

THESIS

INTERSECTIONAL ACTIVISM: WANGARI MAATHAI'S RHETORICAL REVOLUTION  
FOR PEACE, DEMOCRACY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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## ABSTRACT

### INTERSECTIONAL ACTIVISM: WANGARI MAATHAI'S RHETORICAL REVOLUTION FOR PEACE, DEMOCRACY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

This thesis examines Wangari Maathai's intersectional activism. By assessing her use of metaphor, narrative, and appeals to transcendence, I explore the ways in which her rhetorical integration of the themes of peace, democracy, and the environment function as intersectional activism. This capability is exemplified in Maathai's rhetoric through her merger of the rhetorical strategies to highlight the power of the African people in taking charge of their choices regarding environmental stewardship. Also, this merger focuses on the issues at hand but illustrates their impact on both the people and the landscape in a creative manner that adapts to the voices Maathai represents. Through these rhetorical strategies, Maathai develops persuasive and strategic communication demonstrative of intersectional activism and rhetoric of peace.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai was born in April 1940 to peasant farmers in a traditional kikuyu – a mud-walled home – lacking running water or electricity.<sup>1</sup> Yet Maathai would soar beyond her humble beginnings to ultimately become an eloquent and influential advocate of a “better global future” for the “larger family of life,” championing environmental protection, sustainable development, women’s empowerment, representative and legitimate governance, and poverty relief.<sup>2</sup> One of the intellectual progenitors of the interconnectivity between peace, democracy, and the environment, she founded the Green Belt Movement, inspiring the planting of over 40 million trees and amplifying peaceful discourse throughout her community, country, and beyond. Maathai’s advocacy for underrepresented groups and ideas summoned the ire of entrenched interests, and this led to arrest, assault, and imprisonment throughout her life.<sup>3</sup> She was elected to the Kenyan parliament, became the first Central or Eastern African to earn a PhD,<sup>4</sup> and gained international prominence in the peace movement via the United Nations; she would be best known as the first environmentalist, and the first African woman, to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>5</sup> When she died of ovarian cancer in September 2011, Archbishop Desmond Tutu mourned her as “a true African heroine”; U.S. President Barack Obama proclaimed, “Her legacy will stand as an example to all of us to persist in our pursuit of progress.”<sup>6</sup> This pursuit is present in the rhetoric of Wangari Maathai and truly represents intersectional activism.

Maathai embodied a new vision of peace that connected peacemaking with environmental stewardship, delivering the message of peace through sustainable development

and the proper management of resources. Her work as founder of the Green Belt Movement promoted her path to peace through the integration of tree planting and engaging others in issues of consciousness. The Green Belt Movement's mission is "to mobilize community consciousness – using tree planting as an entry point – for self-determination, equity, improved livelihoods and security, and environmental conservation."<sup>7</sup> Maathai's perseverance and promotion of peace through planting brought together community building efforts as well as environmental awareness.

This thesis examines Wangari Maathai's intersectional activism. By assessing her use of metaphor, narrative, and appeals to transcendence, I explore the ways in which her rhetorical integration of the themes of peace, democracy, and the environment function as intersectional activism. This introduction is organized as follows: the first section reviews Communication research on environmental movements and leaders, demonstrating the lack of sustained studies of female environmental activists, broadly, and African voices, more specifically. Next, I summarize the existing research on Wangari Maathai and discuss what study of her rhetoric will contribute to the field of Communication. My methods section outlines the critical and theoretical approaches that will guide my analysis, as well as the artifacts I will examine in this thesis. I conclude with an overview of the thesis chapters.

### Literature Review

Environmental movements are becoming an increasing area of interest in Communication scholarship.<sup>8</sup> Environmental activism has become a growing focus in the Communication discipline with the majority of scholarship emphasizing the engagement of activists, environmental organizations, and dominant environmental issues.<sup>9</sup> Below I outline some of the key objectives of environmental movements as articulated in the Communication literature

followed by literature on the main objectives of social justice movements; then I explain the friction between environmentalists and environmental justice activists, along with pertinent ecofeminist literature as well as literature on women with a focus on global women; finally, I present an overview of some of the current research on Wangari Maathai.

Scholarship on environmental movements documents the ways in which environmental discourse affects social change. Sharon M. Livesey analyzes an environmental dispute to uncover the “terms of discursive struggle at the socio-political level where they both reflect and influence the dynamics of cultural and institutional change.”<sup>10</sup> Jimmie M. Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer study rhetoric and environmental politics to establish the dichotomy between economics and evolutionary progress that leads to paralysis instead of informed action, producing what they call *ecospeak*.<sup>11</sup> Kevin DeLuca asserts that, “As people around the world confront the daunting environmental challenges caused by the excesses of industrialism and corporate capitalism, wilderness provides one of the few resources for thinking how civilization can recover a workable balance with the planet.”<sup>12</sup>

This workable balance is imperative for communication within both the public and private spheres of environmental communication. Public dialogue can be used as a cooperative tool by members of different environmental groups to oppose elite activists and support environmental social change efforts.<sup>13</sup> Robert Cox urges that there is a “palpable sense of urgency in our communication about the environment” and he focuses on the public sphere and how “it is filled with competing visions, agendas, and modes of speaking. It is these different voices, media, and forums that influence our understanding of and relationship with the environment.”<sup>14</sup> The connectivity between the human race and the environment is obvious, yet the way this concern is addressed is not always positioned as a human concern.

The preservation of our environment is central to the well-being of the human race. Consequently, “environmental concerns” will always “involve questions of justice.”<sup>15</sup> Phaedra C. Pezzullo and Ronald Sandler explain that “what is ultimately at issue is *not* whether one movement has more worthwhile goals or moral authority over the other, but rather, *how the goals of both movements might be achieved together effectively.*”<sup>16</sup> Research in environmental communication has demonstrated the connection between environmental justice and social justice. Matthew Cotton and Bernardo H. Motta provide an interdisciplinary examination of environmental justice to expose the fragility of environmental justice studies. This study shows the links and gaps between the different viewpoints and disciplines that have conducted environmental research.<sup>17</sup> More specifically, areas of social justice and environmental communication that intersect with the study here connect environmental communication with gender, race, and identity.

Although the environmental movement and the environmental justice movement would seem to be natural allies, their relationship over the years has often been characterized by conflict and division. Advocates for environmental justice have charged the mainstream environmental movement with racism and elitism and have criticized its activist agenda on the grounds that it values wilderness over people. They also have called upon environmental organizations to act on environmental injustice and address racism and classism in their own hiring and organizational practices, lobbying agenda, and political platforms.<sup>18</sup> Dale Jamieson, for example, argues that “justice is both conceptually and historically at the heart of environmentalism.”<sup>19</sup> He further explains how his overall portrayal of environmentalism seems to align with much of the environmental justice movement; however, these movements are still at odds due to gender, racial, and socioeconomic divisions that adversely affect the potential for identification.<sup>20</sup> Justice

is a common thread that connects those in both movements; however, the grassroots nature of the environmental justice movement sometimes separates it from the large institutions that undergird the traditional environmental movement.<sup>21</sup> The two movements are separated by differential access to materials, recognition, legitimacy, and audiences.

Overall, the goals of environmental justice activists align with the goals of those in environmentalism. Those in the environmental justice faction do recognize that they need to “work through their differences with the images of environmentalists they have previously formed.”<sup>22</sup> This push to work through the differences posed by being an environmentalist or an environmental justice activist gives hope for both movements to come together and work together for the good of the planet. Pezzullo and Sandler urge that “we need to continue to revisit the differences and similarities between the environmental justice and environmentalist movements in order to assess how they – both separately and together – can help improve our relationship with each other and the environment.”<sup>23</sup> One historical movement that explicitly sought to align environmentalism and gender justice is ecofeminism.

During the second wave of feminism, ecofeminists equated exploitation of the environment with patriarchy, more broadly, linking men’s domination of nature with men’s domination of women. Ecofeminists objected to the fact that mainstream environmental movements were dominated by white, middle-class men. They outlined the racial, economic, and community impacts that this lack of representation has for those affected by environmental degradation.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, during the 1970s and transitioning into contemporary movements, gender and environmental politics began to illuminate the interconnectivity between feminism and the environment. This illumination highlighted the importance of ecomaternalism and ecofeminism on the discourses surrounding the environment.<sup>25</sup> Jennifer Peebles and Kevin

DeLuca posit that recent “community activists use what appears to be a liability, their gender – especially their roles as mothers and housewives – as potent rhetorical resources to enlist others in the fight against practices that threaten their homes, families, and communities.”<sup>26</sup> This connectivity to gender and the role of women in regards to communicating for the environment presents another area of scholarship to integrate into this study: global women leaders for the environment and peace.

As Communication scholars have worked diligently to recover and assess the rhetoric of historical and contemporary women rhetors, there are still too few studies of non-White women and women operating outside of the United States.<sup>27</sup> Most of the research in the discipline focuses on women political leaders and historical feminist icons.<sup>28</sup> This is not to say that these dominant portrayals of women are doing the discipline a disservice, but the integration of more international women offers an opportunity to expand our understanding of gender and communication. Much of the research on global women leaders focuses on issues of gender bias and stereotypical media framing.<sup>29</sup> By moving beyond these areas of study the discipline can begin to integrate these international female voices in alternatively marked ways.

Hui Wu posits that “feminist ethno-rhetorical historiography, particularly that of Third World women, remains largely an uncharted territory.”<sup>30</sup> Wu notes the theoretical limitations of some of the “rhetorical history writing of women in marginalized groups, due to divisions and even conflicts of identity among scholars and their research priorities.”<sup>31</sup> Wu states that, “If those who are said to represent mainstream Euro-American culture only spoke for their own people, they would be considered as observers who look at the challenges that minority poses to mainstream theories with indifference.”<sup>32</sup> Alexa Weik von Mossner states that, “for historical and socio-political reasons African-American and other minority perspectives on issues of

sustainability are necessarily different from those of mainstream environmentalists.”<sup>33</sup> Her focus on social and environmental injustice offers a multi-vocal narration and a “social, historical, and cultural reframing.”<sup>34</sup> This reframing has led to the examination of women’s social movements in non-Western contexts. In particular, some research focuses on Africa and the postcolonial aspects of the society in regards to governance, ecology, and modernity.<sup>35</sup>

Research on African women has examined the ways in which they are represented in the media and the impact of women on democratization processes.<sup>36</sup> African women’s online presence in a growing global network has also been examined to glean insights into their political, economic, and social influence and whether or not an online presence enhances agency or reinforces inequalities.<sup>37</sup> Dejo Olowu assesses the rhetorical strategies used to promote human rights issues as they relate to African women.<sup>38</sup> Susan McKay and Cheryl de la Ray examine women’s peacebuilding in South Africa, arguing that relationship building and attention to basic human needs are crucial to a movements’ success.<sup>39</sup> One of the most significant figures speaking out on issues of peacebuilding and human rights is Wangari Maathai.

Wangari Maathai’s work has been examined by scholars in multiple disciplines.<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that all of the prominent research on Maathai, with the exception of one article from 1994, was published after her receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. Furthermore, most of this literature focuses either on her Nobel Lecture or on her most recent rhetorical activism within the Green Belt Movement. These studies all offer important insights into understanding the impact of Maathai’s activism, rhetoric, and life, but they fail to truly engage the plurality of her rhetorical presence.

Three studies in the Communication discipline assess the constitutive aspects of Maathai’s social justice rhetoric.<sup>41</sup> Ellen Gorsevski assesses Maathai’s “emplaced rhetoric,”

explaining that emplaced rhetoric is “a form of postcolonial symbolic and discursive message-making.”<sup>42</sup> She notes that, “In connecting the importance of how environmental activism is peace activism, Maathai invited audiences to understand in a visceral way the responsibility of each citizen to participate in working toward ‘positive peace,’ that is, a condition of peace with social justice.”<sup>43</sup> Whereas Gorsevski’s study examines Maathai’s use of emplaced rhetoric in her memoir, in what follows I will determine whether or not this rhetorical strategy is present in Maathai’s other writings and speeches.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to developing a theory of emplaced rhetoric, Communication scholars who study Maathai have also focused on her status as a movement leader. In his assessment of her Nobel lecture, Russell Kirkscey posits that “Maathai’s leadership acts as a component of change in the social, political, and environmental spheres of African life. Maathai’s work stands as a bridge between traditional African values and globalization.”<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Janet Muthuki examines the ways in which Maathai’s rhetoric and creation of the Green Belt Movement challenges patriarchal structures insofar as it is a woman-led movement that emphasizes female empowerment.<sup>46</sup> This aspect of Maathai’s activism bolsters how impactful her overall rhetoric is in regards to social justice activism due to her positionality as an African woman working against dominant power structures. This thesis expands on scholarly understanding of alternate models for peace rhetoric, feminist discourse, environmental communication, and social justice activism.

Now that I have provided an overview of the extant research pertinent to my study, I will outline my methodological approach.

## Critical Method

### *Texts*

The texts to be examined in this study are a collection of six different speeches, articles, and lectures given by Wangari Maathai. More specifically, the collection is comprised of three speeches, one book chapter, and two lectures. The book chapter represents an example of pre-Nobel Peace Prize rhetoric. The majority of these texts, however, were produced after Wangari Maathai received international recognition with the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize. This recognition created a space for Maathai to deepen her discourse and reach a global audience. All of these texts represent the ways in which Maathai engages different social issues while grounding her words in peace and social justice. The texts address different social issues such as poverty, genital mutilation, environmental degradation, climate change, female empowerment, and human rights issues. Overall, they provide a strong overview of Maathai's rhetoric while highlighting the areas of concern stressed most actively. Below is a list of the specific texts:

1. Keynote address at the Second World Congress of Agroforestry in Nairobi, Kenya, in August 2009
2. Speech given in Gwangju, South Korea in June 2006: "Sustained Development, Democracy, and Peace in Africa"
3. The Third Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture given in Johannesburg, South Africa in July 2005: "Rise Up and Walk."
4. The Inaugural World Food Law Distinguished Lecture given in Washington, D.C. in May 2005
5. Speech given in Oslo, Norway in December 2004 on the acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize

6. Chapter written in *Speak Truth to Power* edited by Kerry Kennedy, May 2000: “Speak Truth to Power”

These texts were chosen primarily because they are highlighted on the Green Belt Movement’s website as examples of key articles and speeches by Maathai.<sup>47</sup> The fact that the international organization is choosing to highlight these specific texts positions them as notable representations of Maathai’s rhetoric. When engaging these texts rhetorically, I will focus on the ways in which they utilize the rhetorical strategies of metaphor, narrative, and appeals to transcendence. Below, I have outlined these rhetorical strategies.

### *Rhetorical Strategies*

Kenneth Burke acknowledges that one of the four master tropes is metaphor. “Metaphor is a device for seeing something *in terms of* something else.”<sup>48</sup> Burke explains that “the seeing of something in terms of something else involves the ‘carrying-over’ of a term from one realm into another, a process that necessarily involves varying degrees of incongruity in that the two realms are never identical.”<sup>49</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson further explore the use of metaphors and how they construct our everyday language. “Metaphorical concepts provide ways of understanding one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience.”<sup>50</sup> Robert Ivie provides an overview of the steps a critic must take when engaging in metaphoric criticism utilizing the notions of clustering like terms together in order to reveal the values and courses of action implied by a speaker’s chosen metaphors.<sup>51</sup> Another rhetorical strategy being utilized in Maathai’s rhetoric, which builds on her use of metaphors, is her use of narratives. Since metaphors are the building blocks of narratives, a narrative approach compels an expanded understanding of her rhetoric.

Walter Fisher notes that “[t]he narrative paradigm sees people as storytellers – authors and co-authors who creatively read and evaluate the texts of life and literature.... [I]t stresses that people are full participants in the making of messages whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors).”<sup>52</sup> Narrative criticism explores the ways in which a rhetorical act functions as a story with characters, scenes, plots, and themes that become obvious as the story develops.

Prominent studies utilizing narrative criticism have focused on the ways in which media frames audience perceptions.<sup>53</sup> There are several social movement studies that focus on women as rhetors in regards to feminism and ecofeminism.<sup>54</sup> This study will add to those utilizations of narrative criticism. Maathai’s political agency often is achieved through the mechanism of storytelling. The ways in which she connects the stories of Africans to Africa’s most pressing social concerns affords her the power to be the voice for millions of Africans. This “multiplicity of voices” represented through Maathai’s rhetoric gives her words power and credibility, helping to make her a prominent agent of change.<sup>55</sup> Another rhetorical trope utilized in Maathai’s rhetoric that makes her a prominent agent of change is appeals to transcendence.

In *Attitudes Towards History*, Kenneth Burke begins to explain the concept of transcendence through frames of acceptance that are “the more or less organized system of meanings by which a thinking man [sic] gauges the historical situation and adopts a role with relation to it.”<sup>56</sup> In order to discern frames of acceptance, a critic must acknowledge that a symbolic merger “is required, to get a close glimpse of the secret ways in which a symbol integrates.”<sup>57</sup> Maathai’s use of symbols, especially those integrating peace, democracy, and the environment, makes the symbol “a vessel of much more content than is disclosed by its ‘face value.’”<sup>58</sup> Put more directly, Burke explains transcendence as follows: “When approached from

a certain point of view, A and B are ‘opposites.’ We mean by ‘transcendence’ the adoption of another point of view from which they cease to be opposites.”<sup>59</sup> Overall, this study will assess the ways in which Maathai’s rhetoric offers an alternative way to conceptualize peace and activism.

When examining the texts I will identify the rhetorical strategies employed in her discussion of the themes of peace, democracy, and the environment. I will pay special attention to how the use of metaphor, narrative, and transcendence work to promote intersectional activism and rhetoric of peace.

Rather than simply entertaining, narrators "articulate a commentary upon power relations in society and indeed create knowledge about society." <sup>60</sup> Maathai’s rhetoric is an ideal model for further understanding the ways in which metaphors, story-telling, and transcendence persuasively promotes audience identification and social change. Now that I have outlined my methodology for this study, I will provide a brief overview of my chapters.

#### Overview of Chapters

Below is a brief overview of my chapters:

Chapter 2: A Stool, a Bus, and a Tree: Mingling Metaphors in Maathai’s Rhetoric

Chapter 3: Tell Me a Story: Notable Narratives in Maathai’s Rhetoric

Chapter 4: Think Big: Appeals to Transcendence in Maathai’s Rhetoric

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The above chapters will investigate the dominant issues and themes being addressed throughout Maathai’s rhetoric. Their organization is based on the recurring use of the rhetorical strategies of metaphor, narrative, and transcendence that is central to Maathai’s rhetoric and activism. In the

end, I hope to provide a study that augments the research on environmental communication, social justice, and international female leaders.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### A STOOL, A BUS, AND A TREE: MINGLING METAPHORS IN MAATHAI'S RHETORIC

Mother Earth, Gaia, and Spaceship Earth are all metaphors used to describe our planet. All of these metaphors work to influence the way the earth is framed in order to bring about recognition of our place within nature and our interconnectedness to all of life's processes. Metaphors are tools that "tell us something about one character as considered from the point of view of another character."<sup>61</sup> Rhetors utilizing metaphoric appeals articulate a creative construction of their values, motives, and insights about society in order to illustrate issues in an artistic manner. Wangari Maathai employs the use of metaphor in many of her speeches in order to reinforce the interconnectivity of peace, democracy, and the environment.

Maathai's rhetoric grounds itself in issues of peace, democracy, and the environment in order to emphasize how "there can be no peace without equitable development; and there can be no development without sustainable management of the environment in a democratic and peaceful space."<sup>62</sup> Even though Maathai had been working on peace, democratization, and the environment for decades, it took the Norwegian Nobel Committee's acknowledgement of her Green Belt Movement and her subsequent Nobel Peace Prize award in 2004 to "make a mind-shift in the way we think about security, the way we think about peace, and to understand that you cannot achieve peace without looking at the environment."<sup>63</sup> This realization is drawn out throughout Maathai's rhetoric with the use of metaphor.

Even though Maathai makes use of numerous metaphors in her rhetoric there are three dominant metaphors that emphasize the connection of the issues of peace, democracy, and the environment: the African stool, the wrong bus syndrome, and trees. All of these metaphors stress

interconnectedness rather than separation and are hopeful and optimistic. In this chapter, I argue that Maathai's use of metaphor not only reinforces the issues of peace, democracy, and the environment but also underpins the value of cooperation in addressing these issues. This cooperation is reflected in the ways in which each metaphor highlights convergence; the African stool is a construct that brings together the natural and the functional, the wrong bus syndrome highlights mobility and progress, and trees represent a merger between the figurative and the literal. This chapter will be broken down into four main sections. The first section will examine Maathai's use of the African stool metaphor. The second section will analyze the wrong bus syndrome metaphor and the third section will highlight Maathai's use of trees. The final section will offer an overview of the three metaphors and provide concluding thoughts.

## The Metaphors

### *The African Stool*

In 2005, Maathai delivered a speech at Howard University in Washington, DC as the keynote speaker for the Inaugural World Food Law Distinguished Lecture. This lecture was received by academics, in particular Professor Marsha Echols, Professor of Law and Director of the World Food Law Institute at Howard University, as well as other members of the Howard University community and Washington, DC area. The World Food Law Institute is an organization that “uses a multidisciplinary approach to promote social development in the agricultural and agribusiness sectors . . . to improve the understanding of issues faced by the millions of persons living and working in rural areas around the world and to provide support for those seeking food security.”<sup>64</sup> During this lecture, Maathai distinctly utilizes the African stool metaphor to illustrate the interconnectivity of peace, democracy, and the environment. In this section, I contend that the use of the African stool metaphor offers a tangible and localized

construct of the African people to provide an illustrative example of how the issues of peace, democracy, and the environment are dependent upon one another to secure the stability of a society.

As Maathai explains during her speech at the World Food Law Lunch, “The metaphor is an African, traditional stool with three legs. A traditional African stool is actually made from one log and then three legs are chiseled out and a seat is also chiseled out in the middle so that when you sit, you sit on the basin, which rests on three legs.”<sup>65</sup> She continues, saying:

I compare the three legs to the three pillars that the Norwegian Nobel Committee identified. One leg is that of peace. The other is that of democratic space, where rights are respected – women’s rights, human rights, environmental rights, children’s rights, where there is space for everybody, where minorities and the marginalised [sic] can find space. The third leg is the environment, that needs to be managed sustainably, equitably, and in a transparent way, the resources of which also need to be shared equitably.<sup>66</sup>

This metaphor and the ensuing language used to describe the metaphor in more detail create a constructive and collective means for linking peace, democracy, and the environment. The fact that this stool is chiseled out of one log is indicative of how these issues are inherently interconnected and interrelated. The basin functions as both a seat and a center and from this center stems the legs of peace, democracy, and the environment. As with the construction of any furniture your measurements need to be concise and consistent in order to establish a balanced and functional piece. Each leg needs to be constructed with care and precision to balance out the other legs so the stool is sturdy, strong, and supportive. This is the same care and precision that should be used when addressing the issues of peace, democracy, and the environment. One area cannot be overlooked or conversely one area cannot be prioritized; there needs to be a balance and an appreciation that without one area or another the stool will teeter, begin to degrade, or

crumble all together. The stool metaphor illuminates the importance of these three areas to the positive functionality of a society, a people, a culture, and a space.

In the Third Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture, also in 2005, Maathai emphasizes that “These are the pillars of any stable and secure state.”<sup>67</sup> The stability and security of a state rests on the people and their government. Bernard Crick states that democracy stresses “the *duty* of all who [are] citizens to *participate actively* in public life and affairs of the state.”<sup>68</sup> When the people along with their governments acknowledge these pillars then future development will be more productive, progressive, and promising. Maathai asserts that good governance is inherently linked to a country’s level of peace, conflict, and environmental degradation or sustainable development. In her Nobel Lecture she states that, “the state of any country’s environment is a reflection of the kind of governance in place, and without good governance there can be no peace.”<sup>69</sup> This ripple effect statement highlights the ways these three areas play off one another in order to create balance and order. Furthermore, as Maathai states during the Inaugural World Food Law Lecture “these three pillars, the pillar of peace, the pillar of the environment, and the pillar of democratic space, are important for any state that intends to be stable.”<sup>70</sup> Stability is significant for the African stool as well as for a people and a society.

A pillar is that symbol of stability; it is “a supporting, integral, or upstanding member or part” and it is “a fundamental precept.”<sup>71</sup> Pillars, when properly conceived and constructed, not only provide stability but security as well. Pillars uphold a structure or in some cases are the aspects or fundamental edicts that are guidelines for a system or society to function at its best. As a mission statement is to an organization’s foundation, pillars function similarly to ground and center one on central aspects of importance. In Maathai’s rhetoric, peace, democracy, and the environment are those major tenets that ground any society. In a 2006 address to then current

President of South Korea Kim-Dae-Jung, former President Mikhail Gorbachev, fellow Nobel Laureates, and distinguished delegates, Maathai argued that “When we manage our resources sustainably and practice good governance we deliberately and consciously promote cultures of peace,”<sup>72</sup> and these cultures of peace lead to dialogue building, healing, and reconciliation. “Whenever we fail to nurture these three themes, conflict becomes inevitable.”<sup>73</sup>

The metaphor of the African stool demonstrates a deeper connection to what pillars represent. When one sits quietly and calmly with their thoughts in a good chair they can find peace, tranquility, and respite. In that respect the African stool also functions as a peaceful space. Furthermore, like good governance, this stool requires careful construction and proper balance. In order for a democratic space to function well different persons, cultures, values, and viewpoints must be considered and addressed in a balanced way so as to not prioritize one group or collective over another. Robert A. Dahl posits that “[d]emocracy, it is frequently said, rests upon compromise. But democratic theory itself is full of compromises . . . .”<sup>74</sup> When dealing with a government or governmental system compromise is inevitable. As with the stool, however, if you take from one leg you need to eventually take from another leg in order to balance things out. Finally, the fact that the stool itself is made from logs positions it as a part of the environment. The stool is crafted from the very environment that Maathai works to protect. Insofar as the African stool metaphor connects timber to her cause, it functions as a literal representation of the environment Maathai works to sustain.

In addition to emphasizing balance and connectedness, Maathai’s African stool metaphor is surprisingly malleable. Whether Maathai is speaking to a college community, an audience of Nobel Laureates and delegates, Presidents Nelson Mandela and Bill Clinton, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Her Excellency Graca Machel,<sup>75</sup> other prominent Africans, or members of the

South Korean government this metaphor is a part of her rhetoric. However, the Inaugural World Food Law Lecture represents the richest development of this metaphor. The metaphor is weaved into her other speeches, but it is not highlighted in the same manner as it is during the World Food Law Lecture. One possibility is that the audiences of the other speeches are political figures who already work to strike a balance in their countries while the audience at the World Food Law Lecture is younger and a mix of academics and community members. This audience is in a position to bring change to their communities and a metaphor that emphasizes connectivity enhances that audience's ability to approach societal change in a more holistic manner. This distinction makes the development of the African stool metaphor in this context more revealing of the metaphor's strategic potential.

This strategic potential of the metaphor is further represented by looking at the audience where this metaphor appears. Her audience at the World Food Law Lecture is predominantly law students at Howard University along with other members of the World Food Law Institute and similar organizations as well as community members. This makes the strategic implications of the metaphor more marked. This audience is the future. They are future lawyers and future activists. Maathai's strategic advancement of this metaphor makes the African stool metaphor indicative of new possibilities.

Overall, the African stool metaphor affords Maathai a strong base to articulate her perspective in order to cultivate an understanding pertaining to how ever-present the issues of peace, democracy, and the environment are to any society. Maathai asserts that if societies begin to think through things in a holistic and collective manner then "we are prepared to capture that image of the traditional African stool with its three legs: democracy, peace, and sustainable management of our resources. Then we can have a peaceful, secure base upon which

development can take place.”<sup>76</sup> Once this development begins to be realized the problems of the people need to be addressed and this is where Maathai’s next metaphor for thinking through her people’s problems comes into play.

### *Wrong Bus Syndrome*

In 2000, Maathai contributed a chapter to the book, *Speak Truth to Power: Human Rights Defenders Who Are Changing Our World*, “a book on activists around the world edited by Kerry Kennedy”<sup>77</sup>; this is one of her highlighted pre-Nobel texts. In this text, Maathai presents and develops the metaphor of the wrong bus syndrome; this is the only text in which this metaphor appears. Since this is a chapter in a book its potential audience is expansive and notably, literate. This book was sold internationally and included other prominent contributors such as The Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Elie Wiesel.<sup>78</sup> Kennedy states that “*Speak Truth to Power* examines issues of human rights in over forty countries, spanning six continents, with topics as far ranging as political rights, free expression, honor killings, demilitarization, environmental activism, mental health, children’s rights, and national self-determination.”<sup>79</sup> This compilation places Maathai’s entry and rhetoric within it as a highlight for environmental activism for human rights. Furthermore, since this is an anthology with numerous human rights activists as contributors, her audience has the capability to examine the text in depth themselves and look up any areas that spark further interest. This possibility posits this text and the use of the wrong bus syndrome metaphor as a representation of mobility, both for the metaphor and the text. In this section, I claim that the wrong bus syndrome functions as a metaphor of mobility, to explain human rights issues in Kenya and their connection to the degradation of the environment.

In *Speaks Truth to Power*, Maathai explains how “people come to see us with a lot of problems: they have no food, they are hungry, their water is dirty, their infrastructure has broken

down, they do not have water for their animals, [and] they cannot take their children to school.”<sup>80</sup> In order to address all of these concerns and to help the people of Kenya to conceive what is going on, Maathai utilizes the “wrong bus syndrome” metaphor.<sup>81</sup> This metaphor is indicative of the people of Kenya and brings personal connection to further understanding the problems at hand. Maathai explains:

After we list these problems we ask, “Where do you think these problems come from?” Some blame the government . . . Blame is placed on the side that has the power. The people do not think that they, themselves, may be contributing to the problem. So, we use the bus symbol . . . If you go onto the wrong bus, you end up at the wrong destination . . . We ask the people, “What could possibly make you get on the wrong bus? How can you walk into a bus station and instead of taking the right bus, take the wrong one?” . . . There are many reasons.<sup>82</sup>

This metaphor takes an everyday part of being a Kenyan and positions it to connect to the larger issues occurring in the area. Maathai asserts that “to get off the bus means to control the direction of your own life.”<sup>83</sup> The rhetorical choice to use the wrong bus syndrome metaphor is strategic and ideological. Maathai takes part of the everyday life of being a Kenyan and employs it to collide with environmental degradation, lack of democratic space, and peace and conflict to inform the people of Kenya.

To inform the people of Kenya, Maathai provided an outlet for them to take direction. The Green Belt Movement became this creative and unconventional resource for the people of Kenya to take action. In order for this action to be viable it required the mobilization of “cognitive and emotive resources of the parties and other attentive stakeholders in such a way as to break the conventional patterns that have sustained their conflict.”<sup>84</sup> The wrong bus syndrome metaphor represents this separation from convention and constraints to take direction for one’s self. Maathai illuminates alternative routes and directions that the people of Kenya can take in

order to avoid getting on the “wrong bus.” She provides support and a resource to take action through the Green Belt Movement.

Similarly, Maathai calls attention to the wrong bus syndrome as a rhetorical tool used to engage her community as a benchmark for the Green Belt Movement. The Green Belt Movement was founded in 1977 and is representative of a movement for change, an environmental movement that intertwines the civil, the political, and the environmental. The fact that this metaphor is delivered in a book chapter in the year 2000 further emphasizes its placement as an ideological metaphor to provide insight into the Green Belt Movement. In this book chapter, Maathai overviews how the Green Belt Movement got started and how her activism developed in Kenya. The wrong bus syndrome is an ideological metaphor for the community of Kenya where the Green Belt Movement starts. This book chapter provides a look into activists around the world and Maathai utilizes the wrong bus syndrome to illustrate to the world how she develops activists out of ordinary people. This metaphor functions as both an introduction to the ways in which the Green Belt Movement got started as well as an insightful tool for demonstrating connections between local everyday problems and large scale societal issues. Furthermore, this metaphor is mobile in its transferability to apply to other communities, by taking localized issues to draw out comparisons to larger problems in order to get off the “wrong bus.”

Once this misdirection is turned into direction there is clarity and focus moving forward. Maathai states, “The clarity of what you ought to do gives you courage, removes the fear, gives you courage to ask. There is so much you do not know. And you need to know. And it helps you get your mind focused. Now, you are out of the bus and moving to the right direction.”<sup>85</sup> Like the African stool metaphor the wrong bus syndrome metaphor takes a localized aspect of the culture and community and connects it to larger social problems. Maathai’s rhetoric creatively

takes on these social issues and breaks them down in an attempt to connect on a personal level to the people of Kenya.

The wrong bus syndrome is personal and an emotional representation of a lack of agency in Kenya. Buses are controlled by the driver who manages their destination and moves the bus forward. If one gets on the wrong bus unknowingly or even knowingly they are allowing their destination to be predetermined by another force as opposed to chosen by their own fruition. A bus is a literal symbol of transportation and movement. The idea of getting on the wrong bus and being taken in the wrong direction is a part of Kenyan life; either they cannot read, they fail to ask for help, or they are confident in their abilities and end up on the wrong bus, going in the wrong direction. When you get on the “wrong bus” you are moving in a negative direction. Furthermore, you are allowing the driver of that bus to dictate your path and control your destination. It takes courage for the people of Kenya to recognize that the wrong bus syndrome is occurring.

This realization comes at the cost of pushing against the Kenyan government and the systems that have kept the people of Kenya under control for over forty years (roughly the 1950s – 1990s). The wrong bus syndrome metaphor is fitting for the people of Kenya to grasp and understand even though it takes self-empowerment to partake in the actions to get off the bus and pave a new direction. The use of a bus as the focal aspect of the metaphor is symbolic of progress and mobility. When the people of Kenya began to realize that their drivers (government) were leading them astray instead of towards their destined paths they got off the bus. The wrong bus syndrome runs parallel to the ways that a government, more specifically the Kenyan government, controls much of the destination of their people. However, when people take control of their destination and direction they impact change on a local level.

Once the people of Kenya begin to get off the wrong bus Maathai asserts that “they will see you move with passion, conviction, and persistence . . . Quite often you threaten people, either people who are on the wrong bus or people who are driving others, because you know they are driving people in the wrong direction and you are asking them not to follow.”<sup>86</sup> Overall, the rhetoric used to articulate the wrong bus syndrome is notably personal. There is an abundance of the word “you” as well as a tie to personal problems experiences by the Kenyan people. This metaphor placed within a book is reflective of the personal level of intimacy between author and reader. A reader dives into a book one-on-one and encapsulates oneself in the language and authors word choices. Maathai’s development of this metaphor in such detail allows the wrong bus syndrome to simmer in the minds of readers for an extended period of time to illuminate the ways in which this metaphor is representative of environmental and human rights issues. This local impact transfers to global acknowledgement when used in a rhetorical manner. Maathai incorporates and calls attention to this strategy in her rhetoric, bridging the ideological with the strategic to demonstrate the use of metaphor to represent both the need for change and the ways to enact change. Overall, the wrong bus syndrome is a mobile metaphor that literally transports itself to a global audience through the rhetoric of Maathai. In the next, section I will discuss the final metaphor dominant in Maathai’s rhetoric: trees.

### *Trees*

The Green Belt Movement is based around tree planting and its mission “to strive for better environmental management, community empowerment, and livelihood improvement using tree-planting as an entry point.”<sup>87</sup> This mission is woven throughout Maathai’s rhetoric through the continual use of trees in a metaphoric manner. No matter the audience: Nobel Laureates, book readers, members of the World Congress of Agroforestry, Nelson Mandela, political

members of South Korea, or other governmental officials, Maathai finds a way to place the metaphor of trees within her rhetoric to highlight their importance not only to the Green Belt Movement but to the overall sustainability of the Kenyan people and their environment. Trees are a focal aspect of the Green Belt Movement and they represent the most prominent metaphor in Maathai's rhetoric. In this section, I maintain that the metaphor of trees denotes symbolic insights emblematic of a merger between the figurative and the literal to create a creative portrayal of environmental degradation and paths towards sustainability.

In *Speak Truth to Power*, Maathai defines courage as, “not having fear,” and argues that “[f]ear is the biggest enemy you have.”<sup>88</sup> In order to combat fear, Maathai operationalized courage as the simple act of tree planting. In Maathai's Nobel Lecture she affirms that “[t]ree planting became a natural choice to address some of the initial basic needs identified by women. Also, tree planting is simple, attainable and guarantees quick, successful results within a reasonable amount of time.”<sup>89</sup> The Green Belt Movement and Maathai encourage the people of Kenya “to go ahead and start to plant trees. Grow and produce enough food for your family. Get in the food security project, making sure that you plant a lot of indigenous food crops so that we do not lose local biodiversity.”<sup>90</sup> It is important to sustain our planet and preserve its natural landscape in order to promote the continual growth and development of resources and products that ensure the secure functionality of the planet. During Maathai's keynote address at the World Congress of Agroforestry she states, “Trees have an important role not only in climate change mitigation but also in reducing vulnerability to climate-related risks.”<sup>91</sup> Through the work of the Green Belt Movement and the activism of Maathai trees become an integral component in mitigating environmental risks as well as providing security for the people

of Kenya to sustain their land. Trees become an epicenter for not only environmental degradation but security for the people of Kenya to have access to materials and resources to feed their families and keep local biodiversity thriving. Therefore, the tree is the culmination and literal symbol of progress, change, and growth.

Furthermore, the tree brings together the issues of peace, democracy, and the environment through the actions of those who chose to get off the bus and drive towards a new direction. Kenneth Burke states, “One confronts contradictions. Insofar as they are resolvable contradictions he acts to resolve them. . . . [and] symbolically erects a ‘higher synthesis’, in poetic and conceptual imagery, that helps him to ‘accept’ them.”<sup>92</sup> The synthesis constructed through Maathai’s rhetoric emphasizes the role the environment plays in creating a peaceful planet. Metaphorically and symbolically, trees themselves become a congregate for the environment, democracy, and peace. Maathai explains, “[T]he tree became a symbol for democratic struggle. . . . The tree also became a symbol for peace and conflict resolution.”<sup>93</sup> The tree is a creative symbol for conflict resolution. As Tatushi Arai states “Conflict resolution is a social process through which root causes and contexts of a given conflict are systematically assessed and effective nonviolent means explored to eradicate destructive effects of the underlying problems.”<sup>94</sup> Trees function as a metaphor for all the underlying problems that kept many Kenyans from getting off the wrong bus as well as from seeing the interconnectivity between peace, democracy, and the environment. Maathai states:

Managing resources in a sustainable way and governing ourselves in a more democratic and inclusive way where we respect human rights and respect diversity and promote equity that it is very very [sic] important to peace and that when you do so you prevent many of the reasons why we eventually end up fighting each other.<sup>95</sup>

Maathai continually reveals through her rhetoric the link between our natural resources and the conflicts that result when those resources are lacking. Through planting trees which provide timber, food, and resiliency for the top soil to survive as well as water to soak into the ground and not flood the lands, trees become a metaphoric advocate for sustainable development and a demonstration of that development. According to Maathai during her Nelson Mandela lecture, it is vital to “manage our resources sustainably, accountably, and responsibly. We need to share those resources equitably. Otherwise, we shall continue to invest in wars and conflicts. Fighting crime and domestic instability, rather than promoting development and thereby eliminating poverty.”<sup>96</sup> The fact that trees become a symbol to address conflict, poverty, sustainable development, democracy, and peace further reinforces the strength of this metaphor. This literal material of the environment becomes a metaphoric tool in the visual and symbolic bridging of the environment, democracy, and peace.

Additionally, the tree is also a symbol of the trajectory for the direction in which the linkages between peace, democracy, and the environment are headed up. Trees grow up and their roots grow out from their grounded base. As the roots of a tree spread out the tree becomes much larger than what is visible above the surface. Trees have depth not seen by looking out onto a landscape. The problems of our planet along with the lack of sustainable development and proper management of our resources goes far beyond the surface just as a tree goes deep into the soil and spreads its roots across the land. The issues addressed not only in Kenya but throughout our planet go deeper than we think and when only what can be seen is what is addressed there is a misrepresentation of the totality of the problem. However, when trees grow up and the landscape

begins to fill again with foliage and vegetation that visually represents environmental progression.

Just as there are numerous issues to be addressed there are numerous types of trees that provide diverse and convergent resources. Trees come in all shapes and sizes; they also provide different gifts to the planet, whether it is different types of timber for burning or building or different types of nourishment. The metaphor of the tree runs deep, just as its roots do. When gardening, landscaping, or planting one assesses the area, the soil, and the overall climate to determine if what they wish to grow will truly flourish in this space and place. Maathai's rhetoric conveys that for too long they were planting, in essence, the wrong trees, just as people were getting on the wrong bus, these misdirections and missteps lead to grave environmental degradation. Trees are intricate as are the issues addressed through tree planting. The roots of a tree are twisted and tangled while the branches of a tree tend to spread out fully aware of the other branches around them. The trunk of a tree stands strong, solid, and supportive at the center, bridging the tangled roots with the banquet of branches. This natural and beautiful structure speaks through its design. Moving from the bottom up a tree is reflective of working through life's wicked problems.

According to Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, wicked problems are complex political and social problems "that cannot be definitively described." Proposed solutions to wicked problems "cannot be meaningfully correct or false"; in fact, wicked problems have "no 'solutions' in the sense of definitive and objective answers."<sup>97</sup> In this sense, the physical aspects of a tree illustrate the wicked problems that lay within issues of democracy, peace, and the environment. The snarled roots are the multiple voices

screaming to have their problems heard. These voices get tangled and twisted in their confusing conversations that grow and spread but rarely get resolved without some intervention or proper management. The roots represent the multiplicity of issues that exist and overlap in these conversations and debates. As you move up the tree and get to the trunk this represents dialogue, mediation, and development. The trunk is usually the longest visible part above ground and depending on the problem discussed it can take a long time and a lot of dialogue to reach those branches, hence the trunk grows larger and longer. The trunk is strong and patient just as a people should be when sorting out their issues. Most solutions are not quick to resolve like watering a house plant or planting a fern, they are bigger than all of us and therefore, we need all of us to address and offer input into these problems and possible solutions. In the end, the branches represent reconciliation, compromise, and progress. There are many branches going in many different directions and in any society there will be several proposed solutions to a problem. Along with those proposed solutions compromises are made, some people leave unhappy or dissatisfied, and some people branch out far enough to sprout their own seedlings and start the process over again.

Trees are cyclical and follow an elaborate life process that is not thought of in great depth normally, but this life process is similar to dealing with life's big and small issues. All of the parts of the process connect just as Maathai affirms that peace, democracy, and the environment connect. There are things that can intervene and hinder the process such as deforestation, lack of rain, or even the wind. These aspects of a tree's life make it a powerful metaphor for environmental degradation, sustainable development and management of resources, good governance, and peace. Overall, trees become a

creative and practical way to engage in environmental change. In the end, “trees are symbols of peace and hope”<sup>98</sup> and they connect and reach much more than is conceivable or perceivable by the human eye at a glance.

### Conclusion

Overall, the three major metaphors in this chapter strengthen the importance and interconnectivity of peace, democracy, and the environment. According to Hermann Stelzner, metaphors are impactful if they are “vivid and apt” and if “they contain potencies which literal statements do not have.”<sup>99</sup> All of the metaphors in this chapter provide those potencies that would otherwise not be conveyed if Maathai’s rhetoric simply reiterated that peace, democracy, and the environment are interconnected. By utilizing metaphors Maathai’s rhetoric exemplifies creativity and an adoption of characters to see those connections from a different viewpoint. This viewpoint unites aspects of everyday lived experiences of African culture.

The African stool, the wrong bus syndrome, and trees unite in their connectivity to the lives of Africans. These non-Western metaphors are delivered to African, Asian, American, and European audiences to ground Maathai’s rhetoric in the people and place she works to sustain. No matter the audience, international or national, Maathai’s rhetoric returns to Africa, broadly, and Kenya more specifically. Her rhetoric unites its words and language in a utilitarian manner that brings her distant audiences’ one figurative step closer to her home, Kenya. Maathai’s rhetoric is illustrative of this marrying of metaphors to connect to her cause in Kenya as well as to represent progress and change.

Each metaphor, the stool, the bus, and the tree, imply growth or forward progress. A stool boosts one up and literally elevates one above the ground. A bus moves one

forward and demonstrates progress in passage and growth in ability to move distances. A tree simply grows, and is a natural example of progress as it moves from seedling, to bud, to tree. All these metaphors when nurtured and nourished, are indicative of growth and progress: the stools' construction must demonstrate care and precision, the bus' maintenance when upheld keeps the engine healthy, and the tree when planted in proper soil, watered as necessary, and allowed to mature provides the timber and sustenance needed. Furthermore, in order for these metaphors to grow and progress human intervention is imperative. Even though trees are naturalistic, a bus is technological, and a stool is a combination of both, without humans intervening in a positive manner to promote the proper development of these resources these metaphors lose their potency. This potency is present through the uniting of these metaphors as well as through their separation and insights garnered from each.

The African stool reminds us that “we have to invest in the environment. We have to invest in cultures of peace, continuously and deliberately. We have to invest in cultures of democratisation, of democratic space.”<sup>100</sup> This metaphor is poignant in that it is a local construction from a local resource. The Green Belt Movement started as a local grassroots initiative and spread to international levels. The African stool is symbolic of the movement's roots and literal grounding in addressing environmental degradation. The stool is made from the land that Maathai works to preserve and just as she wishes for people to see things more holistically the African stool is made from one log that utilizes the holistic aspects of the wood to construct a stool. This metaphor is telling of the interconnectivity between peace, democracy, and the environment and her grounding in addressing all of these issues through a holistic and balanced approach.

The wrong bus syndrome metaphor pushes Maathai's rhetoric to be reflective of activism and action. "You need to take action. You have to inform yourself. And you are willing to inquire; you are willing to learn . . . ." <sup>101</sup> This metaphor is self-reflective for audiences to think about their histories, their positions in life, and about what they can do to address the problems they face. It is easy in life to get misdirected or misled but it is even harder to redirect oneself down the right path after being misled for so long. The wrong bus syndrome metaphor asks for faith and trust in going in a new direction, the right direction, once the realization of the past and the previous paths that have led to dead ends and roundabouts illuminate one can begin to take a turn in a new direction.

Finally, the metaphor and powerful symbolism of the tree connects the other two metaphors and further reinforces how connected everything is and how the issues addressed in Maathai's rhetoric are profound and intricate. To address environmental degradation Maathai's rhetoric and the Green Belt Movement take literal piece of the environment to promote change and progress. The seedlings used to plant trees represent hope for the future generations of Kenya and the world to not be faced with a lack of resources or a concrete desert instead of a lush landscape with abundant crops, vibrant animals, and secure families.

In the end, all of these metaphors represent strategic rhetorical choices for Maathai. She tactically utilizes metaphors representative of African ideologies and structures her rhetoric to reinforce their connection to larger issues. Even though her audiences are varied her rhetoric is creative and makes connections that are grounded in everyday lived experiences. The dominant metaphors illustrated are not prevalent in all cultures but all cultures utilize furniture for sitting, modes of transportation, and nature.

Maathai takes familiar aspects of everyday life and focuses them on her African cause to connect her national and international audiences to her rhetoric.

Lastly, all of these metaphors are articulated by Maathai, a strong African woman, speaking on behalf of other African men and women. She is well-versed and the composition of her rhetoric is clear and intelligent. Since she is usually speaking to well-educated audiences there is a certain expectation that her language will adhere to her audience. Maathai fulfills this expectation while still utilizing local language that positions Africa and their ideologies at the core of her rhetoric. The choice to utilize metaphors is one of many rhetorical strategies emplaced in Maathai's thoughtful and planned rhetoric. In the next chapter, I will focus on Maathai's use of narrative as a rhetorical strategy.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### TELL ME A STORY: NOTABLE NARRATIVES IN MAATHAI'S RHETORIC

John Steinbeck once said, "I am impelled, not to squeak like a grateful and apologetic mouse, but to roar like a lion out of pride in my profession."<sup>102</sup> Wangari Maathai similarly roars like a lion through her commitment to peace, democracy, and the environment. Even though Maathai is not a famous storyteller, like Steinbeck, she utilizes the art of storytelling to connect her cause to her people and audiences around the world. These stories bring about a grounded understanding of peace, democracy, and the environment through common tales that depict localized anecdotes reflective of these issues in a creative and informative manner.

Maathai is a quintessential storyteller and agent not only through her involvement in the Green Belt Movement but also through her various examples of discourse that exemplify the ways in which she connects stories of East Africans to the issues of East Africa. Through these stories Maathai's rhetoric illustrates, to use Walter Fisher's terms, an "awareness of *narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and constant habit of testing *narrative fidelity*, whether the stories . . . ring true with the stories" she knows to be true in her life and the lives of the people and place she speaks on behalf of.<sup>103</sup> The narrative paradigm as constructed by Fisher is a predominantly Westernized view of the use of narrative. However, Maathai's rhetoric utilizes this paradigm to provide an expanded and potentially universal adaptation of this communicative tool to demonstrate the transferability of it beyond Western narratives. In this chapter, I argue that Maathai's rhetoric functions to bridge the localized issues of Kenya with a global audience through the use of narrative and in turn expands Fisher's narrative paradigm to hold universal appeal. This expansion is conveyed through Maathai's use of narrative setting,

events, and characters indicative of Kenya to bolster the coherence, fidelity, and rationality of her narratives to Western and non-Western audiences alike.

This chapter will be constructed around the narrative components of setting, events, and characters focusing on Maathai's use of both Western and non-Western narrative aspects to connect to national and global audiences. Additionally, I will comment on Maathai's role as narrator and suggest implications of Maathai's use of narrative to the art of storytelling within the communication discipline. Russell Kirkscey states, "rhetors can use narrative to sustain social movements."<sup>104</sup> Maathai's use of narrative highlights her ability to structure symbolic messages reflective of the occurring issues in Africa and of her social and environmental activism. Through this analysis, this chapter will reinforce the impact of storytelling along with the creative ability of Maathai to extend a localized problem to a global audience through narrative. In what follows, I will briefly overview the pertinent literature on narrative and the narrative paradigm to better position the goals of this chapter prior to my analysis of Maathai's rhetoric.

### Narrative

Narratives and story-telling are fundamental forms of human communication and as Fisher states "[t]he character of narrator(s), the conflicts, the resolutions, and the style will vary, but each mode of recounting and accounting for is but a way of relating a 'truth' about the human condition."<sup>105</sup> This truth may be relayed through localized anecdotes, personal experience, fictional portrayals, or even grandiose exposés. Regardless, narrative is a formative aspect of human communication which helps to account for lived experience. Fisher's paradigm notes that all meaningful communication is a form of storytelling.<sup>106</sup> Through the use of narrative we learn "truths by dwelling in the characters in the story, by observing the outcomes of the several conflicts that arise throughout it, by seeing the unity of characters and their actions,

and by comparing the truths to the truths we know to be true from our own lives.”<sup>107</sup> This paradigm offers a grounded perspective to conceptualize the construction of narrative as a human communication act with significance to the human experience and comprehension of life.

Beyond this foundational portrayal of the narrative paradigm, scholars such as John Louis Lucaites and Celeste Michelle Condit argue for a differing criterion to assess poetic, dialectical, and rhetorical functions of narrative calling for a distinct criterion for assessing each.<sup>108</sup> Additionally, Michael Calvin McGee and John S. Nelson note Fisher’s use of narrative rationality as problematic and polarizing focusing on Fisher’s loose interpretation for what constitutes narrative rationality.<sup>109</sup> Also, Barbara Warnick contests Fisher’s articulation of narrative probability and believes “that the presence of contradictory claims and equivocal statements in Fisher’s initial presentation of the paradigm are likely to cause difficulties for those who seek to apply it to the critical assessment of texts.”<sup>110</sup> Although the aforementioned critics challenge Fisher’s paradigm in distinct ways, their arguments implicitly indict the universality of the narrative paradigm.

In response to his critics, Fisher asserted that “the narrative paradigm is a philosophical statement that is meant to offer an approach to interpretation and assessment of human communication – assuming that all forms of human communication can be seen fundamentally as stories, as interpretations of aspects of the world occurring in time and shaped by history, culture, and character.”<sup>111</sup> This celebratory construction of the narrative paradigm is what I wish to further with this study and prove that, in fact, this paradigm holds universal appeal and allows for the interpretation of narratives across the world. I adopt Fisher’s optimism for the potential of this paradigm and have seen its promise and progress evident in much of the current and predominant literature in the discipline.

This open interpretation posed by Fisher has led to an abundance of research around the use of narratives.<sup>112</sup> Much of the scholarship utilizing narrative focuses on personal narratives of members of a similar group as a way to develop understanding and shared identity with issues such as physical disabilities, bereavement, illness, disaster, personal loss, or issues of circumstance.<sup>113</sup> This scholarship affirms the extensive reach that narrative has in regard to the lived experience of both the self and others. Additionally, this scholarship focuses on narratives surrounding politics, the media, family, social issues, spirituality, and everyday life; these differing areas of concern demonstrate the varied approaches that can be adopted for narrative inquiry. Furthermore, all of these narratives are meant to develop identity and identification through “narrative forms that create expectations and resonate with audiences.”<sup>114</sup> However, the majority of these narratives lack global appeal or engagement with non-Western narratives, limiting their resonance with a more universal and international audience.

There are few relevant and notable examples of the inclusion of non-Western narratives in communication scholarship.<sup>115</sup> Scott R. Stroud emphasizes that “texts from other cultures may also be employed in order to expand the narrative paradigm” and offer an “introduction of new values and narratives to an audience.”<sup>116</sup> This call aligns with the goals of this chapter to advance a more nuanced understanding of the narrative paradigm. Additionally, Kathleen Glenister Roberts has argued that “the demise of consensus narrative means that the commitment to storytelling (rather than arguing or acting) as a mode of human behavior is more significant now than ever.”<sup>117</sup> This move leads to the inclusion of more varied forms of narrative from differing perspectives, in her case the inclusion of folklore, and in this case the inclusion of East African narratives.

Overall, the current literature on narrative provides an opportunity to further advance the narrative paradigm and to truly “celebrate human beings . . . by reaffirming their nature as storytellers.”<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, it offers a path to test the universality of storytelling and narratives through an examination of the global reach of Maathai’s narratives. Specifically, through Maathai’s use of narrative she provides an example of trying to engender understanding about an issue that pertains specifically to Kenya but which has the potential to resonate more broadly. Maathai utilizes personal narratives to comment on the environment, democracy, and peace thus providing integrative narratives that address the personal, the political, and the social. Maathai’s narratives offer what Glenister Roberts asserts to be “a model for community life by proposing a progression from story to narrative: when a story has enough coherence and fidelity that it can be agreed upon by a group of people, it becomes public and is therefore a narrative.”<sup>119</sup> Maathai’s narratives are representational of the people and experiences of Kenya, however, through her public positionality she is able to introduce these issues to a global audience and that makes her narratives truly impactful. In the next section, I will begin to unpack Maathai’s use of narrative, focusing initially on her use of the African landscape as a narrative setting.

#### Narrative Setting: The Landscape of Africa

The construction of the African continent is continually reified in the West as a place with a primitive culture, full of victims, and in need of Western intervention.<sup>120</sup> Molefi Kete Asante stresses, “[t]he tropes about Africa have become commonplace because of the falsification of information about the continent by Western media sources.”<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, he contends that “the inferiorization of Africa is a part of the philosophical and cultural fabric of Europeanization. It is as if the definition of the West must include a discourse on Africa as the negation.”<sup>122</sup> However, through Maathai’s use of narrative she constructs an alternative view of

Africa and offers a native discourse on the continent. By setting her narratives in the East African setting of her home, Maathai portrays this space from a non-Western and native perspective. This functions, as Victoria J. Gallagher emphasizes, to help “people to vividly experience, remember, and interpret events and accomplishments removed from them in time and space.”<sup>123</sup> This places Maathai’s construction of the landscape of Africa as removed from Western portrayals and indicative of a lived experience that stresses the importance of setting to her narrative structure.

In this section, I assert that through this non-Western and native construction of the environment of Africa Maathai creates a counter-space of the African land. This counter-space highlights environmental degradation, the need for sustainable development, and the proper management of resources in Kenya. For the purposes of this section, I define a counter-space similarly to Nancy Fraser’s counterpublic. Nancy Fraser asserts that one needs to recognize the existence of a “plurality of public arenas” and since we live in a “multi-cultural society” it only makes sense that there is a “multiplicity of publics.”<sup>124</sup> In this regard, there is a multiplicity of portrayals of Africa. Maathai’s rhetoric provides one portrayal of this continent and specifically East Africa and Kenya through her use of narrative to construct a counter-space of memory, experience, and hope. This portrayal is “contrary to collective and public remembering” of Africa from a dominant representation of the continent in Western cultures yet it resonates with the citizens of the country more closely.<sup>125</sup>

It should be noted that the majority of the scholarship on space and place is devoted to the study of actual sites and, more specifically, structures of memorialization and memory.<sup>126</sup> However, I do not think this excludes Maathai’s spoken narratives. Maathai is constructing a discursive space that encompasses past, present, and future environments. Furthermore, like

many of the texts referenced in the space and place literature, Maathai's construction of space is based on memory and experience. Additionally, as Sonja Modesti claims "spaces invite multiple understandings of the space and those who inhabit the space because they are predicated upon fractured images, symbols, and signs."<sup>127</sup> Maathai's narratives invite this multiple understanding through her construction of a non-Western African landscape allowing for numerous reads of her construction of East Africa. This construction of space broadly, and a counter-space more specifically, is most prominent in Maathai's tadpole narrative. In this narrative Maathai 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 . . . 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. The challenge is to restore the home of the tadpoles and give back to our children a world of beauty and wonder.<sup>128</sup>

The space created in this narrative is a counter-space—a terrain that outlines Maathai's perception of Africa using the strategy of presence and absence. Brian L. Ott, Eric Aoki, and Greg Dickinson explain this strategy and theory as the "unique interplay between *what* is present (displayed, revealed) and what is absent (not displayed, concealed)."<sup>129</sup> Additionally, they claim that "[a]bsence is not without meaning; rather, it is a fully embodied rhetorical experience."<sup>130</sup> These initial insights into presence and absence provide a foundational understanding into Maathai's rhetoric and how she rhetorically chooses to portray the place of Kenya within her narrative. Maathai's use of narrative to construct a figurative space reflective of her literal home through language and imagery choices creates a conceptualization of East Africa and Kenya, specifically, that highlights the presence of environmental degradation. At the same time, this narrative articulates an absence of the Western preconceived Africa in need. Instead this

narrative presents a space that is environmentally challenged yet experiential and specific to the people and memories of Kenya. This creation of a counter Africa affords African people an agency that does not exist in the United States and Western popular representations of this continent. Also, the unfinished quality of the narrative “and the indeterminate symbolic and figurative enactment open the story’s significance to extend beyond the individual to others in the audience, possibly motivating them to social action.”<sup>131</sup>

Furthermore, by setting her narratives in East Africa, Maathai rhetorically chooses to highlight the presence of the environment and chooses to exclude the narratives of despair so widely articulated to Western audiences. Specifically, Maathai 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.”<sup>132</sup> Undoubtedly, Maathai had many childhood experiences; however, she chooses to highlight an impactful and positive memory of her past that eclipses any negative portrayals of the people or place. This positioning works to demonstrate a counter-space and construction of Africa that omits the othered perspective so prevalent in Western societies. Ott et al. state, “[a]bsence is not presence’s opposite; it is presence’s barred Other.”<sup>133</sup> This Othering of Africa is present in the everyday portrayals of Africa by non-natives and Westerners. Maathai flips this portrayal by honing in on the environment of Africa as the major feature for audiences to grasp. Through envisioning the environment of Africa through Maathai’s personal lens the imaginary and the symbolic converge to provide audiences with a new narrative construction of Africa.

Additionally, Maathai’s narrative features childlike naivety, curiosity, and innocence, accentuating the convergence of the imaginary and the symbolic through the eyes of a child. Maathai states, “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.”<sup>134</sup> This narrative allows Maathai to transition through space and time and portrays a space of experience from childhood to adulthood.

This construction alters the narrative paradigm by giving Maathai the hierarchical power to portray this space due to her positionality as both a native and a well-educated woman whose knowledge and insight rivals and surpasses, many Westerners. This allows her rhetoric to bridge the gap between Africa and Westerners. Ott et al. state “[t]he Imaginary – the field of the images and appearances and of the signified – is structured by the Symbolic – the field of the linguistic and of the signifier.”<sup>135</sup> By setting her narratives in the environment she works to sustain, Maathai is symbolic as the narrator and thus the signifier and the setting she chooses to portray becomes the imaginary to her audiences through what she chooses to signify in her narratives. Maathai signifies a vibrant environment through the eyes of a child, an environment that is now being threatened by ignorance and disregard for the importance and impact of natural spaces. Just as the child in Maathai’s narrative unknowingly grabbed onto tadpole eggs, thus removing their lived potential, Maathai’s narrative highlights how the removal of these animals affects the lived potential of the people who inhabit these spaces.

In addition, Maathai’s narrative portrays an Africa of past, present, and future. In her tadpole narrative Maathai consistently remarks on the past land that sustained, the current land that is degrading, and the future land that needs to be preserved and protected for future generations. Returning to the tadpole narrative, Maathai states, “I reflect on my childhood experience”; she remarks, “[t]his is the world I inherited from my parents”; she concludes “[t]oday, over 50 years later, the stream has dried up . . . . The challenge is to restore the home of the tadpoles and give back to our children a world of beauty and wonder.”<sup>136</sup> This

narrative focuses on a framing of the environment that promotes both the cyclical nature of the world and the desire to return to a previous setting and space “of beauty and wonder.” Setting her narratives in Kenya functions to focus in on the environmental aspects of the area and blur any portrayals of the people, poverty, or health issues in great detail.<sup>137</sup> According to Lawrence J. Prelli “the meanings manifested rhetorically through display are functions of particular, situated resolutions of the dynamic between revealing and concealing.”<sup>138</sup> Maathai’s use of setting and place works to reveal to audiences the environmental issues while concealing the common portrayals of the people and place in desolate ways. Instead, Maathai takes those despairing and desolate portrayals and attaches them to the physical space and place that is truly in need.

This construction of the African landscape connects to other aspects of sustainability such as water, food, and health. In this regard, the African environment holds progressive power towards a sustainable future on multiple levels. In this sense, as Olga Davis states, the “cultural space is both a particular location that has culturally constructed meanings, and a metaphorical place from which” Maathai communicates.<sup>139</sup> This sustainable future is currently under construction and Maathai’s rhetoric cultivates a sustainable counter-space. Most notably, when Maathai states, “The challenge is to restore the home of the tadpoles and give back to our children a world of beauty and wonder” her words are working to fill an empty space.<sup>140</sup>

Jacques Lacan notes, “nothing exists except against a supposed background of absence . . . . In the symbolic order, the empty spaces are as signifying as the full ones.”<sup>141</sup> These empty spaces are demonstrated within Maathai’s narratives through the use of setting. This provides insight into aspects of the environment apparent in her narratives as well as absent and how these portrayals work to build a space of promise. Empty spaces can be seen as portrayals of lacking or longing in Maathai’s narrative and “they imagine and remake intersections of space and time.”<sup>142</sup>

In her narrative she juxtaposes the current landscape with a past landscape and the absences between the two are indicative of the absences of strong health, well-managed resources, and access to clean water. She states, “I reflect on my childhood experience . . . . I would drink water straight from the stream . . . .Today . . . .the stream has dried up, women walks long distances for water, which is not always clean, and the children will never know what they have lost.”<sup>143</sup>

Maathai’s rhetoric works to demonstrate the connection between the issues of peace, democracy, and the environment and through her use of narrative setting further explicates this connection.

Overall, as Greg Dickinson states, “narratives and images of and about space serve as ways of mapping or making sense of new spatial relationships.”<sup>144</sup> Setting her narratives in the Kenyan environment functions to form a transitional construction of this place with the promise of a progressive future environment. Furthermore, Maathai’s use of narrative setting constructs this portrayal of Africa that vacillates between what was, what is, and what can be constructing a “new spatial relationship” that spans time. As Phyllis Scott Carlin and Linda M. Park-Fuller assert “narrative is a personal experience story of a specific . . . event told with awareness of community and historical obligations . . . and, despite their temporal distance from the event” are performed by tellers “with an urgent, emergent sense of self, place and purpose arising from the ‘emergency’ of the event.”<sup>145</sup> Maathai is this teller, performing her narrative of the past, present, and future, to highlight the importance and urgency of addressing environmental degradation in Africa. This narrative is not the only example that illustrates Maathai’s integration of purpose and experience to convey the importance of constructing a sustainable future. In the next section, I will analyze a different aspect of Maathai’s narratives, her use of narrative events in connection to practices of everyday life.

## Narrative Events: Practices of Everyday Life

Everyday practices and actions contribute to the overall functionality of a people and place. The everyday practices of the Kenyan people are something Maathai has immediate access to being a Kenyan herself. This accessibility affords Maathai's rhetoric to authentically reflect the natives and incorporate lived experiences to emphasize environmental awareness and identification through shared concern. In this section, I assert that this shared concern highlights how the practices of everyday life translate to impactful narrative events in Maathai's rhetoric to link the environmental and the everyday to reinforce issues of sustainability, proper management of resources, and the importance of the seemingly mundane.

Tim Edensor states, "national identity is grounded in the everyday, in the mundane details of social interactions, habits, routines, and practical knowledge."<sup>146</sup> Maathai utilizes the mundane to draw connections between the issues occurring in Africa and how they impact the simplest practices of everyday life. In each of the narratives outlined in this chapter Maathai hones in on a key component of everyday living for the Kenyan people and communal aspects of their national identity. Returning to her tadpole narrative Maathai states, "women walk long distances for water, which is not always clean, and children will never know what they have lost" and taps into the act of fetching water and how this daily task becomes an impactful representation of the potential consequences of deforestation, mismanaged lands, and uncared for biodiversity.<sup>147</sup> Even though this narrative is a personal anecdote, the actions illustrated depict daily habits and routines of many Kenyan and African people.

As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell states, narrative is "a highly appealing form of discourse, particularly if identification between advocate and audience is facilitated by common values and shared experiences."<sup>148</sup> The practices of everyday life in Kenya become those "common values

and shared experiences” expressed within Maathai’s narratives. The tadpole narrative was delivered to an international audience, yet by showcasing the simple act of fetching water, Maathai connects her story to the larger theme of environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the use of this narrative figuratively transports the people of Kenya and their everyday experiences to a global audience. That connection back to the environmental makes the mundane germane and positions the practices of the everyday as influential.

The specific practices of everyday life may differ in their details for the people of Kenya but the basic needs expressed such as food, water, shelter, and safety resound far beyond a Kenyan only audience. Most notably, Maathai’s use of the daily tasks of the women of Kenya to care for their families is a narrative present throughout the world. Maathai states:

The women talked about how, a long time ago, they did not have to spend so much time going out to collect firewood, that they lived near the forest. They spoke of how, once, they ate food that sustained their health. Now, while the food does not require much energy to grow, it does not sustain them. The women feel their families are now very weak and cannot resist diseases, that their bodies are impoverished because of an environment that is degraded.<sup>149</sup>

These women are constantly engaging in daily activities that are imperative to sustaining their families and the health and safety of their children. Mary Chamberlain asserts “it is within the everyday, within the family and the workplace, the home or the street, that family values and cultural practices are transmitted, contested, transformed and where identities evolve.”<sup>150</sup> These aspects of nature and nurture draw on how the daily activities relate back to the environmental concerns expressed in Maathai’s rhetoric. The utilization of the specific perspectives of the women of Kenya will be covered in more detail in the next section. However, the pertinence to this section is the use of the practices of everyday life as constructing tools in Maathai’s narrative development.

The tadpole narrative and the use of the daily practices of the women of Kenya both convey practices specific to the people of Kenya but adjustable to the daily needs of most people of the world reinforcing the expansion of the narrative paradigm beyond narratives of the West through identification with the mundane everyday practices of life. This construction affords Maathai's narratives a flexibility to become malleable to their audience and representative of parallels in the practices of their own daily lives. The reiterations of daily performances and compulsory repetitions of everyday acts leads to a recognition of seeing these activities as natural truths and therefore, constituting meaning and understanding through identification with the mundane.<sup>151</sup> The other two narratives discussed in this chapter, coded wisdom and the story of Peter and John, utilize a more specific aspect of daily life that connects to the traditional and the spiritual.

In these narratives Maathai incorporates religious and spiritual practices of everyday life. By tapping into indigenous spirituality in her Kenyan speech with the narrative of coded wisdom, and Christianity during the Nelson Mandela lecture with the narrative of Peter and John, Maathai connects her values to values she knows to be held by her audience. This connection takes an aspect of many people's identities, religion and spirituality, and strategically places it to elicit a connection to her audience in order to bridge her environmental concerns with faith to create a shared concern. In what follows, I will begin to unpack these two narratives in more detail.

In Africa, the most commonly practiced religions are Christianity and Islam. In a 2010 article in *Christianity Today* Chika Oduah states, "For the past 100 years, indigenous spirituality has been diluted as missionaries carried Islam and Christianity throughout the African continent."<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, many African indigenous beliefs have been incorporated into Islam

and Christianity. This information positions Maathai's use of Christian appeals within her narratives as indicative of one of the dominant belief systems in Africa. This strategic utilization builds on Maathai's rhetorical ability to adapt to her audience and hone in on powerful symbolism through creative narratives that capture components of the everyday.

The Peter and John narrative utilized during Maathai's Nelson Mandela Lecture represents explicit connection to Christianity and the Bible, linking her narrative to both native and non-native audiences. In this narrative Maathai states:

The phenomenon of disempowerment is very common and perhaps that is why it is not addressed . . . Such disempowerment and the triumph over it remind me of a story in the Bible that I love. (It is in Acts 3:1–10.) It's the story where Peter and John went to the temple for prayer. As they approached, they came across a beggar . . . Peter and John, upon seeing him in that dehumanised and humiliated state, said to him "Look up"! . . . Peter went on, "Silver and gold we do not have, but what we have we give to you." And, taking him by the right hand Peter helped the lame man stand up saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Rise up and walk!" And much to his surprise, he felt his limbs get strong and he rose up and walked forward with confidence and pride . . . He was an empowered man: no longer a beggar, no longer dehumanized . . . Peter and John reacted differently and decided to empower him, to give him wholeness. They encouraged him to believe in himself and walk with them into the temple.<sup>153</sup>

The use of the story of Peter and John promotes identification with the audience through spiritual appeals. Maathai takes an aspect of her shared identity as a Christian and Kenyan with her audience and positions her rhetoric to function strategically to reinforce that common ideology and practice. Maathai utilizes this story to connect to the issues of disempowerment she sees within her people and to draw her audience in as active participants and potential activists in the preservation of the environment. Maathai states, "it is a level of disempowerment of our people. Wherever it comes from, it manifests itself in the form of fear, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, apathy and lack of enthusiasm to take charge of one's life and destiny."<sup>154</sup> In order to address this level of disempowerment Maathai and the Green Belt Movement "initiated

education seminars to identify the problems, their sources and solutions.”<sup>155</sup> Patricia Hill Collins asserts, “[a]cquiring a focused education demonstrates the significance of self, change, and empowerment.”<sup>156</sup>

Maathai further claims, “education will help, peace and security are important, and sustainable management of resources is essential. But the people must be allowed to gain confidence, dignity and a sense of self-worth. Ultimately, they must also be empowered with knowledge, skills and tools to take action.”<sup>157</sup> Again, education, an aspect of daily life that most endure is positioned around the narrative of Peter and John to illustrate steps to combat disempowerment. This action occurs through the use of the already empowered, privileged, and educated, using their positions to inform others and give them the skills and tools to create change.

Fisher states that “[w]ith knowledge of agents, we can hope to find that which is *reliable or trustworthy*; with knowledge of objects we can hope to discover that which has the quality of *veracity*. The world requires both kinds of knowledge.”<sup>158</sup> To get to true self-empowerment, change, and action Maathai acquires both the knowledge of agents and of objects to first empower herself and then to bring that knowledge back to her world in Africa and empower others. This narrative is a reminder of how to enact change in others. Maathai reiterates that “Peter and John called on the beggar to rise up and walk. It was not Peter and John who had to do the rising and the walking. It was the beggar . . . he decided to respond to an opportunity which presented itself, he was ready for it and his life was changed for the better.”<sup>159</sup> Maathai calls on everyone, especially her audience, to “walk away from ignorance, inertia, apathy and fatalism,” and to “walk towards the temple of economic and political freedom. An Africa free of dehumanizing poverty.”<sup>160</sup> Maathai’s strategic use of the Peter and John narrative provides a call

to action through the use of this parable to place her audience as a potential empowered entity to communicate change through their daily interactions and actions.

This placement positions Maathai's rhetoric to function with coherence and truth. Maathai's use of the coded wisdom and Peter and John narratives reveals her ability to adapt to her specific audience and take tokens of common values to create a shared experience through her rhetoric. However, Maathai's coded wisdom narrative recounts a Kikuyu tradition that implicitly appeals to both Western and Kenyan audiences through its religious undertones. The use of this narrative further expands the values to consider in developing a universal narrative paradigm due to its focus on pre-colonial aspects of daily life and non-Western approaches to environmental sustainability. Due to this positionality, I have chosen to delve into this narrative in greater detail and explicate how it connects to not only an everyday practice of the people of Kenya but also to religious values largely held and understood by a Western audience. In this narrative, Maathai states:

[I]n many of the world traditions people developed mechanisms that allow them to reduce their vulnerability. For example, amongst the Kikuyu community here in Kenya, hungry vulnerable groups and travelers were permitted to feed off the farms as long as they did not carry any of the food away. One was required to sit down and eat and satisfy hunger, but not carry food away. It was a common law that people obeyed to prevent death from hunger. For these groups there was a special granary of God (ikumbi ria Ngai), which was supplied by the public. As members passed by from the field with a harvest (magetha), they would throw some of it into the granary of God. This was a good sign of community sense of responsibility to others and very much an equivalent of the biblical tithes or 10%. Such common laws and coded wisdom, on local biodiversity and other agricultural issues, is largely being replaced by greed, selfishness and complete lack of sense of community good. We are more likely to be our brothers' killers, rather than our brothers' keepers!<sup>161</sup>

This narrative focuses on an appeal to the audience to reflect on their past as Kenyan people and how the legacies and traditions of old can mirror a past of sustainability and future hope for the same. This narrative is clearly structured and rationally depicts a tradition that highlights

parallels to possible ways to address environmental issues in a shared and sustainable manner. Specifically, when Maathai states, “For these groups there was a special granary of God (ikumbi ria Ngai), which was supplied by the public.”<sup>162</sup> This use of a Kikuyu tradition bridges the past and the present to illuminate to her audience the ways they can incorporate similar measures in the future to maintain resources for all in Kenya. In short, this narrative is as much a story of the present as it is a story of the past.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, this narrative is true to the lives of the people in her audience and their ancestors. Maathai states, “amongst the Kikuyu community here in Kenya” and thus, highlights the immediacy and closeness of this narrative to the people of Kenya.<sup>164</sup> This narrative takes the audience into account as members of the community addressed and implicit characters in the narrative. Through Maathai’s incorporation of a shared narrative with her audience she underscores the interconnectivity of the issues as well as the urgency for them to be addressed and potential solutions to creating a harmonious African landscape.

Overall, the coded wisdom narrative depicts what Jonas Fryman and Orvar Löfgren describe as a “cultural community . . . established by people together tackling the world around them with familiar manoeuvres [sic].”<sup>165</sup> Maathai states, “It was a common law that people obeyed to prevent death from hunger.”<sup>166</sup> These familiar maneuvers are aspects of Kikuyu practices of everyday life and provide a symbol for how to live amongst one another with balance, simplicity, and sustainability. Fisher notes, “[t]he idea of human beings as story tellers indicates the generic form of all symbolic composition; it holds that symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities in which there is sanction for the story that constitutes one’s life.”<sup>167</sup> The coded wisdom narrative is constitutive

of this type of story and storytelling. The hope engrained in this story is a hope to get back to a time of sustainability and responsibility towards one another, a time when most shared a similar quality of life and care for the life of others in their everyday practices.

Also, this story asks audience members to refrain from being their brothers' killers and remember to be their brothers' keepers; Maathai claims, "Such common laws and coded wisdom, on local biodiversity and other agricultural issues, is largely being replaced by greed, selfishness and complete lack of sense of community good. We are more likely to be our brothers' killers, rather than our brothers' keepers!"<sup>168</sup> This biblical tie in to the story of Cain and Abel is profound in its connectivity to not only cherishing life and the life of others, but to the environment as well. In the biblical account of Cain and Abel it states, "The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."<sup>169</sup> This biblical tale recounts the consequences of not looking out for one's "brother" and, poignantly, the consequence is impacted through a lack of resources from the land and a turn to a life of want. This story is reflective of the ideas central to the tradition of the Kikuyus and demonstrates how when one does not look out for one another in the end, it will come full circle, and the devastation and destruction of another will become our own devastation and destruction. The use of this biblical tale pulls the audience further into this shared narrative and calls on the audience to be "brothers" to one another. This is the last sentence of the narrative; this strategic structuring takes the most common aspect of the narrative for the audience and front loads it to highlight the problems and potential solutions then incorporates a strong final line to emphasize consequence and commonality. The use of the

coded wisdom narrative demonstrates Maathai's adaptable style to relate to her audience on a personal level as well as her ability to structure her narrative with rationality and validity to accent problem, solution, and consequence. In sum, this narrative represents rhetorical fluidity and familiarity to its audience and presents a story to articulate solidarity in the situation and unity in progress towards a solution. Similarly, Maathai's use of the Peter and John narrative highlights this Biblical appeal further and incorporation of religious practices of everyday life.

To conclude, the above narratives ground themselves in connecting back to the practices of everyday life and how they link to the environment or actions one can take to address societal issues around them and be an activist in their everyday life. These practices range from fetching water, to caring for one's family, to religious and spiritual practices. In the end, environmental impacts are stitched into the everyday and this connection bolsters the urgency of addressing these issues. Maathai's use of practices of the everyday as ever present narrative events leads to the next aspect of her narratives I will analyze that further incorporates practices of the everyday. However, this incorporation is poignant due to the characters acting out these practices and expressing their concerns for the environment. In the next section, I elaborate on Maathai's use of the perspectives of the women of Kenya as the major narrative characters within her rhetoric.

#### Narrative Characters: The Perspectives of the People

The Green Belt Movement in Kenya started in 1977, when women from rural areas and urban centers, reflecting on their needs at organised [sic] forums, spoke about environmental degradation. They did not have firewood. They needed fruits to cure malnutrition in their children. They needed clean drinking water, but the pesticides and herbicides used on farms to grow cash crops polluted the water. The women talked about how, a long time ago, they did not have to spend so much time going out to collect firewood, that they lived near the forest. They spoke of how, once, they ate food that sustained their health. Now, while the food does not require much energy to grow, it does not sustain them. The women feel their families are now very weak and cannot resist diseases, that their bodies are impoverished because of an environment that is degraded.<sup>170</sup>

The above narrative, taken from in the book *Speak Truth to Power*, provides a grounded overview of Maathai's utilization of the perspectives of the Kenyan women in constructing her rhetoric. Furthermore, this excerpt accents the importance of the perspectives of the Kenyan women to the overall development of the Green Belt Movement and subsequent efforts of Maathai to engage her community in environmental change. This is not to say that Maathai omits the perspectives of others within her rhetoric; on the contrary, Maathai includes farmers, traditional Kikuyu members, imagined future generations, members of parliament, policymakers, and other prominent positions and perspectives in her narratives.<sup>171</sup> However, the consistent inclusion of the perspectives of the Kenyan women in each rhetorical act Maathai engages positions this perspective as a priority.<sup>172</sup> This demonstrates what Linda Wheeler Cardillo attributes to autobiographical narratives in that the storytellers, in this case the women of Kenya, "tell stories they wish to tell – those that have significance to them."<sup>173</sup> In this section, I assert that the Kenyan women offer a strong cast of narrative characters who lend credibility to Maathai's story. This use of narrative presents the women of Kenya as prioritized agents and actors in Maathai's activism and represents what Lewis would call, "a narrative logic that emphasizes the connection between character and action."<sup>174</sup> This activism is explicated through appeals to feminism and social justice grounded in the pursuit of engaging peace, democracy, and the environment. Throughout these rhetorical appeals Maathai acts as a representative for these women, taking their message and professing it to the masses to convey the importance of addressing these concerns.

Jerome Bruner states, "a narrative is composed of a unique sequence of events, mental states, happenings involving human beings as characters or actors. These are its constituents. But these constituents do not, as it were, have a life or meaning of their own. Their meaning is given

by their place in the overall configuration of the sequence as a whole.”<sup>175</sup> Maathai gives meaning to the stories of the women of Kenya; these stories function as constitutive aspects of her rhetoric and place an importance on what their happenings contribute to “the overall configuration” of her rhetoric and activism. Maathai states, “women are the primary caretakers, holding significant responsibility for tilling the land and feeding their families. As a result, they are often the first to become aware of environmental damage as resources become scarce and incapable of sustaining their families.”<sup>176</sup> This lack of resources led to the realization, as Maathai emphasizes, that “when the environment is destroyed, plundered or mismanaged” it undermines “our quality of life and that of future generations.”<sup>177</sup> This leads to this simple story carrying a clear and significant message for those experiencing this degradation leading them to accept the moral and engage in change, thus the advent of the Green Belt Movement.<sup>178</sup> In this regard, the perspectives of the women of Kenya work to inform and enhance Maathai’s validity and rhetorical rationale.

The contribution of these perspectives adds to the construction of Maathai’s rhetoric by providing feminist and social justice insights of the people. These insights most aptly coincide with the definition of feminism found in Colleen Kelley and Anna Eblen’s collection of essays in *Women Who Speak for Peace*. In it they state:

The definition of feminism adopted for this collection advocates the humanistic empowerment of individuals . . . . [F]eminism seeks to liberate through rhetorical transformation, and it may encompass individual, social, national, or international forums. According to this definition, feminism empowers the oppressed, be they women victimized by power-abusing patriarchies, persons of color tyrannized by political systems, or men embroiled in incessant interethnic or international war.<sup>179</sup>

Even though there are many definitions of feminism, I believe this definition provides a holistic interpretation of feminism that fittingly encompasses the diversity of issues that the Green Belt

Movement and the women of Kenya work to remedy. This progression was slow as many of women did not even realize their environment was oppressive to them. Maathai states, “women did not realize that meeting their needs depended on their environment being healthy and well managed. They were unaware that a degraded environment leads to a scramble for scarce resources and may culminate in poverty and even conflict.”<sup>180</sup> Through this use of personal narratives, as Frederick C. Corey explains, “the story teller is able to reorganize relations of power by exploring and expressing self-defined values” thus making these perspectives rhetorical.<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, Maathai’s utilization of the perspectives of the women of Kenya is an example of activism from a marginalized group. This activism allowed for the women, as Naida Zukic asserts, to “re/constitute themselves as collective political agents.”<sup>182</sup> In *Speak Truth to Power*, Maathai states “[w]hen I do what I do, when I am writing letters to the president, accusing him of every crime on this earth, of being a violator of every right I know of, especially violating environmental rights and then of violence to women, I must have courage.”<sup>183</sup> This courage is indicative of the foundations of feminism that push to liberate and illustrate the wrongdoings of another specifically in patriarchal societies.

In Kenya, patriarchy could not be more visible, especially during the 1970’s when the Green Belt Movement was founded. Florida A. Karani explores the role of women in Kenya during this time period and the subsequent 1980’s. She remarks “For many years, education of girls held low priority; hence a greater proportion of the adult women population today occupy marginal roles in the economy and structures of society and may perform traditional roles as well.”<sup>184</sup> The performance of the traditional roles “of wife, mother, child-bearer, caretaker, and food provider” led to these women becoming aware of the environmental issues that surrounded their everyday life.<sup>185</sup> When Maathai took into account and true consideration the concerns of

these women it gave them an agency and role as educator that most of them had never been afforded before. However, the Green Belt Movement as discussed in the previous section offered educational seminars to empower the women and provide a support system and program to engage their social justice activism through the proper channels.

Omar Swartz asserts “Social justice never is about absolutes but it is about being able to talk about the pressing problems of the day to articulate, critique, and offer solutions.”<sup>186</sup> The Green Belt Movement became this social justice forum for the women of Kenya to express their concerns and have a dialogue “about the pressing problems of the day.”<sup>187</sup> Maathai states, “The Green Belt Movement in Kenya started in 1977, when women from rural areas and urban centers, reflecting on their needs at organised [sic] forums, spoke about environmental degradation.”<sup>188</sup> In Maathai’s rhetoric she reiterates how the Green Belt Movement acts as an epicenter for environmental activism, female empowerment, and overall social justice activism. This incorporation positions the women of Kenya as the dominant characters of change throughout many of Maathai’s rhetorical acts. The continual inclusion of the perspectives of the women provides a transitional character that bends and weaves throughout Maathai’s rhetoric to provide a concrete symbol and representation of how the movement started and how the activism is being engaged.

Overall, the perspectives of the women of Kenya demonstrate the importance of their traditional roles to illuminate the environmental degradation occurring to those in hierarchical positions. Through this discourse “individuals and collectives negotiate, challenge, and critique their relationships to the dominant to claim complex social positionings.”<sup>189</sup> This further expands Fisher’s traditional narrative paradigm by having the disempowered utilize their perspective and their narratives to articulate truth and meaning as opposed to those at the top of the hierarchy.

This truth and meaning stemmed from the incorporation of feminist and social justice appeals and activism to engage the women in environmental change and informational outreach to their communities. The main proponent of proclaiming these truths is Wangari Maathai. In the next section, I will further explicate the importance of Maathai acting as narrator and how this role again makes Fisher's narrative paradigm universally significant.

#### Wangari Maathai as an African Woman Narrator

Maathai is a prominent African woman; the Green Belt Movement, her countless invitations to speak and inform, along with her examples of other forms of activism make her a significant rhetor to analyze. In this chapter, the focus on her use of narrative exemplifies another mark of the importance of her rhetoric as symbolic and significant. Maathai is an African woman narrator and presents stories filled with people, places, and practices evident and germane to her environmental cause. In this section, I affirm that Maathai acting as narrator expands Fisher's traditional narrative paradigm to reveal a reconceptualization of the construction of narrative, the stories that are relevant, and the use of a narrator who represents postcolonial and non-Western rhetorical appeals and proves that in fact, the narrative paradigm is a universal tool that aptly applies to all human beings and story tellers.

Maathai's use of narrative adheres to Fisher's paradigm while illustrating the ways in which non-Western narratives achieve narrative rationality. Maathai as narrator acts as what Zukic calls, a "cultural signifier, challenging normative readings, reclaiming textual spaces, and carving out new discursive territories."<sup>190</sup> This expands Fisher's paradigm by providing the integration of other cultures and values in the construction of narratives that hold coherence and fidelity. Additionally, much of Maathai's rhetoric is indicative of her identity as a Kenyan woman, a female environmental social justice activist, and an African. This positioning

constructs an alternate narrative world set in Africa and created by Maathai. The narratives are embedded in Maathai's ongoing story as well as the stories of her people and invite audiences to interpret their meaning and judge their coherence and rationality through the use of common sense.

Since Maathai is not a Western rhetor the adoption of the use of narrative offers an opportunity to explore this typified Western paradigm from an alternative articulation and representation. Aoki et al. state "narratives, with their native voices, play a central role in creating the anthropological positioning" as audiences listen "to the voices they become ethnographers interacting with an interlocutor. The stories the interlocutor tells reveal to the visitor/anthropologist the intricacies of lost traditions."<sup>191</sup> Maathai represents this interlocutor to non-native audiences who comprise the majority of her rhetorical audiences. Furthermore, Maathai as narrator provides an international and culturally unbound example for rhetorical analysis that expands the diverse instances significant of inquiry and significant to developing the field of narrative studies in a transnational and postcolonial manner. Also, the narrator, as Julie-Ann Scott asserts is the "creator of meaning with the capacity to perform" and Maathai's recognition through the Nobel Peace Prize along with her positionality as a transnational female activist gives way for her narratives to be performed to a global audience.<sup>192</sup>

Radha Hedge is one scholar working towards the inclusion of these transnational voices within the Communication discipline. Hedge states "our research can no longer be conceptualized in insular and culture-bound terms. The objective of this venture into postmodern and postcolonial terrain was to forge an intellectual alliance that can expand the representational possibilities of feminist theorizing in communication."<sup>193</sup> Maathai is a representation of this expansion. The role of both rhetor and narrator provides a lens "to circumscribe the experiences

of women in diverse global communities.”<sup>194</sup> This postcolonial and transnational demonstration of significant rhetoric by Maathai further expands the narrative paradigm specifically, its applicability to non-Western cultures.

Overall, for the purposes of this section the inclusion of these affects offers a framework for future work to expand, problematize, and challenge other traditionally driven paradigms of Western communication culture and further posit that they may in fact not be Western paradigms at all but human paradigms. In the end, the use of Maathai as narrator gives her, what Corey claims, “the opportunity to construct identity and examine questions of value from an insider’s point of view.”<sup>195</sup> The objective of this brief section is to highlight the importance of Maathai as a female African narrator and warrant her rhetoric further as significant and substantial to the discipline, scholarship, and activism.

### Conclusion

In the end, as Esther Schely-Newman states, “each narrative can be interpreted individually” however “the context and progression from story to story indicates an inner connection.”<sup>196</sup> This inner connection bolsters Maathai’s continued rhetorical engagement with the themes of peace, democracy, and the environment. Whether using tadpoles, coded wisdom, Peter and John, or women, each narrative reinforces an aspect of Maathai’s activism. These narratives create “a dynamic discourse about society and about the relationships between individuals, groups, and classes in society.”<sup>197</sup> Additionally, Maathai’s use of narrative proves that Fisher’s narrative paradigm is not solely an application for the West but is an application for the world and reinforces Fisher’s claims of the universal potential and application of the narrative paradigm to all human beings. Maathai’s adherence to narrative rationality, coherence,

and fidelity affirm that her ideas and narratives, as Robert C. Rowland states, can “be supported outside the limited confines of the story.”<sup>198</sup>

Furthermore, Maathai’s use of narrative setting, events, and characters to run parallels with aspects of Kenyan place, practice, and people provides an overall narrative construction that encapsulates the issues occurring in Africa, their urgency in needing to be addressed, and their effects on the everyday. Maathai sets many of her narratives in the actual environment she works to sustain and positions the characters to function as activists in the cause calling on others to think of future generations and how they can engage in similar actions to sustain their own environments. Also, Maathai’s stories and characters are consistent with the ideas and arguments she is espousing and the environment and people she is representing. This commonality in Maathai’s narratives highlights a stylistic choice by grounding her rhetoric strategically to incorporate the people and environment she represents.

Lastly, in all of Maathai’s narratives she integrates her personal ideology. Maathai structures her narratives to adapt to her audience while simultaneously symbolizing her environmental activism. She enlists her audiences as active participants in the stories through their strategic ability to extend beyond the Kenyan landscape and become symbols for action and social change. This draws on audiences as “the other participants who help to form the work and mediate its meaning and the dynamics through which this occurs.”<sup>199</sup> The narratives are simple yet profound and allow the narratives to reflect lived experiences as well as present the issues Maathai works to address through an accessible venue.

Narratives are a common trope utilized in the everyday to recount events and describe significance. Through Maathai’s use of narrative in her rhetoric she continually connects her words back to aspects of the everyday and presents issues in a creative and simple manner as

opposed to complex and confusing communication. Overall, all of Maathai's narratives, "attempt to craft honest, wise, and politically sensitive stories that speak across time and space."<sup>200</sup> These narratives provide a creative path to bridge connections with different perspectives and global perceptions. Lastly, all these narratives ask for action. In the next chapter, Maathai's rhetoric asks for action again through the utilization of appeals to transcendence. She calls on audiences to see the interconnectivity between them and the environment and the role it plays in our everyday lives explicated through appeals to transcendence.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### THINK BIG: APPEALS TO TRANSCENDENCE IN MAATHAI'S RHETORIC

Think globally, act locally. Wangari Maathai's activism is reflective of this saying. From her grassroots endeavors with the Green Belt Movement to her international recognition with the Nobel Peace Prize, Maathai has focused her work on Kenya while staying fully aware of the big picture and implications her activism has for the world. Regardless of her platform or audience, peace, democracy, and the environment are areas of concern Maathai continually works to fuse together through her rhetoric. Thus far, I have illustrated how Maathai's rhetoric utilizes both metaphors and narratives to creatively construct symbolic messages that reinforce the importance and urgency of addressing environmental issues and their inextricable linkage to issues of peace and democracy. In this final analytical chapter, I further emphasize this interconnectivity through Maathai's rhetorical appeals to transcendence.

Kenneth Burke explains transcendence as follows: "When approached from a certain point of view, A and B are 'opposites.' We mean by 'transcendence' the adoption of another point of view from which they cease to be opposites."<sup>201</sup> At first glance there is not a visible connectivity between peace, democracy, and the environment. However, through Maathai's rhetoric she consistently demonstrates that these areas symbolize, what Burke notes as, "a vessel of much more content than is disclosed by its 'face value.'"<sup>202</sup> Furthermore, Maathai utilizes transcendent appeals to illustrate the interconnectivity of people, the planet, and peace; thus, she rhetorically creates a new point of view that works to transcend many of the identities that separate the people of the world.

In this chapter, I argue that Maathai's rhetorical use of holistic, spiritual, and communal appeals functions to transcend national, cultural, and environmental differences. This transcendence encourages audiences to think about the bigger picture and see their connection to one another and the planet. This chapter will be constructed around the three major appeals to transcendence exemplified in Maathai's rhetoric. The first section will focus on Maathai's rhetorical use of holism as an appeal to transcendence. The second section will analyze spiritual appeals and the third section will explore transcendent appeals to community. In the end, this chapter will demonstrate how the rhetorical use of transcendence engages multiple perspectives and considers various viewpoints to create an alternative approach that softens differences and creates conceptions focused on commonalities.

### Appeals to Transcendence

Prior to my analysis of Maathai's rhetoric, it is important to note that "the concept of transcendence is elusive and difficult to pin down."<sup>203</sup> The predominant research has focused on male political figures, the media, and the expansion and critique of transcendence.<sup>204</sup> All of these relevant and pertinent pieces of scholarship have advanced the scholarly understanding of transcendence offering nuanced perspectives and fleshing out Burke's original conceptualization. Additionally, these exemplars provide insight into the conversation that has taken place in the discipline regarding appeals to transcendence. Below, I provide an overview of the extant literature highlighting the seminal examples that contribute to this conversation.

Barry Brummett provides one of the formative articles on transcendence.<sup>205</sup> In it he posits that transcendence is "a symbolic means of avoiding guilt" through mortification and purification.<sup>206</sup> Brummett explains that "transcendence is a way of turning guilt around into virtue, of making it not-a-sin."<sup>207</sup> Brummett concludes, therefore, that transcendence becomes a

means for dealing with guilt.<sup>208</sup> This guilt connects back to transcendence as it “provides the opportunity to restore unity and order,” without which “human beings could not conduct themselves in the world in ways that effect changes or solve problems.”<sup>209</sup>

This unity and order elicited through transcendence also needs to be seen as enduring. Janice Hocker Rushing attends to this when she states that “contemporary statements addressing the need for transcendence respond to an exigence which is both enduring and developing over time.”<sup>210</sup> Building on this endurance, Terence M.S. Evens and James L. Peacock affirm that transcendence “describes a kind of being, both protean and indistinct, by which society everywhere develops and proceeds.”<sup>211</sup> These statements reinforce the impact that transcendence has on societies and human beings through space and time. Furthermore, as Suzanne M. Daughton asserts, transcendence allows rhetors to push “at recognized boundaries” in order to illuminate new perspectives and viewpoints from familiar stances.<sup>212</sup> This familiarity functions to encapsulate enduring features of the appeal while simultaneously addressing contested areas of concern through a new perspective.

One of the new perspectives created through transcendence, as Karen Rasmussen claims, “moves language usage from the linearity of discursive form to the configularity of a presentation mode.”<sup>213</sup> This inherently performative appeal of transcendence makes it a transformative rhetorical trope to be utilized by rhetors. Lee Snyder sees transcendence as a transformative tool to demonstrate the ability of these appeals to navigate time and space through a strategic means.<sup>214</sup> Christina R. Foust and Charles Soukup examine transcendence as a path that poses “existentialist questions evoked by the everyday’s meaninglessness and offers” answers.<sup>215</sup> Finally, Kristin Hoerl acknowledges one approach to transcendence “as the verbal means of resolving contradictions and reconciling opposites” and states “transcendence is a

bridging device.”<sup>216</sup> This bridging affect further highlights the transformative impact that transcendence can have on communication.

James P. Zappen advances this inquiry into transcendence through his proposal of dialectical-rhetorical transcendence.<sup>217</sup> In this move, he “challenges rhetoric as a socially responsible endeavor to view not individual discourses alone but individual discourses in relationship to each other, to act as well as to study these discourses, and thus to intervene.”<sup>218</sup> In this sense, “dialectical-rhetorical transcendence is a process by which rhetorical partisans can rise above the pursuit of individual advantage” and utilize this conceptualization of transcendence to transform the dialectic into an “ultimate order that transcends the diversity of individual voices.”<sup>219</sup> Ultimately, this becomes “a lifelong practice of mutually testing and correcting our own and others’ ideas in pursuit of better ideas than any one of us alone could produce.”<sup>220</sup> Again, the transformative power of transcendence is underscored as well as the procedural impact of transcendence to lead to order and unity in ideas and progress.

On the other hand, the above scholarship does not adequately assess the limitations of transcendence. As Robert Wess claims, transcendence is “always relative to historically engendered tensions. A perspective that is transcendent in one situation is not necessarily transcendent in others.”<sup>221</sup> In this regard, engaging a transnational example of rhetoric of transcendence may seem to be a liminal endeavor. However, the appeals assessed in this chapter exhibit a multi-cultural sensibility and, thus, may resonate across cultures. .

Additionally, Maathai’s rhetoric provides a new addition to the literature on transcendence to include activists and activism. This turn toward viewing transcendence through an activist lens reaffirms Rushing’s claim that “visions of transcendence may occur in the most mundane of places and the most humble of forms.”<sup>222</sup> Maathai’s Greenbelt Movement is a

simple tree-planting campaign that was started for the people of her rural Kenyan community and has subsequently flourished into a campaign with an international presence that has heightened worldwide environmental concern. In the remaining pages of this chapter, I further explore Maathai's activist rhetoric by assessing her holistic, spiritual, and communal appeals to transcendence.

### Holistic Appeals to Transcendence

Tae-Seop Lim, Sang-Yeon Kim, and Jihyun Kim define holism as “a worldview regarding humans as parts of various holistic entities, who adopt identities from the wholes they are parts of, and strive to act in unison with other parts in the wholes.”<sup>223</sup> These interacting wholes are indicative of the interacting pieces of the environmental puzzle that Maathai works to sustain. Maathai's rhetoric transcends individual identities to reveal holistic identities as part of this environmental whole. In this section, I assert that Maathai's use of holistic appeals to transcendence functions to illustrate the universality and shared importance of the sustainability and protection of the earth. In short, holistic thinking asks humanity to think beyond their individual selves and see the environment as a shared entity of concern. In what follows, I demonstrate how Maathai's rhetoric utilizes holistic thinking as rhetoric of transcendence.

At the 2005 Inaugural World Food Law Distinguished Lecture, Maathai calls on her audience to think holistically about the environment and other societal issues that surround them. Maathai states:

The environment is an intricate way joined, is related, is intertwined, in our lives on an everyday basis. It is not something we think about or talk about or learn about sometimes. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat: everything we do has to do with the environment. We need to take this concept and make it holistic, so that we can think in a holistic manner, and learn to protect the base on which everything else depends. Learn that if we destroy the mountain, the waters, when they take the soil, they take away the soil in which the farmer plants his seed.<sup>224</sup>

This appeal to holism seeks restoration and realization that, as John H. Patton states, “involves the idea of becoming, of moving away from one set of circumstances or one way of thinking to another.”<sup>225</sup> This is a transcendent move towards interdependence in that the environment needs humans to nurture it and treat it well to sustain its being, just as humans need a sustained and well developed environment to sustain their being. Without thinking of the environment in this more holistic and interdependent manner imbalance is inevitable. When humans take more from the environment without replacing, replanting, or restructuring to address that removal most fail to realize they are taking from their own sustainable livelihoods and thus “the base on which everything else depends.”<sup>226</sup>

In this case, holistic thinking is a mental path to begin to think about solutions and humans connection to the environment and one another differently. Maathai calls on her audience to adopt the viewpoint that if we fail the environment and destroy it, we are truly failing ourselves in that the foods and resources we need for nourishment and to sustain our basic needs will be eradicated. This protection entails fortifying “the base,” securing landscapes and ecosystems, and safeguarding against continual degradation and working towards environmental elevation.

Thinking in terms of how the small scale aspects of our environment, like the soil, relate to the large scale aspects, like human livelihood, leads to what Tatushi Arai calls, “Envisioning what can be and what ought to be, beyond what was and what is.”<sup>227</sup> This envisioning in itself is both transcendent and holistic. Envisioning the planet as a whole and seeing “beyond what was and what is” transcends the past and the present and figuratively look towards the future in a holistic manner. “Envisioning what can be and what ought to be” is thinking in terms of transcending time and focusing on future generations and a future planet that is yet to come. This

envisioning is unlocking the potential of the planet and its people to create a better base, a base that should be.

Maathai's holistic appeals to transcendence is seen again as she urges "us to make a mind-shift in the way we think about security, in the way we think about peace, and to understand that you cannot achieve peace without looking at the environment."<sup>228</sup> This indivisibility further posits that the areas of peace, security, and the environment interact with one another and need mutual consideration to affect the environment as a whole. Furthermore, no matter the approach utilized by Maathai, the environment is always interconnected and is the transcendent entity that connects all the other areas of concern. The environment in itself is holistic and this conceptualization hinges on global implications of the environment as a whole and thus, the planet as the grand representation of the environment.

With this grandeur of the environment emphasized, it is important to highlight that Maathai affirms that many of the challenges that face the world pose "a global challenge for both political and religious leaders"<sup>229</sup> These are the world's holistic leaders who can legally and spiritually implement change at the larger level and elevate the concerns of local citizens to be concerns of the world's citizens. This appeal to transcendence functions as a form of upward transcendence. Brummett explains that "Upward transcendence occurs when an act is reconceptualized or transformed; what was at first a selfish act of acquisition is, by way of upward transcendence, transformed into an act that protects the health of the larger economic system."<sup>230</sup> Maathai strategically engages those public and pivotal entities to implementing world change as active participants as opposed to as obstacles and selfish entities that care not about "the health of the larger economic system." This positioning works to recognize the universe as holistic and signifies the importance of the global leaders of the world to enacting

global change for the environment thus, connecting issues of peace and democracy back to issues of the environment.

This move towards upward transcendence is further seen when Maathai states:

In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground. A time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to each other. That time is now. The Norwegian Nobel Committee has challenged the world to broaden the understanding of peace: there can be no peace without equitable development; and there can be no development without sustainable management of the environment in a democratic and peaceful space. This shift is an idea whose time has come.<sup>231</sup>

Here, Maathai accents the importance of a broader understanding to illuminate and underscore the bigger picture, which is the “sustainable management of the environment in a democratic and peaceful space.”<sup>232</sup> Maathai appeals to humanity to see this expansive and thus holistic, appeal to transcendence to encapsulate peace, democracy, and the environment in inextricable terms.

These terms reinforce the universality of the collective environment that all of humanity inhabits and the moral obligation that humanity shares despite differences to protect and sustain its global home. This recognition highlighted in Maathai’s rhetoric appeals to the transcendent and holistic powers of a shared inhabitation on planet earth.

This appeal to transcendence functions, as Hoerl asserts, to “bypass significant moments in histories of social and political struggle. Selective amnesia refers to the omission of events that would dramatically reframe our understanding of how historic conflicts connect to contemporary social relations were they explicitly included.”<sup>233</sup> Maathai’s rhetoric does not appeal to specific events throughout history to underscore the importance of environmental sustainability; rather, her rhetoric appeals to the bigger picture and broader understanding of it all; the planet we all inhabit is earth and we all subsequently dwell in this earthy environment and must sustain it so that it may sustain us. Maathai disregards difference and conflict and instead focuses on common

ground and shared importance. Maathai further remarks on this common ground when she states, “we human beings have evolved in the environment in which we find ourselves. For every one of us, wherever we were, the environment shaped us: it shaped our values; it shaped our bodies; it shaped our religion. It really defined who we are and how we see ourselves.”<sup>234</sup> The rhetorical focus is on the holistic aspects that the people of the planet share and that inseparable connection to the environment. We are bigger than ourselves and the environment is a global representation of this greater presence and space of importance to the progression of human beings.

Overall, Maathai’s use of holistic appeals to transcendence functions, as James Jasinski asserts, “To call attention to a pervasive aspect of human life and the discursive practices that sustain it.”<sup>235</sup> In this regard, the environment is a pervasive entity that sustains human life and through Maathai’s discourse she calls attention to its shared importance for all of humanity through her appeals to transcendence. Specifically, holistic appeals to transcendence offer the broadest reconceptualization of perspectives and provide a universal framework for presenting a concern in a generalized format. Additionally, as Burke states, transcendence is “the building of a *terministic bridge*, whereby one realm is *transcended* by being viewed *in terms of* a realm ‘beyond’ it.”<sup>236</sup> In this sense, Maathai’s rhetoric builds a bridge to present her personal environmental concerns to a worldwide audience through appealing to the holistic nature of the environment, its people, and the planet.

As noted, Maathai’s holistic appeals focus on the universal identity that all of humanity shares with the environment. However, there are many complex aspects of identity beyond the realm of holism. In the next section, I focus on Maathai’s use of spiritual appeals to transcendence.

## Spiritual Appeals to Transcendence

Appeals to spirituality are inherently appeals to the faithful and appeals to those who believe in something more. Maathai utilizes spiritual appeals to transcendence to connect her environmental activism to the mystical, the spiritual, and the divine. In this section, I assert that Maathai's use of spiritual appeals to transcendence functions to elevate environmental concerns to the celestial sphere, constructing the environment as something to believe in. This use of transcendent rhetoric allows Maathai to creatively connect with her audience's faith-based ideologies and traditions. First, the Japanese concept of *mottainai* will be explicated to demonstrate its function as a spiritual appeal to transcendence.

Maathai states that *mottainai* "urges respect, gratitude and utilization of resources without wasting or over-consuming . . . Japanese children learn to be respectful, grateful and accountable to future generations even as they grow up. Such intergenerational responsibility is important."<sup>237</sup> *Mottainai* is a push to use the world's resources with moderation and accountability. In short, "*Mottainai* is the painful longing for things that have been lost."<sup>238</sup> When people waste, they lose things forever, whether it is wasted time or wasted resources; those things cannot be restored with the same vigor that they are consumed with so haphazardly. This waste is regretful and reflective of gluttony for environmental resources and the over consumption of the land and its bounty.

Through the use of *mottainai*, Maathai employs a spiritual concept that illustrates the importance of managing the world's resources in a sustainable way. Audiences hear Maathai reflect on a trip to Japan and bring back a concept she learned that aligns with the work that has been done in Kenya. This transportation of a Japanese faith-based tradition to an African audience is transcendent in that the spiritual appeal is transferred to international identities

through Maathai's rhetoric illuminating its connectivity to the environment and thus, Maathai's activist goals. This concept functions to reinforce the work of the Green Belt Movement, Maathai, and the people of Kenya in order to present alternative pathways to sustainable development. Mottainai is a spiritual concept that promotes rounded thinking and accountability towards others, complementing Maathai's own call for accountability.

This accountability is also seen through transcendent spiritual appeals to God within Maathai's rhetoric. Specifically, Maathai states:

As I tried to encourage women and the African people in general to understand the need to conserve the environment, I discovered how crucial it is to return constantly to our cultural heritage. Mount Kenya used to be a holy mountain for my people, the Kikuyus. They believed that their God dwelled on the mountain and that everything good—the rains, clean drinking water—flowed from it. As long as they saw the clouds . . . they knew they would get rain. And then the missionaries came. With all due respect to the missionaries (they are the ones who really taught me), in their wisdom, or lack of it, they said, 'God does not dwell on Mount Kenya. God dwells in heaven.' We have been looking for heaven, but we have not found it. Men and women have gone to the moon and back and have not seen heaven. Heaven is not above us: it is right here, right now. So the Kikuyu people were not wrong when they said that God dwelled on the mountain, because if God is omnipresent, as theology tells us, then God is on Mount Kenya too. If believing that God is on Mount Kenya is what helps people conserve their mountain, I say that's okay. If people still believed this, they would not have allowed illegal logging or clear-cutting of the forests."<sup>239</sup>

Most notably, this spiritual appeal to transcendence illustrates what Rasmussen states as “the progression from a faith grounded in creation (scene) to one based in salvation (purpose) to a transcendent alternative centered on recreation by co-agents.”<sup>240</sup> Maathai appeals to the Kikuyu cultural heritage as well as the omnipresence of God to accent the connection between faith, ourselves, and the environment. If you truly believe that God is all around you, then God is in the environment and if you believe in him and are faithful to him then you would protect the environment of which he is a part. Maathai rhetorically fuses together the spiritual and the scenic to construct a purposeful scene and environment that connects the omnipotence of God to the

natural world around us and the power that the people have to protect their environment. This appeal to transcendence focuses on the message to sustain the environment already being handed down from Kikuyu tradition and even the Bible and God himself. This truly makes this appeal transcendent in that the new perspective is that of the faith based view of the world along with the environment and its ever-present connection to the spiritual.

This connection is further seen when Maathai states that the faithful “must take care of the Garden of Eden that God created in the book of Genesis, and to encourage them not to wait for God to bring rain, because the rains will come anyway. But if the rains don’t come, it has nothing to do with God. It has everything to do with the way they are managing their environment.”<sup>241</sup> Again, Maathai highlights this connection between the spiritual and the environmental to create a new point of view towards sustainability. This point of view considers the environmental cause at the heart of Maathai’s rhetoric and creatively constructs alternative pathways to engage the people of the world to see the urgency in addressing her environmental concerns and thus, their environmental concerns. By utilizing the power and presence of God, Maathai offers a faith based perspective to environmental sustainability. This perspective dissolves input based on climate change, lack of resources, or the negative effects if the environment is continued to be mismanaged; alternatively, it focuses on faith and suggests that if you believe in God or your cultural heritage then you inherently believe in the environment and as a faithful person should protect it in order to protect your faith and demonstrate your love to God and the land he has given you.

Another spiritually grounded concept present in Maathai’s rhetoric is the use of the Kikuyu tradition of coded wisdom. Maathai states, “For these groups there was a special granary of God (ikumbi ria Ngai), which was supplied by the public. As members passed by from the

field with a harvest (magetha), they would throw some of it into the granary of God. This was a good sign of community sense of responsibility to others and very much an equivalent of the biblical tithes or 10%.<sup>242</sup> By invoking the notion of biblical tithes, Maathai references the Old Testament practice of giving 10% of one's produce, flocks, and cattle to support the Levites. Additionally, the Bible states, "If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs."<sup>243</sup> In this regard, Maathai rhetorically transcends two faith-based practices to illuminate the innerconnectivity between Kikuyu traditions and Christianity.

This form of spiritual transcendence illustrates a reconstruction of faith-based practices that could contradict one another based on ideologies and instead positions them, according to Snyder, "as harmonious elements of a larger worldview."<sup>244</sup> Maathai utilizes the traditional faith of the Kenyan people and the globally prominent faith of Christianity to create a new perspective that interweaves the two in order to present an enlightened view towards environmental sustainability and community. Additionally, Maathai strategically chooses aspects of Christianity and Kikuyu tradition that complement one another and are compatible with her environmental concerns and activism. This strategic use of spirituality in her rhetoric highlights that the transcendent perspective is not so different from the perspectives perceived as different; it is just altered in a way to creatively make visible connections that were difficult to see when the perspectives were perceived as separate traditions.

Overall, Maathai's spiritual appeals to transcendence utilize the faith and beliefs of many to connect to the environment in order to present a similar conviction and need for conservation and loyalty. Also, as Evens and Peacock state, "Transcendence may connote the mystical and the

occult, the visionary and divine. But whatever its particular connotation . . . it is fundamental to social life.”<sup>245</sup> In this regard, Maathai utilizes the spiritual to connect the social importance of the environment to the fundamentals of life. In the next section, Maathai bridges the social and the personal yet again, through communal appeals to transcendence. These appeals highlight the personal aspects of self and our inherent human identities as communal.

### Communal Appeals to Transcendence

At the end of day, we are all human beings with many aspects of ourselves that differ as well as many aspects that are shared. In Maathai’s rhetoric, she appeals to those shared and communal aspects of the human identity to illustrate the collective environmental community of which all human beings are a part. In this section, I assert that Maathai utilizes communal appeals to transcendence in order to encourage people of different factions to come together through turning the attention away from individual concerns and focusing it on a shared commonality. In this regard, Maathai enlists the people of the world in a moral discussion. James S. Fishkin states, “A hallmark of moral discussion is learning to view a problem from the point of view of those who are affected – a kind of ideal role taking.”<sup>246</sup> The “ideal role taking” Maathai promotes in her rhetoric is for humanity to recognize that we are all in this together and there is no way to avoid the detriments of environmental degradation because it is literally our “life support system.”<sup>247</sup>

More specifically, during Maathai’s Nobel Lecture she stresses, “Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own – indeed, to embrace the whole creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder.”<sup>248</sup> This call enlists every person with no selectivity “to assist the Earth.” This communal appeal to

transcendence focuses on the unity of all of humanity. Zappen states, “transcendence offers not more persuasion (“You should believe me . . .”) or even identification in its simple and limited sense (“because you and I are really very much alike”) but a promise of larger unities—transcendences—that encompass individual and group differences.”<sup>249</sup> Maathai’s appeal to all of humanity in progressing towards a sustainable future is indicative of this larger unity. This unity is particularly notable when Maathai states, “This will happen if we see the need to revive our sense of belonging to a larger family of life, with which we have shared our evolutionary process.”<sup>250</sup>

This “larger family of life” encompasses differences and ultimately transcends individual identities to create a familial and communal identity for all of humankind. Through this communal appeal Maathai rhetorically engages all of the people of the world based on their essential character and belonging to the planet. As Patton states, transcendent appeals reflect “upholding an idealized conception of what the people should become in conformity with their essential character.”<sup>251</sup> Therefore, Maathai’s communal appeals to transcendence ask the people of the earth to conform to their essential character as human beings. In addition, Maathai acknowledges that “Everyone needs to work together and to protect the environment together.”<sup>252</sup> She is not only appealing to the collective identity of human beings but also the shared action needed to protect and sustain the environment.

Maathai’s rhetoric pushes for transcendent thinking that connects not just to other humans but to all of life’s processes. Maathai communicates this connectivity with the appeal to the larger family of life and makes the environment personal. Her rhetoric posits the environment as a member of one’s family and through this position the environment is kin. This connection to family makes the environment and humans a part of the same lifeline and the same home. This

home is figuratively under attack and it is the members of the household's job to figure out how to protect it and all those who dwell under its roof.

Gandhi once stated, "If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him . . . We need not wait to see what others do."<sup>253</sup> Maathai underscores this logic in her rhetoric by acknowledging how her acts along with the people of Africa lead to further engagement in the fight for environmental sustainability. She states, "I have also believed that solutions to most of our problems must come from us."<sup>254</sup> In addition, she says, "participants discover that they must be part of the solutions. They realize their hidden potential and are empowered to overcome inertia and take action. They come to recognize that they are the primary custodians and beneficiaries of the environment that sustains them."<sup>255</sup> This realization and recognition calls on audiences to become aware of their interdependence with the environment. Maathai's rhetoric positions her audience as a collective that is caretaker and heir to the environment. In this sense, communal efforts and awareness are needed to sustain the world's ecosystem.

Another example of Maathai's use of communal appeals is her rhetorical focus on family relationships. At the 2009 Summit on Climate Change, Maathai states, "Your Excellencies, we are all here first and foremost as inhabitants on this planet. Before being leaders, you are someone's mother, father, sister, brother and I am very confident that all of you will personally go to Copenhagen, and for all the six billion people on Earth, seal a good deal."<sup>256</sup> This interconnectivity of all of the people on the earth is further resonated in this statement. Maathai literally calls attention to "all the six billion people on Earth" and highlights the fact that no matter your current life situation everyone has been "someone's mother, father, sister, brother."

Again, these connections back to the familial and the communal accent the relationship between community and sustainability, enlisting every citizen—from the world’s top leaders to its invisible children—as participants in creating a sustainable future. Maathai continues in this same speech, stating, “Citizens of the world are looking to you to provide the level of leadership needed to respond to this unprecedented and historic challenge. Today the world is watching and waiting to see what you, their leaders, will commit at this historic summit.”<sup>257</sup> Maathai appeals to community by identifying leaders as “citizens of the world” and suggesting that regardless of political ideologies, environmental policies impact everyone who inhabits this planet.

Beyond the political, Maathai further highlights the personal; when receiving her Nobel Prize Maathai acknowledges, “Although this prize comes to me, it acknowledges the work of countless individuals and groups across the globe. . . I know they, too, are proud today. To all who feel represented by this prize I say use it to advance your mission and meet the high expectations the world will place on us.”<sup>258</sup> Here, Maathai uses the international prominence of the Nobel Peace Prize as a platform to appeal to the transcendence of the prize and its capability to be a communal representation for all those who have worked for the environment. Moreover, she notes “the high expectations the world will place on us” and by doing so, she recognizes that the work for the planet is not yet done and by receiving the Nobel Peace Prize it simply opened up another venue to pursue environmental activism and engages a larger audience in the global cause.

In this sense, Maathai’s communal appeals to transcendence function as examples of dialectical-rhetorical transcendence. Zappen affirms that dialectical-rhetorical transcendence seeks, “not only to persuade others in their own best interest but also to create larger communities of interest that transcend individual and group ideologies and interests.”<sup>259</sup>

Maathai's rhetorical use of communal appeals to transcendence work to mitigate ideological and individual differences in order to present a new point of view focused on the broader human community.

Another portion of the global community upon which Maathai calls to enact global change is the young people of the world. Maathai states, "I would like to call on young people to commit themselves to activities that contribute toward achieving their long-term dreams. They have the energy and creativity to shape a sustainable future. To the young people I say, you are a gift to your communities and indeed the world. You are our hope and our future."<sup>260</sup> Again, the young people are a part of these larger communities and "indeed the world." Maathai's communal appeal to transcendence through the community of young people posits the legacy of sustainable communities and the hope that the young people will cultivate these actions to continue with a sustainable future. Furthermore, as Christopher B. Brown asserts, "this ideology demonstrates that people in younger generations are more likely to adopt a shared vision"<sup>261</sup> This shared vision stems from Maathai's rhetorical construction of a communal vision.

In the end, this communal vision and appeal to transcendence is accented with finality and creativity when Maathai states, "Humanity needs to find beauty in its diversity of cultures and accept that there will be many languages, religions, attires, dances, songs, symbols, festivals and traditions. This diversity should be seen as a universal heritage of humankind."<sup>262</sup> Here, Maathai is not disregarding that differences exist; rather, she is highlighting that humanity is a diverse collective. In this regard, Maathai's rhetorical use of communal appeals to transcendence, as Burke would state, are working to try "to bring up an issue rather than to persuade anyone that we can make it crystal-clear."<sup>263</sup> The environment, like the global community, is a complex entity.

Lastly, Maathai's rhetoric functions, as Manuel Castells asserts, "to harness the dialogue between different social collectives and their cultures in the hope of sharing meaning and understanding. The aim of the practice . . . is not to convince but to communicate."<sup>264</sup> Maathai communicates these connections to her audiences in order to ignite transcendent thinking about the environment and its connection to peace, democracy, and one another. The use of communal appeals to transcendence adapts to her audience and embodies the diverse and convergent aspects of everyone on this planet to bridge connections and offer a shared positionality and perspective highlighting the importance of the environment to all of humankind.

### Conclusion

Maathai's appeals to transcendence do not focus on what may separate these issues and aspects of identity; rather, she refocuses attention towards something shared and provides a new perspective to overcome differences and address the environmental issues at hand. Specifically, Maathai's use of holistic, spiritual, and communal appeals to transcendence highlights the intricacies in the human identity and their interconnection to the environment. Overall, the ideas emplaced in Maathai's rhetoric are appeals to transcend limited and individualistic responses to environmental degradation by viewing the world community more inclusively.

Strategically, Maathai utilizes familial and communal themes to underscore the connectivity of nature and humanity, creating a bridge between the two. Most cultures promote the importance of family. Consequently, an ideological appeal to family promotes a version of communalism likely to appeal even to audience members who hail from more individualistic cultures. Maathai also appeals to the spirituality of the people of the world and accents the connection between their faith traditions and the environment. If the environment is truly made by God and has been protected by generations of people then why would you want to let them or

him down? If you believe in God and you believe in the heritage and traditions of your people, then you inherently believe in the environment and know what its beauty and wonder can offer to humankind. In this regard, Maathai's use of spiritual appeals connects the natural with the divine, offering a new perspective for why there needs to be a sustainable, well-managed planet. Finally, Maathai's appeal to holistic thinking draws on the ability of her audience to contemplate and reflect. Her holistic appeals most generally convey the interconnection of everything on the planet and in the universe in order to elicit a sense of belonging as well as a conceptualization of the earth and environment as a puzzle made up of interacting wholes.

Regardless of the type of appeal, the environment is the central focus of Maathai's rhetoric. Each appeal discussed in this chapter reinforces the need to address environmental degradation and to create a sustainable future through rhetoric of transcendence. Transcendence illuminates the ability of everyone and everything on this planet to have the capability to affect change. When one sees beyond themselves and begins to see their connection to the processes and parts of the planet, especially those that need the most care, then the solutions become more immediate and more connected. The themes discussed in this chapter have significance to the aspects of the environment and the people that Maathai works to help and protect. If the people do not see their connection to the planet and people around them then change will never be realized because cause, effect, and connectivity will not be recognized. However, if the rhetorical appeals are successful, audience members may seek to transcend the challenges and complexities of their particular circumstances and search collaboratively for holistic solutions. Finally, once solutions are envisioned they need to be acted on; tree planting is the dominant solution that Maathai proposed and that action promotes one simple tactic the global community can enact.

Overall, Maathai's use of appeals to transcendence is, to use Walter Fisher's phrase, a "reaffirmation of the human spirit as the transcendent ground of existence."<sup>265</sup> In closing, Maathai asserts that "We can work together for a better world with men and women of goodwill, those who radiate the intrinsic goodness of humankind."<sup>266</sup> No matter what Maathai is speaking about she illuminates the connectivity of all life—both human and non-human. In my conclusion, I reflect on the implications of Maathai's rhetoric as well as prospects for future research and environmental action.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This study examines the ways in which Wangari Maathai communicates about peace, democracy, and the environment. Whether she utilizes metaphors, narratives, or appeals to transcendence, Maathai's rhetoric functions as activist rhetoric. Furthermore, the skill with which she deploys these rhetorical strategies makes Maathai an exemplar of intersectional activism. Maathai draws on issues of peace, democracy, and the environment throughout her rhetoric to assert their interconnectivity and interdependence. In this conclusion, I review this study's key insights, acknowledge the limitations of this project, outline areas for future research, and provide closing remarks.

Maathai's rhetoric pursues solutions that stem from dialogue and observation. Maathai concerns herself with what Ian Shapiro claims are "the ways in which deliberation can be used to alter preferences so as to facilitate the search for a common good. For, the general will has to be manufactured, not just discovered."<sup>267</sup> Maathai's rhetoric attempts to "manufacture" a preference for responsible environmental stewardship by emphasizing the impact of environmental degradation on people, creatures, and the planet. Although her discourse emanates from her local perspective, it is designed to have universal appeal. Furthermore, Maathai's rhetoric is inclusive of historically marginalized African perspectives, a perspective underscored by the very existential environmental perils faced by those people. Her rhetoric incorporates the voices of the African people along with the fact that life in these areas is threatened; if there is not proper deliberation and action pursued to address this destruction then the "common good" suffers. Maathai deploys a variety of tactics in her rhetoric to address a localized problem from the

standpoint of the people of Kenya and then applies these tactics to address the global problem of environmental abuse.

Through Maathai's incorporation of the voices of millions, especially those in Africa who are sometimes perceived to lack agency and legitimacy, she asserts her own political agency and that of the people she represents. Maathai's rhetoric affirms what James S. Fishkin claims, that "the public is indeed capable of dealing with complex issues, once it believes its voice matters, once it believes that there is reason to spend time and effort in public discussion, listening to alternative points of view."<sup>268</sup> This capability is exemplified in Maathai's rhetoric through her merger of metaphors, narratives, and appeals to transcendence to highlight the power of the African people in taking charge of their choices regarding environmental stewardship. Also, this merger focuses on the issues at hand but illustrates their impact on both the people and the landscape in a creative manner that adapts to the voices she is representing. Overall, Maathai's rhetoric illustrates the connections between the environment, peace, and democracy. Through these rhetorical strategies, Maathai develops persuasive and strategic communication demonstrative of intersectional activism and rhetoric of peace.

In my first analysis chapter, I analyzed the ways in which Maathai's rhetoric utilizes metaphors. The metaphors highlighted were the African stool, the wrong bus syndrome, and trees. All three of these metaphors provide a creative lens through which to view the interconnectivity of the issues of peace, democracy, and the environment. These themes are apparent throughout Maathai's rhetoric and she underscores their interdependence. The metaphors offer insight into the creative connections that Maathai employs in her rhetoric. Her utilization of metaphors that connect literally to the African landscape echoes Maathai's ability to integrate complex concerns in a comprehensible

manner. In the end, these metaphors demonstrate the inequities the people of Africa have experienced and their effect on the quality of their lives. Maathai states, “Inequities, both national and international, are largely responsible for poverty and all its manifestations. There is hardly any conflict in the world that is an exception. Below the thin layer of racial and ethnic chauvinism, religion, and politics, the real reason for many conflicts is the struggle for the access and control of the limited resources on our planet.”<sup>269</sup>

Maathai’s metaphorical approach to conveying these inequities is both resourceful and insightful.

Overall, the three major metaphors in this chapter emphasize the importance and interconnectivity of peace, democracy, and the environment. According to Hermann Stelzner, metaphors are impactful if they are “vivid and apt” and if “they contain potencies which literal statements do not have.”<sup>270</sup> All of the metaphors in this chapter provide those potencies that would otherwise not be conveyed if Maathai’s rhetoric simply reiterated that peace, democracy, and the environment are interconnected. Maathai’s strategic use of metaphors exemplifies her ability to think creatively and to adopt diverse viewpoints. In the second chapter, I examined Maathai’s use of narratives. The narratives discussed in that chapter ranged from stories about tadpoles to anecdotes about the women of Kenya, employing coded wisdom and biblical tales for strategic effect. In the end, as Esther Schely-Newman states, “each narrative can be interpreted individually” however “the context and progression from story to story indicates an inner connection.”<sup>271</sup> This inner connection bolsters Maathai’s continued rhetorical engagement with the themes of peace, democracy, and the environment. Whether using tadpoles, coded wisdom, Peter and John, or women, each narrative reinforces an aspect of

Maathai's activism. These narratives create "a dynamic discourse about society and about the relationships between individuals, groups, and classes in society."<sup>272</sup> Additionally, Maathai's use of narrative proves that Fisher's narrative paradigm is not solely an application for the West but is an application for the world and reinforces Fisher's claims of the universal potential and application of the narrative paradigm to all human beings. Maathai's adherence to narrative rationality, coherence, and fidelity affirm that her ideas and narratives, as Robert C. Rowland states, can "be supported outside the limited confines of the story."<sup>273</sup>

Furthermore, Maathai's use of narrative setting, events, and characters to run parallels with aspects of Kenyan place, practice, and people provides an overall narrative construction that encapsulates the issues occurring in Africa, their urgency in needing to be addressed, and their effects on the everyday. Maathai sets many of her narratives in the actual environment she works to sustain and positions the characters to function as activists in the cause, calling on others to think of future generations and how they can engage in similar actions to sustain their own environments. Also, Maathai's stories and characters are consistent with the ideas and arguments she is espousing and the environment and people she is representing. This commonality in Maathai's narratives highlights a stylistic choice by grounding her rhetoric strategically to incorporate the people and environment she represents.

Lastly, in all of Maathai's narratives she integrates her personal ideology. Maathai structures her narratives to adapt to her audience while simultaneously symbolizing her environmental activism. She enlists audience members as active participants in the stories through their strategic ability to extend beyond the Kenyan landscape and become agents for action and social change. This draws on audience members as "the other participants who help to

form the work and mediate its meaning and the dynamics through which this occurs.”<sup>274</sup> The narratives are simple yet profound and reflect lived experiences as well as present the issues Maathai works to address through an accessible venue and ask for action.

In the third chapter, Maathai’s rhetoric solicits action again through the utilization of appeals to transcendence. Maathai’s appeals to transcendence focus attention toward shared aspects of identity and provide a new perspective to overcome differences and address the environmental issues at hand. Specifically, Maathai’s use of holistic, spiritual, and communal appeals to transcendence highlights the intricacies in the human identity and their interconnection to the environment. Strategically, Maathai utilizes familial and communal themes to underscore the connectivity of nature and humanity, creating a bridge between the two. Additionally, an ideological appeal to family promotes a version of communalism likely to appeal even to audience members who hail from more individualistic cultures. Maathai also appeals to the spirituality of the people of the world and accents the connection between their faith traditions and the environment. In this regard, Maathai’s use of spiritual appeals connects the natural with the divine, offering a new perspective for why there needs to be a sustainable, well-managed planet. Finally, Maathai’s appeal to holistic thinking draws on the ability of her audience to contemplate and reflect. Her holistic appeals most generally convey the interconnection of everything on the planet and in the universe in order to elicit a sense of belonging as well as a conceptualization of the earth and environment as a puzzle made up of interacting pieces.

Regardless of the type of appeal, the environment is the central focus of Maathai’s rhetoric. Each appeal discussed reinforces the need to address environmental degradation and to create a sustainable future through the use of rhetoric. The themes discussed in these chapters

have significance to the aspects of the environment and the people that Maathai works to help and protect. If the people do not see their connection to the planet and people around them then change will never be realized because cause, effect, and connectivity will not be recognized. However, if the rhetorical appeals are successful, audience members may seek to rise above the challenges and complexities of their particular circumstances and search collaboratively for solutions.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

In my study, I chose to utilize rhetorical criticism as my foundational approach to examine a selection of communicative acts of Wangari Maathai. More specifically, I chose to approach my examination through a methodology that combined three dominant rhetorical criticism strategies: metaphor, narrative, and appeals to transcendence. This approach was ideal based on the aspects of Maathai's rhetoric I illuminated and the types of texts examined. However, as I will explain, this methodological choice is not without its limitations. Additionally, these limitations imply directions for future research. Below, I discuss both the limitations and areas for future research.

The main limitation to my research is that this is a Master's thesis, and by necessity, is a preliminary examination of Maathai's rhetoric; future research projects would benefit from an expanded scope. Additionally, I did not acquire access to the entirety of Maathai's rhetorical artifacts such as her numerous books, documentaries, and other speeches and articles. I chose from a specified list highlighted on the Green Belt Movement's website. Lastly, by choosing solely a rhetorical criticism approach I limited my scope of analysis to one dominant area of scholarship; a different or mixed methodological approach would flesh out more nuances in Maathai's rhetoric. Overall, if time and access to materials were expanded then methodological

approaches could also be expanded. Ultimately, I am content with the approach utilized in this study as it afforded me the ability to analyze a select number of Maathai's text in a focused manner to illuminate the ways her rhetoric is multidimensional and to provide insight into ways to expand on this analysis in the future.

Future research could examine important questions I was unable to answer due to my methodological approach. For instance, a critical method that emphasizes identity might yield insights regarding gender, power, and culture among other insight gleaned from Maathai and her work. Maathai is a well-educated female African activist who has won prestigious awards for her work, however, in her culture women are still meant to remain in subordinate and marginalized positions. How did this cultural expectation affect Maathai's educational pursuits and activist work? What obstacles did she have to overcome as a woman to achieve the worldwide success and prominence that she did? How did she assert her power as an activist in Kenya in order to garner support for her cause? Depending on the focus of the research, cultural or gender-based approaches could explicate further understanding into female leadership and cultural divisions that continue to oppress or empower those perceived to lack agency or marginalized by their governments, systems, or other social structures.

Another area of Maathai's rhetoric and activism that is left unaccounted for in this study is its true impact on audiences. How were audiences affected by Maathai's activism and presence, both globally and locally in Kenya? Were there aspects of Maathai's speeches and work that resonated more with audience members than others? Would those who worked closely with Maathai on the Green Belt Movement echo her use of narratives and local anecdotes as a means to demonstrate and illustrate the urgency of addressing the environmental needs of the planet? These and other questions could be examined and answered through either personal

accounts from members of the Green Belt Movement and members of her audiences at some of her prominent speeches. Additionally, her speeches could be read by participants with the goal to see what resonates and is impactful to members of diverse groups. This data could be analyzed and coded in order to illuminate trends in her audiences' perceptions of impact as well as used to reinforce the strategic and effective use of the rhetorical strategies employed in Maathai's rhetoric.

Lastly, an interdisciplinary study of Maathai's rhetoric could examine the scientific veracity of the environmental claims that Maathai makes in her rhetoric and could consider, more broadly, the impact of government and public policy on the environment. In the end, there are a variety of ways to approach both Maathai as a rhetor and activist on her own as well as Maathai as a social movement leader and founder of the Green Belt Movement.

#### Closing Remarks

In the end, Maathai tactically utilizes rhetoric representative of African ideologies and structures her messages to reinforce their connection to larger issues. Even though her audiences are varied, her rhetoric is creative and makes connections that are grounded in everyday lived experiences. Maathai takes familiar aspects of everyday life and focuses them on her African cause. No matter the audience, international or national, Maathai's rhetoric returns to Africa, broadly, and Kenya more specifically. Her rhetoric unites its words and language in a utilitarian manner that brings her distant audiences' one figurative step closer to her home, Kenya. Maathai's rhetoric is illustrative of this marrying of rhetorical strategies to connect to her cause in Kenya as well as to represent progress and change towards environmental stewardship through intersectional activism.

Lastly, all of these rhetorical strategies are articulated by Maathai, a strong African woman, speaking on behalf of other African men and women. She is well-versed and the composition of her rhetoric is clear and intelligent. Since she is usually speaking to well-educated audiences there is a certain expectation that her language will adhere to her audience. Maathai fulfills this expectation while still utilizing local language that positions Africa and their ideologies at the core of her rhetoric. Metaphors and narratives are common tropes utilized in the everyday to recount events and describe significance. Through Maathai's use of these tropes in her rhetoric she continually connects her words back to aspects of the everyday and presents issues in a creative and simple manner as opposed to complex and confusing communication. Overall, all of Maathai's rhetoric attempts, "to craft honest, wise, and politically sensitive stories that speak across time and space."<sup>275</sup> This provides a creative path to bridge connections with different perspectives and global perceptions.

Overall, the ideas emplaced in Maathai's rhetoric are appeals to transcend limited and individualistic responses to environmental degradation by viewing the world community more inclusively. Her rhetoric intertwines the theme of environmental responsibility with the values of peace and democracy. When speaking about the actions associated with the Green Belt Movement as a whole she refers to the work of those involved, including herself, as ways to "plant seeds of peace,"<sup>276</sup> to "embrace democratic governance, protect human rights and protect our environment,"<sup>277</sup> and as a way to place "the critical issue of the environment and its linkage to democracy and peace before the world."<sup>278</sup> This placement posits the interconnectivity and intersections of these issues on an international platform.

Maathai's rhetoric demonstrates a belief in the ability of every human to be a part of the solution. She states, "All of us, scientists, extension workers, policymakers, academicians,

students and civil society have a vital role to play in addressing, and providing practical and sustainable solutions for this challenge.”<sup>279</sup> Maathai, who has sadly passed away, used her voice and her concern for her community to express and advocate for peace, democracy, and environmental awareness throughout the world.<sup>280</sup> Wangari Maathai is an individual of extraordinary significance throughout the spectrum of peace activism and social movement leadership. The tactics she utilized opened the door for her cause to influence how we approach other causes and conversations for creating a more peaceful world.

## NOTES

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<sup>4</sup> PBS Website, <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/takingroot/timeline.html> (accessed November 2012).

<sup>5</sup> "Wangari Maathai Biography," *NobelPrize.org*, 2004.

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<sup>7</sup> The Green Belt Movement International.

<sup>8</sup> George Lakoff, "Why It Matters How We Frame the Environment," *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 1 (2010): 70-81; Brigitte Nerlich and Nelya Koteyko, "Carbon Reduction Activism in the UK: Lexical Creativity and Lexical Framing in the Context of Climate Change,"

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<sup>10</sup> Sharon M. Livesey, "Eco-Identity as Discursive Struggle: Royal Dutch/Shell, Brent Spar, and Nigeria," *Journal of Business Communication* 38, no. 1 (2001): 58-91.

<sup>11</sup> Jimmie M. Killingsworth & Jacqueline S. Palmer, *Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America* (Carbondale, IL: SIU Press, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Kevin Michael DeLuca, "Salvaging Wilderness from the Tomb of History: A Response to The National Parks: America's Best Idea," *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 4 (2010): 484-493. Also see: Kevin Michael DeLuca, "Greenpeace International Media Analyst Reflects on Communication Climate Change," *Environmental Communication* 3, no. 2 (2009): 263-269; Peter Newell, *Climate for Change: Non-state Actors and the Global Politics of the Greenhouse* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Kevin Michael DeLuca, "Trains in the Wilderness: The Corporate Roots of Environmentalism," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 4, no. 4 (2001): 633-652; Kevin Michael DeLuca, "Salvaging Wilderness from the Tomb of History: A Response to The National Parks: America's Best Idea," *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 4 (2010): 484-493.

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Dale Jamieson, "Justice: The Heart of Environmentalism," *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement*, eds. Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 89.

<sup>16</sup> Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo, "Introduction: Revisiting the Environmental Justice Challenge to Environmentalism," *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement*, eds. Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 2.

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<sup>169</sup> Genesis 4, Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011, <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+4&version=NIV> (accessed June 2013).

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<http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai/key-speeches-and-articles/speak-truth-to-power> (accessed May 2013).

<sup>171</sup> See The Green Belt Movement's Website section on Maathai's Key Speeches and Articles for examples of her rhetoric: <http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai/key-speeches-and-articles>

<sup>172</sup> Maathai references the women of Kenya in every speech act examined in this thesis in some way, shape or form. Whether she uses their perspective as an introduction to the Green Belt Movement or she incorporates their narratives to reinforce her messages about other environmental, democratic, or peace related issues, the women of Kenya are ever-present in Maathai's rhetoric. Furthermore, Maathai as a Kenyan woman acts as an immediate inclusion of the female Kenyan perspective regardless of rhetorical content. Maathai develops the content and therefore it is constructed from the perspective of Kenyan woman.

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<sup>174</sup> William F. Lewis. "Telling America's Story: Narrative Form and the Reagan Presidency." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 3 (1987): 283.

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 422.

<sup>186</sup> Omar Swartz, ed. *Social Justice and Communication Scholarship*. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), xvi.

<sup>187</sup> Wangari Maathai, "Speak Truth to Power," *GreenBeltMovement.org*, May 4, 2000,  
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<sup>188</sup> Wangari Maathai, "Speak Truth to Power."

<sup>189</sup> Naida Zukic. "Webbing Sexual/Textual Agency in Autobiographical Narratives of Pleasure." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2008): 401.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 403.

<sup>191</sup> Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott & Eric Aoki, "Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting: The Reverent Eye/I at the Plains Indian Museum," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3(2006): 34.

<sup>192</sup> Julie-Ann Scott. "Performing Unfeminine Femininity: A Performance of Identity Analysis of Bulimic Women's Personal Narratives." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 28, no. 1-2 (2008): 117.

<sup>193</sup> Radha S. Hedge, "A View from Elsewhere: Locating Difference and the Politics of Representation from a Transnational Feminist Perspective," *Communication Theory*, 8(1998): 289.

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<sup>201</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, (3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984),336.

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