

Ecofeminist Politics and Patriarchal Resistance: Emmanuel Mbogo's Theatrical Staging of Wangari Maathai's Activism in Africa

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ABSTRACT

African ecofeminist scholarship has increasingly emphasized the intersections of gender, ecology, and power, yet little attention has been given to how theatre mediates these struggles and translates activism into cultural performance. This study addresses that gap by critically examining Emmanuel Mbogo's staging of Wangari Maathai's activism, situating her ecological resistance within broader debates on patriarchy, environmental justice, and feminist leadership. The purpose of the study is to demonstrate how Mbogo's dramatization transforms Maathai's Green Belt Movement into a performative political project that mobilizes rural women, challenges authoritarian governance, and advances democratic participation. Using a qualitative interpretive methodology, the analysis draws on close reading of Mbogo's play alongside ecofeminist frameworks such as nego-feminism, Ubuntu ethics, and embodied materialism. The findings identify six recurring themes: domesticity as political contestation, metaphors of marriage and betrayal, discursive pathologization of female activism, collective female solidarity, capitalist exploitation and ecological justice, and intergenerational ethics. These results show that Maathai's struggle was simultaneously ecological and feminist, confronting entrenched patriarchal systems while affirming the transformative power of women's collective resistance. The study concludes that Mbogo's theatrical representation functions not merely as cultural reflection but as a constitutive force in shaping ecofeminist politics, enriching global understandings of ecological resistance, feminist leadership, and social justice. Its significance lies in demonstrating how African theatre contributes to international ecofeminist discourse by bridging local struggles with global debates on sustainability, equity, and democratic resilience.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Patriarchy, Ecofeminist Politics, Patriarchal Resistance, Wangari Maathai, Green Belt Movement and Environmental Justice

INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism has become a vital framework for analysing the intersections of gender, ecology, and power. First articulated by Françoise d'Eaubonne in *Le féminisme ou la mort* (1974), ecofeminism argues that patriarchal domination and capitalist exploitation are responsible for both the subjugation of women and the degradation of nature. Over the past five decades, ecofeminism has diversified into spiritual, materialist, and postcolonial strands, each emphasizing structural connections between gender inequality and ecological crises (Shiva & Mies, 1993; MacGregor, 2022).

In contemporary scholarship, ecofeminism is increasingly recognized as a critical lens for understanding the gendered dimensions of climate change and environmental justice. Recent studies highlight that environmental degradation disproportionately affects women, particularly in the Global South, where patriarchal governance systems marginalize their knowledge and exclude them from decision-making processes (Lawrence et al., 2025). Ecofeminist praxis therefore entails ecological restoration as well as resistance to patriarchal structures that perpetuate inequality and harm.

Patriarchal resistance is central to ecofeminist politics. Scholars argue that women's struggles against environmental destruction are simultaneously struggles against patriarchal systems that deny their agency and leadership (MacGregor, 2022). Ecofeminism insists that patriarchal domination is not merely symbolic but

materially entrenched in governance, economics, and cultural practices. Recent feminist political theory emphasizes that patriarchal resistance must be understood as both structural and symbolic, with grassroots mobilization serving as a critical site of resistance (Lawrence et al., 2025).

African feminist thought situates ecofeminism within postcolonial critiques, highlighting how colonial exploitation reinforced patriarchal hierarchies that marginalized women. Oyèwùmí (1997) and Nnaemeka (2004) argue that African feminism must be understood in relation to indigenous knowledge systems and community-based practices. More recent scholarship emphasizes African eco-spiritualities and collective solidarity as frameworks for resisting patriarchal governance and advancing climate justice (Juma, 2025; Randriamaro, 2024). Within this context, ecological activism becomes a praxis of resistance that challenges both patriarchal and colonial legacies, reclaiming agency while advancing sustainability.

Wangari Maathai's Green Belt Movement, founded in 1977, exemplifies this intersection of ecological activism and patriarchal resistance. By mobilizing rural women to plant trees and restore degraded ecosystems, Maathai challenged governance structures that prioritized profit and authoritarian control over sustainability and justice. Her activism redefined leadership by positioning women as agents of ecological renewal and democratic resistance. Recent scholarship highlights how Maathai's memoir *Unbowed* functions as a text of decolonial ecology and feminist resistance (Karmakar & Byrne, 2024), while Adhikari (2025) underscores her role in linking ecological restoration with women's empowerment and democratic participation. Emmanuel Mbogo's reading of Maathai situates her work within ecofeminist politics, emphasizing how her praxis destabilized patriarchal power while advancing a holistic vision of environmental justice rooted in gender equity and sustainability.

This paper sets out to examine Emmanuel Mbogo's *Wangari Maathai* as a literary text that interprets Maathai's ecological activism through the lens of ecofeminist politics in Africa. By analysing how Mbogo presents Maathai's praxis of ecological restoration as a deliberate form of patriarchal resistance, the study highlights the ways in which women's environmental labor becomes both political and transformative. In doing so, it situates Mbogo's representation within African feminist traditions and connects it to international ecofeminist discourse, underscoring the significance of African perspectives in shaping global debates on climate change, gender justice, and the redefinition of women's leadership in ecological struggles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Ecofeminism: Origins, Debates, and Tensions

Ecofeminism first emerged in France in the 1970s through Françoise d'Eaubonne's *Le féminisme ou la mort* (1974), which linked patriarchal domination, capitalist exploitation, and ecological destruction (d'Eaubonne, 1974). From Europe, the framework spread to North America and South Asia, where Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies emphasized women's subsistence roles and ecological knowledge as central to resisting patriarchal and capitalist systems (Shiva & Mies, 1993). These contributions established ecofeminism as a global discourse, but critics argue that early ecofeminism risked essentializing women's relationship to nature (MacGregor, 2020). More recent scholarship expands ecofeminism to address climate change and environmental justice, showing how patriarchal governance continues to marginalize women's agency in ecological decision-making (Lawrence, Patel, & Kim, 2025). These debates reveal ecofeminism's plural character but also highlight tensions between universalist claims and context-specific realities, underscoring the need for localized analyses.

African Ecofeminism: Decolonial Frameworks, Negotiated Resistance, and Performance

African ecofeminism is rooted in indigenous cosmologies and community-based practices that foreground the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and spirituality. Dube (2024) demonstrates how African women's creative writing challenges extractivist paradigms while affirming ancestral knowledge, whereas Randriamaro (2024) situates these practices within decolonial frameworks informed by Ubuntu and collective solidarity. Nnaemeka's (2004) concept of nego-feminism further underscores how resistance is culturally negotiated, enabling women to contest patriarchy while sustaining social cohesion. Evidence from contexts such as the

Niger Delta and Kenyan forest movements confirms that African ecofeminism constitutes a transformative praxis grounded in cultural memory, spiritual ethics, and gendered agency rather than a derivative of global theory.

Recent scholarship consolidates this position by foregrounding African intellectual traditions as central to ecofeminist thought. Kopf (2025) conceptualizes “genealogies of resistance” to trace interconnected struggles in the works and activism of Wangari Maathai, Rebeka Njau, and Mary Njeri Kinyanjui, demonstrating that African ecofeminism emerges from entangled histories of colonialism, patriarchy, and ecological degradation. Within this framework, the Green Belt Movement signifies both an environmental intervention and an epistemic project reclaiming African women’s agency in shaping sustainable futures.

Despite extensive scholarship on ecofeminism, the role of theatre in conveying its politics has received little attention. Mbogo’s play on Wangari Maathai portrays ecofeminist resistance as an embodied struggle, exposing the gendered and patriarchal forces that constrain women’s activism. Theatre, therefore, becomes a key space for reimagining and negotiating African ecofeminism.

East African Ecofeminism: Wangari Maathai’s Legacy

In East Africa, Wangari Maathai’s Green Belt Movement, founded in Kenya in 1977, exemplifies ecofeminist praxis by mobilizing rural women to restore ecosystems while challenging authoritarian governance. Scholars interpret Maathai’s memoir *Unbowed* as a text of decolonial ecology and feminist resistance (Karmakar & Byrne, 2026), while others highlight her role in linking ecological restoration with women’s empowerment and democratic participation (Adhikari, 2025). These analyses demonstrate that Maathai’s activism redefined leadership by positioning women as agents of ecological renewal and democratic resistance. Yet, existing scholarship privileges textual and political analyses, leaving underexplored the performative dimensions of her legacy. This omission is significant because theatre offers a unique medium for dramatizing resistance and mobilizing collective action. Emmanuel Mbogo’s play on Maathai’s activism therefore provides a critical site for examining how ecofeminist politics are staged, reinterpreted, and disseminated within African cultural contexts.

Patriarchal Resistance in African Feminist Thought

Patriarchal resistance remains central to African feminist theory. Nnaemeka’s (2004) nego-feminism emphasizes negotiated strategies of resistance, while Randriamaro (2024) foregrounds Ubuntu as a decolonial ecofeminist ethic rooted in solidarity and community. Graness and Kopf (2024) argue that African feminist thought is undergoing an epistemic shift toward Africa-centered frameworks that privilege indigenous knowledge and resist Western dominance. Dube (2024) underscores the activist character of African ecofeminism, linking ecological struggles to broader histories of slavery, colonialism, neoliberalism, and gender-based violence. Case studies from Côte d’Ivoire further demonstrate how ecological struggles are inseparable from feminist resistance to patriarchal domination (Zenodo, 2024). Journals such as *Feminist Africa* continue to provide platforms for intellectual and activist dialogue, reinforcing the importance of integrating African feminist thought into global ecofeminist discourse. Yet, while these frameworks highlight strategies of resistance, they rarely interrogate how cultural production—plays, performances, and artistic practices—functions as a site of ecofeminist resistance.

Literary Works and Ecofeminism: Decolonial Narratives of Resistance and Sustainability

Ecofeminist literature demonstrates how patriarchal systems simultaneously oppress women and exploit the environment, while also offering spaces of resistance and alternative visions of justice (MacGregor, 2020). Global works such as Kingsolver’s *Prodigal Summer* (2000), Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Joseph’s *Gift in Green* (2011) foreground women’s ties to land and community, situating ecofeminism within broader struggles of race, class, and sexuality (Shiva & Mies, 1993). These texts critique patriarchal ideologies and provide counter-narratives that position women as agents of ecological care and transformation (Lawrence, Patel, & Kim, 2025).

Postcolonial and decolonial contributions extend this discourse by embedding ecological struggles within histories of colonialism and survival. Works such as Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Aidoo's *Changes* (1991), Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) highlight intersections of gender, land, and survival in societies negotiating postcolonial realities. These texts synthesize feminist and ecological concerns, foregrounding indigenous knowledge and communal ethics as alternatives to neoliberal extractivism (Graness & Kopf, 2024).

Performance and theatre add another dimension by dramatizing ecological and gender struggles in cultural contexts. Penina Muhando's plays (*Hatia*, 1972; *Nguzo Mama*, 1982) critique social injustice and ecological degradation, while Emmanuel Mbogo's *Wangari Maathai* (2019) epitomizes ecofeminist praxis by dramatizing Maathai's activism as deliberate patriarchal resistance. His portrayal situates her as a historically grounded figure whose environmental work was inseparable from feminist resistance and democratic struggle, filling a critical gap in ecofeminist scholarship by showing how theatre can embody ecological justice.

Collectively, these works show that ecofeminist literature not only critiques oppression but also envisions transformative futures. Yet, while prose has been widely studied, performance remains underexplored; justifying the present study's focus on Mbogo's play as a performative intervention in ecofeminist discourse.

Synthesis and Identified Gap

Global and African ecofeminist scholarship demonstrates the richness and diversity of ecofeminist thought, while African feminist theory foregrounds negotiated resistance and indigenous epistemologies. However, the literature reveals a consistent gap: the performative dimension of ecofeminist politics remains underexplored. While Maathai's activism has been analyzed politically, ecologically, and textually, little attention has been given to how plays and performances embody and extend her legacy. This study addresses that gap by examining Emmanuel Mbogo's play on Maathai's activism, situating it within ecofeminist and African feminist discourses, and demonstrating how theatre functions as a medium of ecological and feminist resistance.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in decolonial African ecofeminism, which critiques the structural links between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature under patriarchal and capitalist systems (Shiva, 1988; Mies & Shiva, 1993). Contemporary scholarship emphasizes intersectional and decolonial approaches attentive to race, coloniality, and uneven development (Gaard, 2017; Salleh, 2017; Thompson, 2023). Within this discourse, African ecofeminism emerges as rooted in indigenous epistemologies, communal land ethics, and anti-colonial resistance traditions, highlighting negotiation, community survival, and historically situated struggle (Nnaemeka, 2004; Ogun-dipe-Leslie, 1994). Recent contributions extend this perspective through African women's creative writing and feminist environmental thought, underscoring ecofeminism as a lived, culturally embedded praxis (Gudhlanga, Dube, & Popenene, 2024).

Guided by this framework, the paper argues that Emmanuel Mbogo's theatrical staging of Wangari Maathai's activism positions her praxis as a paradigmatic instance of African ecofeminism. Through the Green Belt Movement, Maathai mobilized rural women as environmental stewards and political actors contesting land grabbing, corruption, and exclusion. Her activism exemplifies Salleh's (2017) concept of embodied materialism, where ecological labor functions as ecological restoration, economic survival, and symbolic defiance, while simultaneously generating political consciousness and structural critique.

By centering decolonial African ecofeminism, the framework conceptualizes ecofeminist politics as historically situated, embodied, and community-driven resistance. Mbogo's staging underscores how Maathai's activism provoked patriarchal repression yet advanced transformative outcomes of environmental justice, gender emancipation, and civic accountability, destabilizing entrenched patriarchal and neo-colonial structures. Figure 1 presents the theoretical framework, which is grounded in Decolonial African Ecofeminism and serves as the critical lens for analysis.

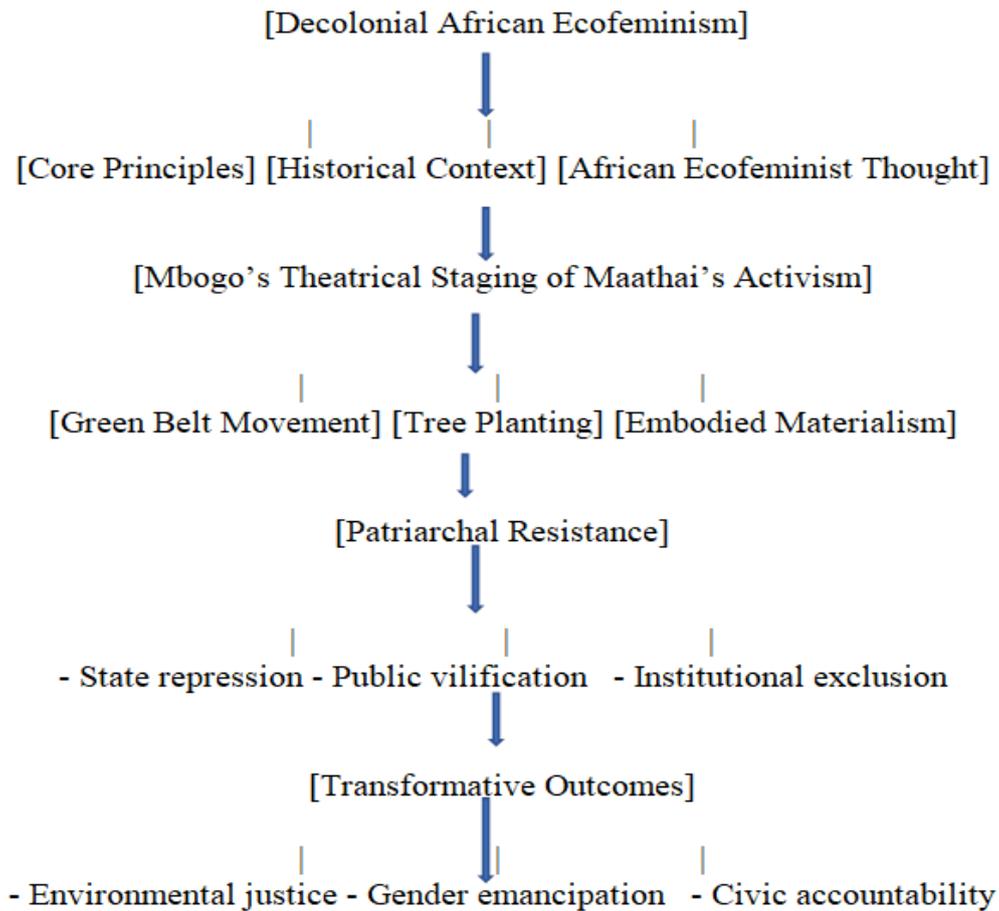


Figure 1. Theoretical frame work that serves as the critical lens for analysis

The framework is anchored in Decolonial African Ecofeminism, which provides the critical lens for analysis. This theoretical grounding flows into Emmanuel Mbogo’s theatrical staging of Wangari Maathai’s activism, where her praxis, embodied in the Green Belt Movement, tree planting, and Salleh’s ((1997, 2017) concept of embodied materialism, becomes the central expression of ecofeminist politics. According to Salleh, embodied materialism situates women’s ecological work as a material practice that resists capitalist and patriarchal exploitation. Mbogo’s dramatization highlights how ecological labor functions simultaneously as environmental restoration, economic survival, and political defiance. Such praxis provokes patriarchal resistance, manifested through state repression, public vilification, and institutional exclusion. Ultimately, the framework underscores the transformative outcomes of Maathai’s activism, advancing environmental justice, enabling gender emancipation, and reinforcing civic accountability while destabilizing entrenched patriarchal and neo-colonial structures.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research design rooted in ecofeminist literary analysis. Emmanuel Mbogo’s *Wangari Maathai* is examined as a cultural and intellectual artifact that documents Maathai’s ecological activism. The analysis relies on the researcher’s interpretive engagement rather than automated content-analysis software, following Levitt et al. (2018), who emphasize intellectual judgment as a legitimate analytic tool in qualitative inquiry. While programs such as NVivo can generate objective coding (Allsop et al., 2022), they risk flattening symbolic and cultural nuance; interpretive analysis is therefore foregrounded as the most appropriate tool for literary inquiry (Elliott & Timulak, 2005).

The theoretical framework is anchored in Decolonial African Ecofeminism, which provides the critical lens for analysis. Mbogo’s dramatization of Maathai’s praxis embodied in the Green Belt Movement, tree planting, and Salleh’s (1997, 2017) concept of embodied materialism, is interpreted as ecofeminist politics that challenge and resist capitalist and patriarchal exploitation.

Three complementary approaches guide the analysis. Textual analysis involves close reading of narrative strategies, symbolism, and thematic emphases, highlighting ecological labor as both environmental restoration and political resistance. Contextual interpretation situates the text within African feminist thought, drawing on nego-feminism (Nnaemeka, 2004), Ubuntu ethics (Randriamaro, 2024), and decolonial ecofeminism (Dube, 2024; Graness & Kopf, 2024), thereby foregrounding African epistemologies and activist practices. Comparative evaluation places Mbogo's work in dialogue with global ecofeminist texts such as Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* (2000), Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Aidoo's *Changes* (1991), underscoring both the distinctiveness of African ecofeminist narratives and their contribution to global debates on climate justice, gender equity, and ecological sustainability.

By integrating textual, contextual, and comparative approaches, the study situates Mbogo's work as both a cultural representation of Maathai's activism and a scholarly intervention in ecofeminist thought, highlighting its transformative outcomes for environmental justice, gender emancipation, and civic accountability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion draw on a qualitative interpretive methodology that privileges close reading of Emmanuel Mbogo's play on the life and activism of Prof. Wangari Maathai. Dramatic metaphors, dialogues, and stage actions are examined as cultural texts that embody struggles over gender, ecology, and power. This interpretive approach follows Elliott and Timulak's (2005) emphasis on uncovering layered meanings in qualitative research, situating the play within wider socio-political contexts. The analysis is framed by Decolonial African Ecofeminism, which highlights the intersection of gender, ecology, and postcolonial resistance (Dube, 2024; Graness & Kopf, 2024). Complementary lenses include Salleh's (2017) embodied materialism, linking ecological labor and maternal care to political struggle; Nnaemeka's (2004) nego-feminism, emphasizing negotiation and cultural compromise; Randriamaro's (2024) Ubuntu ethics, situating ecological justice within communal solidarity; and Lawrence et al.'s (2024) feminist environmental politics, which examine how women's activism is often delegitimized through discursive pathologization.

Within this framework, six recurring ecofeminist subtopics are identified across the eight scenes: domesticity as political contestation, metaphors of marriage and betrayal, discursive pathologization of female activism, collective female solidarity, capitalist exploitation and ecological justice, and Intergenerational Ethics and Maternal Metaphors. Together, these themes illustrate how Mbogo's dramatic construction politicizes everyday practices, reframes metaphors of loyalty and betrayal, and exposes rhetorical strategies that delegitimize women's activism. By foregrounding maternal care, solidarity, and ecological stewardship, the play demonstrates how African ecofeminism redefines private and public spheres as sites of resistance and renewal, contributing to broader debates on gender, justice, and sustainability.

Domesticity as a Site of Political Contestation

Domesticity in Mbogo's play is not portrayed as a neutral or private sphere but as a contested terrain where patriarchal expectations collide with feminist resistance. The narrative consistently politicizes domestic life, showing how activism destabilizes traditional gender roles while simultaneously reconfiguring them into sources of strength and empowerment.

In Scene Two (pp. 5–6), Mwangii's complaint that Wangari is "too busy" to listen frames her activism as neglect of domestic duty, reflecting entrenched patriarchal discourse that equates political engagement with failure of wifely obedience. By positioning activism as incompatible with domestic expectations, the play exposes how patriarchal structures discipline women who transgress prescribed roles. A similar dynamic emerges in Scene Five (p. 26), where prison guards mock Wangari's resistance with "*utakula jeuri yako mwanamke*" ("You will pay for your arrogance, woman"), reducing her defiance to irrational female arrogance. In the same scene (pp. 28–33), Mwangii's abandonment dramatizes the clash between activism and patriarchal marriage, turning the home into a site of punishment. Yet Wangari reclaims domesticity by politicizing maternal care: even in pain, she insists on eating with her son Muta, transforming maternal duty into resistance.

This theme culminates in Scene Eight (p. 49), where Wangari reframes maternal care as collective victory: “*Ushindi huu si wangu peke yangu. Ushindi huu ni wa wanawake wote waliopanda mamilioni ya miche ya miti.*” Motherhood here expands into ecological stewardship, echoing Salleh’s (2017) embodied materialism, which links nurturing and ecological labor to political struggle. From a Decolonial African Ecofeminist perspective (Dube, 2024; Graness & Kopf, 2024), domestic practices such as feeding, nurturing, and planting trees become political acts that challenge both patriarchy and environmental destruction. Wangari’s negotiation of maternal duty resonates with nego-feminism (Nnaemeka, 2004), which emphasizes compromise and cultural negotiation as strategies of resistance.

Her collective framing of victory reflects Ubuntu ethics (Randriamaro, 2024), situating maternal care within a communal ethic of solidarity and ecological justice. This ethic is vividly dramatized in Scene Eight (pp. 47–49), where Wangari’s triumph is declared collective, embodying Ubuntu’s principle that identity and achievement are realized through community. The crowning ritual with cultural regalia further symbolizes communal recognition, elevating her activism as a collective triumph rather than a personal accomplishment. Ubuntu reframes ecological justice as a moral imperative rooted in community, where care for land and care for people are inseparable. By aligning local struggles such as the defense of Uhuru Park with global ecofeminist movements, Mbogo shows how Ubuntu ethics extend maternal metaphors into a broader politics of solidarity, resilience, and ecological renewal.

Through these scenes, Mbogo demonstrates how domesticity, often mobilized to punish women, can be reclaimed as a site of resistance and renewal. By transforming domestic acts into political gestures, the play destabilizes the boundary between private and public spheres, affirming Lawrence et al.’s (2024) observation that feminist environmental politics derive strength from reconfiguring care as a mode of justice. Domesticity thus emerges as a critical arena of ecofeminist struggle and ecological renewal.

Metaphors of Marriage and Betrayal

Patriarchy in Mbogo’s play persistently frames Wangari Maathai’s activism through metaphors of marriage and betrayal, casting her political commitments as disloyalty to the private sphere. In Scene Two (p. 4), Mwangii laments that he has “married Green Belt,” equating activism with marital infidelity and implying that Wangari’s loyalty has shifted from her husband to the movement. This metaphor constructs activism as a rival to marriage, reflecting patriarchal anxieties about female autonomy. Similarly, in Scene Three (p. 16), Stefano trivializes her struggle as “Black Belt karate,” reducing political resistance to combative disobedience. Both metaphors discipline Wangari by framing activism as betrayal of marital vows or normative feminine propriety, thereby delegitimizing her political agency.

The theme intensifies in Scene Five (p. 31), where Mwangii’s departure literalizes betrayal within marriage, dramatizing how patriarchal structures punish women who prioritize activism over domestic expectations. From a Decolonial African Ecofeminist perspective (Dube, 2024; Graness & Kopf, 2024), these metaphors reveal how patriarchal discourse seeks to privatize and domesticate women’s ecological labor, silencing collective resistance and reinforcing colonial-capitalist hierarchies. Yet Wangari’s praxis embodies Salleh’s (2017) concept of embodied materialism, where care, labor, and ecological stewardship are inseparable from political struggle. Her insistence on maternal care, even in pain, resonates with nego-feminism (Nnaemeka, 2004), which emphasizes negotiation and compromise as strategies of resistance.

Later, in Scene Eight (p. 47), Raila Odinga celebrates Wangari as having removed the “*taji la miiba*” (crown of thorns) and replaced it with a “*taji la dhahabu*” (crown of gold). Here, metaphors of betrayal are inverted into metaphors of triumph, reflecting Ubuntu ethics (Randriamaro, 2024), which foreground collective recognition, solidarity, and shared victory. Wangari’s triumph is not hers alone but belongs to the community of women who planted millions of trees, embodying Ubuntu’s ethic of interconnectedness and collective flourishing.

Mbogo’s dramaturgy demonstrates that metaphors of betrayal and loyalty are fluid instruments of power, strategically weaponized to discipline women yet reconfigured to celebrate resilience. This dynamic echoes Muthuki’s (2006) argument on the malleability of metaphors in political discourse. Recent feminist

environmental scholarship (Lawrence et al., 2024) underscores this fluidity, showing how ecofeminist discourse continues to challenge structures of domination while advancing collective ecological futures. Wangari's praxis, interpreted through decolonial ecofeminism, embodied materialism, nego-feminism, and Ubuntu ethics, exemplifies how African ecofeminism transforms patriarchal language into a politics of resistance, solidarity, and ecological justice.

Discursive Pathologization of Female Activism

Patriarchal resistance in Mbogo's play intensifies through the discursive pathologization of female activism, whereby language frames Wangari's political engagement as irrational or abnormal. In Scene Two (p. 5), she is accused of being possessed by spirits, a trope that delegitimizes her activism by associating it with superstition rather than rational conviction. In Scene Three (p. 16), Stefano derides her as "crazy" and a "lunatic professor," equating resistance with madness. Similarly, in Scene Four (p. 23), Nyayo mocks her as having a "*fuse imeungua*" (a blown fuse), reducing defiance to mental instability. By Scene Five (p. 29), prison guards ridicule her as abusive, reframing activism as violent rather than principled.

Collectively, these discursive strategies illustrate how patriarchal structures undermine female political agency by casting resistance as pathology, reinforcing gendered norms that equate women's activism with irrationality, instability, or aggression. Such discourses echo Lawrence et al. (2024), who note that feminist environmental politics are frequently delegitimized through narratives of irrationality, demonstrating how language operates as a tool of repression that obscures principled foundations of resistance. From a Decolonial African Ecofeminist perspective (Dube, 2024; Graness & Kopf, 2024), this pathologization reflects colonial-patriarchal strategies of silencing women's ecological labor. Wangari's persistence embodies Salleh's (2017) embodied materialism, where care and ecological stewardship are inseparable from political struggle, resisting attempts to reduce activism to deviance. Her refusal to abandon maternal and ecological commitments resonates with nego-feminism (Nnaemeka, 2004), which negotiates cultural expectations while subverting patriarchal control.

By Scene Seven (p. 45), however, these discursive constructions collapse under international recognition, as Wangari is reimagined as "*Johari ya Afrika*" (Jewel of Africa). This discursive shift illustrates the contingency of metaphorical frames: what is dismissed as irrational in one context can be celebrated as heroic in another. The transformation reflects Ubuntu ethics (Randriamaro, 2024), which foreground collective recognition and solidarity, reframing stigmatization into communal honor.

In dramatizing this discursive transformation, Mbogo underscores the fragility of patriarchal rhetoric. While initially weaponized to silence, such narratives collapse when confronted with global acknowledgment of women's achievements. The play thereby exposes the instability of language as an instrument of oppression and affirms the capacity of feminist politics to reclaim and repurpose discourse as a site of empowerment and ecological justice.

Collective Female Solidarity

Female solidarity emerges in Mbogo's play as a central force sustaining ecological agency and political resistance. From the outset, women's collective mobilization is dramatized as both local and global. In Scene Two (p. 10), Green Belt women chant to cover Kenya with a "green blanket," a metaphor linking ecological restoration to communal care and situating activism within a vision of national renewal. The theme intensifies in Scene Four (pp. 21–25), where chants of "Solidarity forever" transform protest into a performative assertion of unity against patriarchal and state repression. In Scene Six (pp. 36–38), women pledge to fast at Uhuru Park until skyscraper plans are abandoned and political prisoners released, showing how solidarity moves beyond symbolism into embodied resistance. In Scene Seven (p. 39), women threaten to strip naked in protest, weaponizing cultural taboos to radicalize vulnerability as defiance.

Scene Eight (pp. 46–48) culminates this trajectory as Green Belt women crown Wangari with cultural regalia, elevating her as the embodiment of collective triumph. This ritual reframes individual achievement as inseparable from communal struggle, echoing Maduekwe et al.'s (2025) emphasis on collective mobilization

as the foundation of ecofeminist resistance. From a Decolonial African Ecofeminist perspective (Dube, 2024; Graness & Kopf, 2024), solidarity destabilizes colonial-patriarchal hierarchies by politicizing maternal care, fasting, and ritual practices. Wangari's praxis reflects Salleh's (2017) embodied materialism, where ecological labor and care are inseparable from political resistance, and resonates with Nnaemeka's (2004) nego-feminism, which negotiates cultural norms while subverting patriarchal control. The crowning ritual further embodies Ubuntu ethics (Randriamaro, 2024), foregrounding interconnectedness and collective flourishing.

Placed in comparative perspective, Mbogo's dramatization of solidarity aligns with global ecofeminist texts that foreground collective agency as the basis of ecological resistance. Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* (2000) emphasizes interdependence between human and ecological communities, Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) dramatizes solidarity against caste and gender oppression, and Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* (1991) situates female solidarity within negotiations of modernity and patriarchy. Mbogo's work distinguishes itself by embedding solidarity within African struggles against authoritarianism, colonial legacies, and neoliberal extractivism, extending ecofeminist discourse into postcolonial governance and resource exploitation.

Mbogo's dramaturgy demonstrates that female solidarity is constitutive of ecological agency. By transforming domestic and cultural practices into instruments of political power, solidarity converts embodied sacrifice and cultural symbolism into transnational resistance, culminating in Wangari's Nobel recognition. This aligns with Lawrence et al. (2024), who argue that feminist environmental politics derive strength from collective mobilization bridging local struggles and global justice. Thus, Mbogo situates African ecofeminist solidarity within a global continuum, enriching international ecofeminist discourse by showing how communal resistance in Africa resonates with and expands global struggles for ecological justice and feminist emancipation.

Capitalist Exploitation and Ecological Justice

The skyscraper project in Mbogo's play functions as a potent symbol of capitalist exploitation, dramatizing the tension between neoliberal privatization and ecofeminist resistance. In Scene Two (p. 8), women denounce land grabbing, situating the struggle over Uhuru Park within broader critiques of dispossession. The collusion of Stefano and Maxwell in Scene Three (p. 11) embodies the alliance between political elites and capitalist interests, underscoring how ecological destruction is inseparable from systemic exploitation. This trajectory intensifies in Scene Four (pp. 21–24), where Nyayo mocks Wangari's resistance and offers bribes, exposing how corruption and capitalist incentives are mobilized to suppress dissent. Wangari's insistence in Scene Six (p. 37) that skyscraper plans must be abandoned directly challenges the commodification of land and asserts ecological justice as a non-negotiable principle. The withdrawal of donor funding in Scene Seven (p. 39) dramatizes the collapse of capitalist ambitions under sustained resistance, while her proclamation in Scene Eight (pp. 49–50) that Kenya must never destroy its land reframes ecological preservation as a collective moral imperative.

From a Decolonial African Ecofeminist perspective (Dube, 2024; Graness & Kopf, 2024), the skyscraper project exemplifies how patriarchy and capitalism intersect in land exploitation, reinforcing colonial hierarchies of dispossession. Wangari's resistance embodies Salleh's (2017) concept of embodied materialism, where ecological labor and care are inseparable from political defiance against capitalist commodification. Her refusal to compromise resonates with nego-feminism (Nnaemeka, 2004), which emphasizes negotiation but also strategic defiance when ecological justice is at stake. The collective mobilization of women reflects Ubuntu ethics (Randriamaro, 2024), foregrounding solidarity and interconnectedness in defending public spaces.

Through his theatrical discourse, Mbogo frames ecofeminism as a counterforce to neoliberal privatization, paralleling transnational critiques of capitalist exploitation. The threatened destruction of Uhuru Park dramatizes how patriarchy and capitalism converge in ecological injustice, echoing Saini and Naqvi's (2025) argument that ecofeminism critiques this intersection as central to environmental justice. By foregrounding women's resistance, the play demonstrates how ecofeminist activism reclaims land as a site of justice rather than profit, positioning ecological preservation within a transnational struggle against exploitation.

Intergenerational Ethics and Maternal Metaphors

Maternal metaphors recur throughout Mbogo's play, shaping its vision of ecological justice as an intergenerational ethic. In Scene Two (p. 10), seedlings are described as "children needing a mother's love," directly linking environmental care to maternal responsibility and situating activism within a continuum of nurturing that transcends the domestic sphere. In Scene Five (p. 33), Wangari insists that her coffin should not destroy forests, reframing death rituals through ecological ethics and emphasizing continuity between life, death, and environmental preservation.

In Scene Six (p. 35), Wangari insists on eating with her child Muta despite injuries, dramatizing maternal care as resistance. This act underscores the inseparability of personal sacrifice and ecological commitment, showing how care for family and care for land are mutually reinforcing. By Scene Eight (p. 49), she declares: "*Ushindi huu si wangu peke yangu. Ushindi huu ni wa wanawake wote waliopanda mamilioni ya miche ya miti,*" extending maternal identity into collective triumph. Her prophecy (p. 50) that "*Miti mashambani itazaa matunda / Ardhi nayo itatoa mazao kwa wingi*" projects ecofeminism as intergenerational stewardship, envisioning maternal care as ensuring ecological abundance for future generations.

Mbogo dramatizes Karmakar's (2024) emphasis on motherhood as ecological continuity, foregrounding maternal metaphors as anchors of ecofeminist ethics rooted in intergenerational responsibility. From a Decolonial African Ecofeminist perspective (Dube, 2024; Graness & Kopf, 2024), maternal imagery destabilizes patriarchal attempts to privatize care, reframing it as political agency. Wangari's praxis embodies Salleh's (2017) concept of embodied materialism, where nurturing and ecological labor are inseparable from resistance to capitalist exploitation. Her insistence on maternal care resonates with nego-feminism (Nnaemeka, 2004), negotiating cultural expectations while subverting patriarchal control. Finally, her collective framing of victory reflects Ubuntu ethics (Randriamaro, 2024), situating maternal metaphors within a communal ethic of solidarity and ecological justice.

Thus, maternal metaphors in the play function as discursive strategies that transform domestic practices into symbols of continuity, resilience, and justice across generations, positioning ecofeminist activism as intergenerational stewardship against patriarchal and capitalist structures.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Emmanuel Mbogo's *Wangari Maathai* demonstrates how African ecofeminist politics are dramatized through literary representation, articulating ecological activism as both cultural memory and political resistance. Across the eight scenes, the play consistently stages the confrontation between ecofeminist praxis, rooted in care, solidarity, and ecological justice, and patriarchal resistance expressed through ridicule, abandonment, exploitation, and repression.

Six recurring themes emerge: domesticity as political contestation, metaphors of marriage and betrayal, discursive pathologization of female activism, collective female solidarity, capitalist exploitation and ecological justice, and intergenerational ethics. Together, these findings show that Maathai's struggle was not only ecological but also deeply feminist, challenging entrenched systems of domination while affirming the transformative power of women's collective resistance.

Placed in comparative perspective, Mbogo's work resonates with global ecofeminist literature yet distinguishes itself by situating ecological resistance within African struggles against authoritarianism, colonial legacies, and neoliberal extractivism. This highlights both the universality of ecofeminist themes and the distinctiveness of African contributions to global feminist and environmental thought.

Ultimately, the results reveal that Mbogo's play functions not merely as a reflection of activism but as a constitutive force in shaping ecofeminist politics. By dramatizing everyday practices, maternal metaphors, and communal solidarity, the text enriches international understandings of ecological resistance, feminist leadership, and social justice, affirming ecofeminism as both a local and global force, rooted in African contexts yet resonant across diverse struggles for sustainability and equality worldwide.

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