainable development continues to be gendered. For instance, in the case of energy, the sustainable development model expects the rural poor to use renewable sources of energy such as expensive solar technology, which meets the need for lighting but fails to meet the basic need for heat for cooking. Lighting enables the use of radios and televisions, thereby privileging men since as a result of different gender roles; they have the luxury of recreation. Women's needs for cooking fuel on the other hand are left unmet (Annecke, 2002). However, the GBM as an ecological activism has used tree planting to provide the Kenyan rural woman with a reliable fuel source.

Maathai and her GBM therefore demonstrate a resistance to dominant western paradigms which necessitate the plunder of both human and natural resources in the global South while also highlighting the gendered nature of the implementation of western paradigms. The GBM as I have maintained throughout this study, is representative of an African ecofeminist activism in challenging capitalist patriarchy at both national and global ideological structures by advocating for a change in the consumption patterns of the North.

6. CONCLUSIONS

As stated in the introduction, this study prioritized Maathai and the GBM in rethinking a western understanding of ecofeminism. As mentioned earlier, ecofeminism/s has mostly been articulated mostly by western scholars (see for example Gaard, 1993; Merchant, 1980; Salleh, 1988 and Warren, 1987). Within their scholarship, there has been the tendency to view women as a homogenous group (see Goudie and Kilian, 1996 and James, 1996). This study questioned the

homogenising imperative of western scholarship by examining Maathai and the GBM in highlighting issues concerning the specific Kenyan context. This was achieved by interrogating the impact of specific historical experiences such as industrialization, colonial hegemony, economic exploitation and urbanization on the environment and Kenyan women via secondary literature. The study focused on the impact of colonial policies on women's roles in food production, changing land tenure patterns, on women's right to land, the marginalizing impact of commercialization and commodity production on Kenyan women.

As detailed in the study, these experiences create ecological stress and a variety of social problems. These social problems place a heavy burden on the rural Kenyan household, especially on women because they play a predominant role in the management and use of natural resources at the grassroots level. Women of the global South as earlier mentioned approach environmental issues from a perspective of poverty and day-to-day domestic problems. In specific Kenyan women face problems such as overgrazing, desertification and soil erosion resulting in their walking longer distances in search of fuel wood and clean water something that many western women have not had to face (see Annabel, 1991). The west can therefore not speak for the environmental issues of the South and more specifically Kenya.

Increasingly as exemplified by organisations such as the GBM, Kenya's rural women are the agents of change. As mentioned in the introduction of this article, ecofeminism conceives women as having the potential to bring about ecological change (Warren, 1990). Indeed, the GBM can be viewed as an ecofeminist activism due to its initiative of mobilizing rural women to plant trees. However, ecofeminism may be also seen as essentializing women by emphasizing their close association with nature. This article has therefore questioned the essentialising nature of ecofeminism from a gender perspective. As mentioned earlier, gender is a social construct and is shaped by historical and material conditions, This study has therefore sought to briefly distinguish between women's gender identities in the west and women's gender identities in Kenya by situating indigenous Kenyan women in complex interrelationships among indigenous knowledge and innovations, colonial and postcolonial education and development practices, African state and the global environmental crisis.

Maathai and the GBM have distinguished themselves from the feminist movement, which is seen as elitist by identifying with the needs of the rural Kenyan women. As the Norwegian Nobel Committee put it, Maathai “thinks globally and acts locally”(Norwegian Nobel Committee, 2004). Kenyan women, as shown, are not a homogenous group. The GBM has demonstrated through its tree planting activities that they do not simply offer a critique of capitalism and western feminism, but they also advance an emancipatory politics, which is goal- oriented and pro-active.

Through tree planting the GBM has sought to empower women, improve the environment and fight corruption. Further the GBM has advocated for a return to indigenous systems which protect indigenous biological biodiversity, knowledge, practices and wisdom and which ensure sustainability. As Braidotti, *et al* (1994) argue, sustainability involves including rural African women’s voices into the discourse without reductionism, essentialism or paternalism in practical or theoretical terms in order to document the value of indigenous practices, as gendered and ecological spaces and to reinvent sustainability. This calls for an integration of gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development. Gender matters in the context of sustainable resources because the responsibilities of managing resources are designated according to gender. Throughout the world, especially in non-industrialized countries, there is gender differentiation relative to the management of natural resources (see Mohammed, 1991; Steady, 1993).

Gender relations are therefore crucial to understanding the impact on the environment. Further, gender shapes the opportunities and constraints women and men face in securing viable livelihoods and strong communities across cultural, political, economic and ecological settings. There is also a need to strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women. An understanding of gender therefore enables planners to find more effective and equitable ways of managing natural resources for building productive rural livelihood systems (Pearson, 1993).

The GBM makes connections between environmentalism, feminism, democratization, and human rights advocacy. The conception of the environment determines the perception of environmental problems. Environmental problems are in turn linked to the developmental process such as lack of fuel and safe water supplies (Patel, 1996). The environmental agenda therefore links between the

cycle of poverty, resource depletion and environmental degradation. As mentioned earlier environmental degradation and resource depletion affects women the most since they are involved in the daily management of environmental resources. Sustainable development is therefore not possible without equity. Governance for sustainable development includes proportional participation of all citizens at all levels of decision-making. Clearly therefore, sustainable development is not possible without a reorganization of socio-political structures. The GBM has been actively involved in advocating for a reorganization of political, social and economic aspects related to women in Kenya.

In closure, Maathai's work in the GBM advances a radical, socialist politics to challenge the social structures that result in the downgrading of the earth and its resources. Her work (through her activism and writings) demonstrate an African feminist discourse as it represents at one level a grassroots effort dealing with a reorganization of political, social and economic aspects related to women in Kenya. At another level, the strategies, tactics and programmes of the GBM clearly show evidence of a type of engagement with and conceptualisation of African ecodevelopment that positions women, class and the protection of the environment as integrated elements in the struggle for sustainable development in the democratic process.

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