The Green Belt Movement: Women, Land, and Development

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ABSTRACT

Environmental degradation is one of the most prevalent and devastating issues in our contemporary world. As discourses on how to curb increasing environmental deterioration continue to emerge, it has become clear that the Earth's ecosystems cannot thrive in tandem with hyper-modernization projects pursuing Western conceptions of development. As the ramifications of environmental degradation become more apparent in our daily lives, it is also evident that Southern women are disproportionately affected by ills brought about by the destruction of ecosystems. In light of our current gendered environmental crisis, this article offers a historical exploration of how the Green Belt Movement (GBM)—an organization founded in Kenya in 1977—engaged in programs and advocacy to empower rural women and conserve the environment. The GBM's activities were particularly groundbreaking due to their occurrence at a time when conversations surrounding environmental protection were not mainstream and took the backseat to development goals evoked by modernization theory. To contextualize the GBM's emergence, the article explores how agrarian policies in colonial and post-colonial Kenya led to deforestation and natural resource depletion. The article then offers gender and development (GAD) and intersectionality literature as ways to better understand the GBM's interventions to restore natural habitats. The GBM's tree planting, education, and advocacy programs are underlined as being instrumental in encouraging authentic design within communities, challenging hyper-modernization in Kenya, and shifting rural women's gender roles. The article ultimately aims to highlight the importance of indigenous knowledge and local activism in creating a sustainable future.

Keywords: gender and development, intersectionality, environmental degradation, conservation, Kenya

Introduction

The Green Belt Movement (GBM) is an organization and social movement based in Kenya aiming to empower women and conserve the environment. The organization was founded in 1977 by Wangari Maathai in response to challenges that rural Kenyan women were facing concerning food, water, and firewood insecurity. This article explores—from a historical perspective—how the GBM applied a gendered and intersectional lens to its efforts in women's empowerment, environmental conservation, and poverty alleviation.[1] The article argues that the

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[1] I recognize that gender is a wide spectrum. For this article, I focus on women and men as most of the relevant research highlights these two genders, and as the GBM focuses on women.

GBM expanded women's agency through an intersectional and gendered approach while promoting environmental protection and challenging Kenya's hyper-modernization agenda.

This article includes five sections informed by primary and secondary resources. Section one looks at how gender determines how people are affected by environmentally deteriorating development projects. It also examines intersectionality literature, specifically how intersections of gender, socio-economic class, and locality generate varying consequences in people's lives from environmental changes. Section two contextualizes land and agrarian policies in colonial Kenya and how these policies began shaping how land was perceived with regard to economic production. Section three investigates how modernization policies in early independent Kenya led to environmental degradation and deforestation. Section four explores the GBM's gendered and intersectional activism toward supporting rural women and environmental conservation. It showcases how the movement encouraged authentic design within communities, challenged hyper-modernization, and shifted women's gender roles. Section five highlights core insights from the article's analysis and the importance of studying the GBM from the perspectives of gender and development (GAD) and intersectionality.

Analytical Framework: Gender, Intersectionality, and Environmental Degradation

This section offers a literature review to understand Southern women's historical relationship with modernization and the environment. Throughout this article, modernization will refer to tenets invoked by modernization theory and its progressive linear model for development. These tenets are industrialization, urbanization, rationalization, bureaucracy, mass consumption, and Western democracy (Crossman 2019). In its engagement with literature on GAD and intersectionality, this section looks at how socio-economic class, geography, and gender intersect to generate varying effects from modernization's environmental impact. The literature provides a framework to better articulate the GBM's interventions in the plights of rural women experiencing ramifications of environmental degradation.

GAD is a framework calling for development approaches to consider socially constructed differences between men and women and how development policies and practices yield different results for each gender (Reeves and Baden 2000). GAD emphasizes that labor, resources, and consumption levels are not distributed in an undifferentiated and equitable manner within households (Miller and Razavi 1995). Rather, GAD considers how gender roles and social relationships between genders inform the effects of modernization on a particular group (Miller and Razavi 1995). GAD does not focus on women's issues in isolation; instead, it looks at the relational circumstances contributing to socio-economic and political disparities between genders. Taking environmental degradation as an example, the tendency is to view its repercussions as nondiscriminatory, however, its outcomes vary across demographics due to the living systems affected. Anesu Makina and Theresa Moyo (2016) assert that environmental degradation produces gendered consequences in Africa. The authors attribute this to "men and women interact[ing] with the environment differently due to their varied needs and roles. Women, for instance, are responsible for water collection so they are impacted more by changes in river flows" (Makina and Moyo 2016, 1187). They assert that while men and women are impacted differently by environmental degradation, women are negatively affected to a greater extent—for example, by the 2000s deforestation that forced Tanzanian women to walk farther for firewood and pushed Cameroonian women who farm for the family into less fertile lands (Makina and Moyo 2016; Fonjong 2008; Misana 1999). Therefore, development projects in Africa contributing to environmental degradation demonstrate an absence of GAD consideration

because socially constructed norms mean women often experience disproportionate repercussions.

GAD literature also analyses how colonialism, as a capital accumulating and modernizing process, dispossessed women from their "means of livelihood" and how the colonial legacy continued to affect women following independence in Southern nations (Beneria, Berik, and Floro 2015, 12). GAD thinkers problematize Western dominance in development discourse and the universalization of Western modernization theory (Beneria, Berik, and Floro 2015). Consequences of capital accumulation based on a Western development model that does not consider GAD were illustrated in Mozambique, where farmers and inhabitants were relocated to new settlements after land grabs for agricultural production by corporations in 2009. Verma writes,

> new settlements were on marginal lands where women's workloads in agriculture and soil fertility increased, as did their household work because distances from homes to fields and water sources were greater than before. As women reported, there was a decrease in food security, livelihood options, and incomes (2014, 58).

This portrays how modernization projects like large-scale monocropping can produce negative gendered outcomes for women (Verma 2014). Mozambican women were more susceptible to the ills of land grabbing since their gender roles necessitated that they generate livelihood from the land, yet compensation efforts only recognized male tenure (Verma 2014). Although modernization is perceived to bring universal net benefits, even if benefits are distributed unequally across demographics, the reality remains that it can cause harm to vulnerable populations—in this case, women.

GAD thinkers problematize the universalization of Western ideas on women's empowerment (Beneria, Berik, and Floro 2015). As the dominance of Western feminism has become increasingly challenged, intersectionality has played an important role when designing systems for the varied needs of non-Western societies. "Intersectionality," coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), represents a framework for studying how a person's differing identities intersect to generate distinctive experiences of privilege and discrimination. While intersectionality was introduced to problematize white feminism—particularly how it centers white middle-class women's experiences in the feminist movement (Crenshaw 1989)—discourses have expanded to include Southern women's experiences and their interactions with Western feminism (hooks 2000). Chandra Mohanty (1988) explores how colonialism's cultural production of a "Third World" created a byproduct of "Third World Women" that depicted these women as a homogenous group of victims oppressed by a common patriarchal system. Homogenizing Southern women negates their differing goals and needs, and ignores their agency (Mohanty 1988). Regarding environmental deterioration discourse, Makina and Moyo contend that "focusing exclusively on vulnerability detracts attention from the ways in which women actively engage in environmental management (Arora-Jonsson 2011). It is also important to avoid portraying women from one region of the global South as representative of the entire global South female population" (2016, 1190). The authors caution against viewing Southern women as monolithic or considering them as sharing similar problems and thus as requiring similar solutions. They problematize narratives of Southern women as passive victims, alluding to the importance of sharing stories featuring women's agency. Similar to Makina and Moyo's (2016) sentiments, intersectional and transnational feminists warn against essentializing Western liberation and development structures (Kurtiş and Adams 2015). Rather, intersectional feminists

advocate for allowing Southern women's complexities and truths to guide their feminism (Beneria, Berik, and Floro 2016).

The GAD framework helps us understand the gendered effects of modernization projects that result in environmental degradation, a perspective pivotal for framing the GBM's work. Intersectionality illustrates the importance of not centering particular experiences or worldviews in a social movement. Intersectionality literature brings an understanding of what has historically informed the GBM's activities. Since its inception in 1977, the GBM's work on women's empowerment and environmental conservation in rural Kenya has lain at the intersection of gender, socio-economic status, and locality. It has focused on poor rural women in Kenya due to their distinct experiences with environmental degradation resulting from development projects. Using these frameworks, the next section examines how the movement effected positive social change for women.

British Land and Agrarian Policies in Colonial Kenya

To understand the widespread environmental degradation that prompted the GBM's rise, one must first recognize the role of British land and agrarian policies in colonial Kenya as antecedents to post-colonial Kenya's hyper-modernization projects. This section will examine the 1902 Crown Lands Ordinance and the 1954 "Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya," two documents influential in determining agrarian and land tenure policies in colonial Kenya. The section concludes with an analysis of these policies' gendered effects.

1902 Crown Lands Ordinance

British government land policies in Kenya's Highlands promoted the notion that land productivity was synonymous with agricultural production. By the early 1900s, the British government had begun encouraging Europeans to settle in Kenya following the completion of the Uganda railway—a railway project in the British protectorate of East Africa connecting Kenya and Uganda's inland areas to the coast (Harbeson 1971). Given the railway completion in 1901, Sir Henry Johnston asserted the following regarding Highlands surrounding the Rift Valley:

> here we have a territory admirably suited for a white man's country, and I can say this, with no thought of injustice to any native race, for the country in question is either utterly uninhabited for miles and miles or at most its inhabitants are wandering hunters who have no settled home, or whose fixed habitation is the lands outside the healthy area (Morgan 1963, 140).

Johnston argued that land used by pastoralists or without permanent settlements should be considered *terra nullius*.[2] Johnston's sentiment was not particularly new; the "white man's country" idea was already prevailing in the East Africa Protectorate and supported by political figureheads such as Sir Charles Eliot, the commissioner from 1901 to 1904 (Coldham 1979). By

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[2] *Terra nullius* defines land perceived as "nobody's land" because it is deemed unoccupied or uninhabited. This concept has often been used to justify imperial territorial acquisition.

1902, a Crown Lands Ordinance granting European settlers Crown land in the highlands for agricultural purposes had been put into effect (Kenya Government 1915). The 1902 ordinance was followed by a series of orders, ordinances, and pledges up to the Second World War that further established European settlement in the region to create a "racially exclusive European farming area" (Harbeson 1971, 232) that "came to be known as the 'White Highlands'" (Harbeson 1971, 232). The "White Highlands" designation rested on the belief that non-agrarian land was unproductive, and therefore should be granted to those willing to farm—specifically, Europeans. The British government justified large-scale land acquisitions in the "White Highlands" using the *terra nullius* argument, by contending that they were not interfering with African settlements. The "uninhabited land" notion proposed by the 1902 Crown Lands Ordinance began to set legal and ideological foundations for land grabbing both in colonial and post-colonial Kenya and influenced how post-colonial Kenya came to define "idle land" and modernization.

The Swynnerton Plan

The 1954 "Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya" continued to link land productively to agrarian activities and marked the beginning of bureaucratizing land tenure for Africans. This plan, known as the "Swynnerton Plan" after R. J. M. Swynnerton, the then assistant director of agriculture, came at a time when much had changed in the British colony of Kenya. World War II's aftermath and the Mau Mau uprising prompted the British government to look toward reviving their economy and subduing anti-colonialists (Harbeson 1971). The Swynnerton Plan was an agricultural policy put forward to increase economic production in Kenya and reward Africans who aligned with the colonial government. The plan, similar to the 1902 Crown Lands Ordinance, promoted using land for large-scale agricultural production, however, it did so under the banner of promoting economic modernization. The plan outlined that land was to be consolidated and further subdivisions were to be interdicted; land was to be enclosed and registered for freehold tenure; and the British government was to encourage a selection of Africans to take up individual land titles and cultivate cash crops by providing them with agricultural extension and access to credit (Francis and Williams 1993; Harbeson 1971; S. M. Kariuki 2004). One consequence was that "modernization meant that land assumed the status of a productive asset rather than remain[ing] simply a source of social and psychological security" (Harbeson 1971, 239). The Swynnerton Plan's measures failed to solve land contests within African communities, instead creating opportunities for land grabbing. Elizabeth Francis and Gavin Williams write that "the very process of registration gave rise to conflicts and to pre-emptive measures by those with knowledge of the registration procedures [under both customary and common law] to establish claims to uncultivated land" (1993, 389). This land commodifying worldview prevailed in post-colonial Kenya, where leaders put forward policies showing disdain for so-called "idle land"—a perspective that facilitated land grabbing.

Gendered Consequences of British Land Tenure and Agrarian Policies

Colonial land tenure policies neglected to recognize women's complex relationship with land and weakened women's rights to land. Before colonial rule, women's access to land mainly came through marriage, since husbands were required to provide land to their wives, whereas unmarried women mainly accessed land through small sections carved out for them by their fathers or through their mothers' land access (Karanja 1991). Yet, women had significant

influence over land because customary land tenure featured a low hierarchy; although land rights were patrilineal, "individual male control over the land was not allodial [and] the outright sale of land was not practiced" (Mackenzie 1991, 230). Furthermore, women enjoyed "security of tenure" and "usufruct" due to their gender role as primary agriculturalists; women had the freedom to make decisions about crops being cultivated, surplus production, and product exchange (Mackenzie 1991, 230). Despite women's historical dependence on land for livelihood, land consolidation processes and land titling introduced by the British only recognized male owners' rights to land (Francis and Williams 1993). Women's alienation from land was compounded by colonial agrarian policies that undermined women's agricultural knowledge. Traditionally, women maintained soil fertility and prevented soil erosion through "rotational bush fallowing" and "intercropping" (Mackenzie 1991, 231), however, British agricultural policies promoting cash crops and monocultures gave rise to soil erosion (Mackenzie 1991, 233). Increased soil erosion led to a British soil conservation campaign that constrained women to forced labor to build bench terraces—stair-like earth strips built on sloping land to conserve water and soil—and ignored their experiential soil conservation knowledge (Mackenzie 1991). Women ended up bearing the brunt of the environmental consequences caused by agrarian practices centered on hyper-modernization. Nevertheless, women resisted land dispossession "using both formal and informal procedures, despite their biases against women, to purchase land individually and collectively to secure rights to land for themselves, and for their daughters" (Francis and Williams 1993, 389). Women also resisted environmental degradation's disproportional gendered effects by rebelling against being forced to labor by the British (Francis and Williams 1993). Colonial land titling and monocropping offer examples of how British agrarian and land tenure policies marginalized African women. Yet, women demonstrated agency by advocating and building solutions for themselves.

Kenya's Post-Colonial Development Agenda

Following decolonization, the Kenyan government embarked on a mission to modernize the nation. An important document for unraveling post-colonial modernization policies is the 1965 sessional paper by Tom Mboya. This section explores the modernization goals highlighted in Mboya's paper to help explain the epoch's ideologies surrounding land. It examines how post-colonial Kenya's ideologies on land productivity—in tandem with colonial legacies—contributed to land grabbing, deforestation, and the disenfranchisement of women from access to land.

Modernization Policies and Land Grabbing

Development in post-colonial Kenya invoked tenets of modernization theory such as industrialization and making resources deemed to be "idle" productive. Tom Mboya—minister of economic planning in Kenya in 1965—wrote a sessional paper titled "African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya" that formed the foundation of how development was approached in the wake of Kenyan independence. Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton argue that President Jomo Kenyatta's and Tom Mboya's conception of African socialism asserted that, "community, because it was natural and therefore amenable to another form of content, should become a necessary part of capitalist development" (1996, 297). This illustrates that there was no real opposition to capitalism in newly independent Kenya; rather, the aim was to position community as a means to capitalistic end goals such as modernization. Mboya writes, "we want

to grow rapidly; to transform the economy from a subsistence to a market economy, to develop our land and introduce modern agricultural methods; to industrialize" (1965, 25). This illustrates that the concepts of development and modernization were linked to the idea of industrialization, and land's purpose was seen as economic production. Mboya writes, "allowing land to lie idle and undeveloped, misusing the nation's limited resources, and conspicuous consumption when the nation needs savings are examples of anti-social behavior that African Socialism will not countenance" (1965, 5). This conveys disdain for land not used for modern agriculture or industrialization. There were steep penalties for those who did not comply with this agenda, especially with regard to agriculture: "those few who refuse to co-operate in a major co-operative farming scheme are made to do so or lose their land" (Mboya 1965, 38). This statement portrays how little room was left for communities to determine their development goals, and simultaneously sets the scene for land dispossessions. Land-grabbing by local elites was widespread in independent Kenya. After independence, most Kenyan land "fell under the categories of government (former Crown lands) and trust land (from the 'native reserves')…[and was] highly open to directives from the president" (Klopp and Lumumba 2014, 58). Effectively, land grabbed by the Crown during colonialism remained alienated land. Despite procedures to redistribute land, political elites capitalized on their policy knowledge and proximity to power to unlawfully allocate land to themselves and their supporters (F. Kariuki and Ng'etich 2016). The rampant land grabbing that ensued in Kenya was a key focus for the GBM, and much of their advocacy aimed to curtail unlawful land acquisitions, particularly those leading to deforestation.

State Deforestation in Kenya

The sessional paper was an antecedent of future deforestation in Kenya to make way for agricultural production. The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources in Kenya asserts that "forest excision for farm settlement" was a major contributor to deforestation (2016, 1). Peter Wass similarly states that as of 1993, "the transfer of forest estate land to non-protected status (210 000 ha) therefore amounts to almost 13% of Kenya's total gazetted Forest Reserves (1.64 million ha). Most of this land had been excised for agricultural purposes" (1995, 16). The figures for these excisions include those from the colonial period, hence deforestation in post-colonial Kenya resulted from the push of colonial and post-colonial administrations for agricultural modernization. Although not all excised land was used for farm settlement, the figures illustrate growing deforestation in Kenyan forests. As an example, indigenous forest cover in Kenya's Mount Elgon region "declined by a third from 53,281 hectares (49% of the protected area) to 35,140 hectares (33% of the protected area)" between 1960 and 1999, with 9,582 of these deforested hectares being used as farmland (Ministry of Environment and Forestry 2018, 39). This environmental degradation is what prompted the GBM to encourage women to plant trees. Through its programs, the GBM pushed back on widespread deforestation for agriculture by asserting that unfelled trees are pivotal to community and ecosystem health.

Gendered Consequences of Post-Colonial Land Tenure and Agrarian Policies

British land tenure policies had failed to recognize women's rights to land by excluding them from land titling procedures. Post-colonial Kenya attempted to resolve tenure injustices through a 1967 act requiring all land transactions to consider familial needs before being approved by the Land Control Board (Karanja 1991; Kenya Human Rights Commission 2000). However, through the 1990s, only 5 percent of Kenyan women had land titles under their name, while

approximately 80 percent of agricultural work was done by women (Karanja 1991; Kenya Human Rights Commission 2000). This disparity between women's land ownership and their agrarian labor was due largely to the fact that the Registered Land Act—introduced in 1963 to replace the 1959 colonial Native Land Registration Ordinance—did not offer recourse for women who did not have their name on land titles, yet depended on the land for livelihood (Karanja 1991; Kenya Human Rights Commission 2000). Furthermore, in post-colonial Kenya, women's "lack of awareness of their land rights" (Karanja 1991, 132) was weaponized to lend their male counterparts greater freedom to sell and buy land. Similarly, increasing demand for land and elites' land acquisitions made land ownership financially unattainable for many women (Karanja 1991). Given this reality, the GBM's emergence was instrumental in providing avenues for women to advocate for themselves within the public sphere. Expanding women's agency was a touchstone for the GBM, hence their efforts to educate women on structures depriving them of land and their encouragement for women to advocate for more equitable land access.

The Green Belt Movement

From its inception, the GBM has been a Kenyan organization seeking to empower rural women and conserve the environment. The GBM's work has been, first and foremost, done through a gendered lens, due to the recognition that environmental degradation and food insecurity affect women to a greater extent. In 1977, when the GBM was founded, Kenya was experiencing widespread deforestation to grow cash crops such as tea and coffee (Merton and Dater 2008). Modernization plans resulting in deforestation led to streams drying up, less secure food supply, and firewood and water scarcity (Swanson 2018). These challenges mainly devastated women because gender roles in rural communities tied women's livelihoods to land access. The GBM recognized these issues' gendered nature because it was women who had "to walk further and further to get firewood for fuel and fencing" (The Green Belt Movement 2021). It was women who had to walk further to fetch water (Merton and Dater 2008; Kahiu 2010). Moreover, women were in charge of feeding their families and struggled to find food for their children suffering from malnutrition (Merton and Dater 2008; Kahiu 2010). In light of this, the GBM, through its programs, worked to challenge modernization activities that endangered women's rights to, and labor on, land. The organization focused on tree planting and provided civic and environmental education to enlighten women on political and economic contexts affecting their livelihoods. The GBM also engaged in advocacy to challenge policies that resulted in environmental degradation and women's disenfranchisement, ultimately managing to extend women's agency.

Designing from Within

The GBM pinpointed that problems plaguing rural women were related to environmental destruction, and decided to tackle rural women's issues through environmental conservation. The organization encouraged women to "work together to grow seedlings and plant trees to bind the soil [and] store rainwater" (The Green Belt Movement 2021). Tree planting allowed rural women to get renewed access to food and firewood, and "receive a small monetary token for their work" (The Green Belt Movement 2021). However, the GBM was not doing the work itself; rather, it was recommending that rural women take up tree-planting initiatives (Maathai 2003; Prévot 2015). Apart from first teaching the women how to plant a tree, the GBM maintained a hands-off approach (Merton and Dater 2008). The GBM had initially decided to provide seedlings, but then decided against it to ensure the women did not become dependent on the organization (Merton

and Dater 2008). Women were encouraged to use their ecosystems knowledge to decide which seedlings were accessible and native to their environment (Muthuki 2006; Muthuki 2011; Hunt 2014; DeLap 2013). In doing so, the GBM promoted indigenous knowledge by supporting indigenous tree planting to promote biodiversity. Although the GBM gave some compensation, it was a small amount, around $0.40 per surviving tree, given more to create morale than to provide income the women could survive on (Merton and Dater 2008). Their hands-off approach premise was that environmental regeneration would give rural women the resources needed to survive and the capacity to renew those resources. The GBM treated participants as capable agents with the creativity to design approaches that best served their needs. Additionally, it was up to women to reach out to the organization and apply to join the initiative if they deemed it a good fit for their community (Michaelson 1994). This method marked a departure from Western feminism, which has often advocated for outside solutions for local communities and a one-size-fits-all approach. The hands-off approach revived indigenous knowledge systems that had begun to disappear with British agricultural policies, while tree planting gave rural women greater autonomy over their livelihoods through self-sufficiency.

Challenging Hyper-Modernization

The GBM's poverty alleviation measures diverged from the other poverty reduction projects in Kenya at the time. National approaches to combatting poverty often concerned industrialization, such as emphasizing land use for modern agriculture. As discussed earlier, development projects not done with a GAD consideration negatively affected Kenyan women, and harmful outcomes were exacerbated by the fact that women's land tenure claims were often overlooked. In light of this, the GBM had to address the greater hyper-modernization issue in Kenya to further support rural women. The GBM began to realize that issues of "environmental degradation, deforestation, and food insecurity" were symptoms of root problems caused by power inequalities and a nationwide shift in values (The Green Belt Movement 2021). The organization recognized that colonial legacies of clearing forests and land grabbing for farm settlement were being kept alive by the newly independent Kenyan state (Merton and Dater 2008; Maathai 2009). These realizations marked a turning point for the social movement, which began expanding its work to education and advocacy.

Education and advocacy were essential next steps in empowering the population. Education helped people understand how they came to face the challenges of food, water, and firewood insecurity. The organization began to provide seminars focusing on "civic and environmental education…to encourage individuals to examine why they lacked agency to change their political, economic, and environmental circumstances" (The Green Belt Movement 2021). Even then, seminar facilitators prioritized making space for communities to design systems from within by allowing participants to raise concerns and innovate solutions (Hunt 2014). Seminars allowed communities to become more knowledgeable about systems affecting them. In conjunction with educating about development goals that lead to deforestation and land grabbing, the GBM also gave people an opportunity to act through advocacy. The organization "began to advocate for greater democratic space and more accountability from national leaders. It fought against land grabbing and the encroachment of agriculture into the forests" (The Green Belt Movement 2021). One such advocacy case was in 1989 in response to a plan to build a skyscraper in Nairobi's Uhuru Park (Maathai 2008). Women of the GBM decided to intervene because they saw this project as further government encroachment into public land. The women advocated for the termination of the skyscraper project by sending letters to government

administration and the media and by holding protests (Merton and Dater 2008). Education was significant in their efforts to stop the building. The women of the GBM recognized that the tower was not simply a local issue because the project had received funding from foreign investors. Thus, the GBM sent letters to foreign governments, asking them "why would they do here in Nairobi that which they would never try to do [in] Hyde Park of London or Central Park of New York" (Merton and Dater 2008, 35:55). The letters, protests, and global media attention led to funds being withdrawn for the project and to the park being conserved (Merton and Dater 2008). The Uhuru Park incident showcases how the GBM was challenging prevailing development concepts in Kenya, whereby a park not being used for agriculture or industry was seen as "idle land." The women's advocacy to save the park marked an emergence of more highly educated women who knew their rights and who were confident in publicly challenging practices that affected their lives.

Shifting Gender Roles

The GBM's interventions were particularly groundbreaking in that they did not look to integrate women into patriarchal norms and they generated a shift in women's gender roles. Taking education as an example, the rural women that the GBM encountered were often illiterate, since men's education was often privileged over women's. Lack of formal education made it difficult to teach technical environmental concepts to rural women and led the Department of Forests to declare, "you need people with diplomas to plant trees" (Hunt 2014, 240). Instead of accepting the norm of women being uneducated or pursuing positivist ways of knowing, the GBM educated rural women using experiential ways of knowing. Rural women's norms began to shift toward being educated—although informally—and knowledge relevant to their experiences became legitimized within their communities. Another example of shifting gender roles is the GBM's involvement in expanding women's agency beyond the private sphere. The initiatives to plant trees, educate communities, and engage in advocacy gave women more ability to assert their demands in the public sphere. Although the women's efforts were not welcomed by the Kenyan state—resulting in protesting women being sprayed with tear gas and beaten with batons by police, leading to the hospitalization of Wangari Maathai during a nonviolent demonstration in Uhuru Park—women now more readily engaged in public discourse (Hunt 2014). Even with the state attempting to delegitimize the GBM—such as when President Daniel Arap Moi infamously referred to Maathai as a "madwoman" and called the GBM's activities "subversive"—the women's initiatives yielded positive results on several occasions (Ighobor 2012). These examples illustrate how the GBM's work, primarily aimed at helping women assert themselves in their private lives, evolved to give women more agency in public spheres. As women became more politically aware and active, a shift in gender roles began to emerge. The GBM's programs supported women in taking up public spaces, while keeping women's empowerment and environmental conservation at the forefront.

Conclusion

This article has raised the issue of modernization projects that lead to environmental destruction and their disproportionate gendered repercussions for women. Colonial and post-colonial administrations in Kenya embraced the narrative that land productivity was synonymous with revenue generation. This fixation with economic production led to agrarian and land tenure policies that resulted in widespread land dispossession and deforestation. The GBM's

interventions were pivotal in challenging the ills of environmental destruction for profit while expanding the agency of rural women disenfranchised by deforestation, food insecurity, and land grabbing. The GBM employed a GAD approach by problematizing development agendas that did not consider how socially constructed gender norms lead to varying consequences for men and women. The movement also invoked intersectionality by accounting for class differences in Kenya that led to rural women being affected to a greater extent by environmental destruction than urban women. The GBM's promotion of indigenous tree planting, seminars, and advocacy measures allowed women to design systems from within, challenge hyper-modernization, shift their gender roles, and become active agents of change.

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