

AN ECO CRITICAL READING OF REBECCA NJAU'S *THE SACRED SEED*

Purity Wanja

Department of Humanities, Chuka University, P.O Box 109-60400, Chuka,
Kenya

Corresponding author email: pwanja@chuka.ac.ke

ABSTRACT

Environmental degradation is a global issue that threatens sustainability of human life; thus it has attracted scholarly attention globally over the years. This paper discusses the depiction of ecological themes in Rebecca Njau's novel *The Sacred Seed*. The main argument is that Njau's novel employs multifarious literary strategies and character representations to open up a discussion on the role of literature in the discourse of environmental conservation. Through negative representations of perpetrators of environmental degradation the novel castigates perpetuation of crimes against nature such as: deforestation and encroachment on natural resources. The moral vision of the author is evident in the way the text highlights the benefits of nature to humanity, such as the viability of herbal medicine as a possible alternative to contemporary medicine. This study is based on the understanding that since literature bears the potential of influencing the attitudes of its consumers; exposure to ecologically conscious texts such as *The Sacred Seed* is likely to sensitize society on the need for preservation of nature.

Key Words: Eco criticism, Eco feminism, nature, satire, violation, environment

INTRODUCTION

Rebecca Njau is one of the pioneer African women writers. She became Kenya's first female playwright when she published her award winning play *The Scar*, in 1963. Her other publications include debut novel, *Ripples in the Pool* first published in 1975, and *Kenya Women Heroes and their Mystical Power* (1984). Recently she also published her memoirs under the title *Mirrors of my Life* (2019). Her literary oeuvre is rife with feminist themes as she explores the place of a woman within the changing socio-economic spaces of Africa. According to Mwangi 2003, p.3) in *The Sacred Seed*, Njau "textualises women's experiences of the world through art, thus restoring women's innermost feelings in a world dominated by men". It is of interest to this study to investigate how she advances the course of nature alongside her concern for women issues.

The Sacred Seed (2003), narrates a story of conflict between men and nature and men and women. Events in the novel revolve around a female protagonist, Tesa, a talented music teacher, who is raped imprisoned and later held hostage in a cottage in a forest by the dictatorial president Chinusi. To heal from her trauma, she embarks on a journey of self-discovery in the country-

side that leads to a pristine forest that serves as an ecological refuge from the dehumanizing environment of the city. At Kimina forest, she, and other wounded women, access healing under the tutelage of a traditional potter, Mumbi. The natural resources and the tranquil environment deep in the village enable them heal both physically and psychologically.

Literary critics have decried the paucity of environmental sensitivity in the literary productions of East Africa. Nabulya (2019) bemoans the dearth of literature on ecology in East Africa, yet ecologically devastating activities are rampant in the region. Gebreyohannes (2022) corroborates this argument in his observation that there has been a tendency for postcolonial African writers to lay more emphasis on neocolonial themes such as corruption and bad governance with very little attention being given to issues relating to environmental crises.

This paper contributes to the discourse of environmental conservation through an analysis of ways in which character depictions and usage of literary language in *The sacred seed* addresses the relationship between man and nature. The paper aims to examine the role of literature in the

complex often conflicting systems of interaction between humans and their natural environment. In the words of (Nixon 2014, p.32) “environmental education is a collective effort of all living on the face of the earth and each person must be reminded to ensure the wellbeing of the ecosystem.” This paper adopts the Eco criticism literary theory to tease out the depictions of ecological concerns in Njau’s novel.

Glotfelty (1996, p. xviii) defines Eco criticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” For Fenton (2008, p.2) Eco criticism is a notion that examines the “interconnectedness of man and nature.” These critics allude to the symbiotic relationship between the human world and the world of nature. This essay utilizes a strand of Eco criticism described as ecofeminism which addresses the interconnectedness of the way women and nature are treated in paternalistic societies. The term ecofeminism which was coined by Françoise d’Eaubonne in the 70s refers to: “a theoretical discourse whose theme is the link between the oppression of women and the domination of nature” (Glotfelty (1996, p. xxiv). *The Sacred Seed* depicts this interconnectedness in the portrayals of rape and oppression of women characters as happening alongside the violation of natural resources. As (Gaard 1993, p. 2) observes attempts to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) cannot be successful until an equal effort is made to liberate nature. (Gaard 1993, p. 2) This paper explores the twin concepts of the domination of women by men and humanity’s misappropriation of nature as fictionalized in *The Sacred Seed*.

METHODOLOGY

This research entails a close reading of the primary text, *The Sacred Seed* as well as relevant journal articles relating to the novel and the topic of Eco criticism. In my reading of *The Sacred Seed* from an ecofeminist lens I draw from the conceptualizations of Moyer (2001) of the ecofeminist concept of dualism to explore the binary

oppositions that give leeway for the domination of women and nature in the text. Dualism is a worldview within which the world is divided into opposed pairs of concepts. In the words of (Khalil 2019, p.1), “What ecofeminists share in common is an intention to deconstruct dualisms that serve to obstruct the presentation of a more interconnected, non-hierarchical, and non-reductionist view of life”. This argument underscores the place of ecological texts as forms of protest against prejudicial dualistic structures.

The analysis of *The Sacred Seed* as an ecological text is also anchored on the ecofeminism perception of “women are the saviours and nurturers of nature” (Sowmya 2012, p.1) For Eco feminists women are more sensitive to environmental conservation than men. According to Plumwood (1993, pp. 8–9) the close affinity of women to nature emanates from their character of “empathy, nurturance, cooperativeness, and connectedness reproductive capacity, which are unsharable by men.”

In the course of this paper I will discuss ways in which the author portrays strong female protagonists, who are able to rise above patriarchal prejudices and oppressions to strongly resist dominations and advocate for their own freedoms and the conservation of nature. The resilience, courage and unity of the women enable them to resist environmental degradation and to preserve the resources of nature. The main argument of this paper is that literature creates awareness of ecological concerns and advocates for a harmonious co-existence between nature and humanity. I explore how a reading of Rebecca Njau’s novel, *The Sacred Seed* enhances an understanding of contemporary challenges in gender and environmental studies in East Africa. Having reiterated the paucity of literary ecological studies in the region, this study will be a contribution to the existing scholarship on both Rebecca Njau and ecofeminism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Njau engages the Bhaktinian concept of the polyphonic nature of the novel to depict diverse approaches to ecofeminist ideas in *The Sacred Seed*. (Gates, 1998, p. 21) criticizes ecofeminist theory “for being so diverse as to have no center.” This paper considers this pluralism as an element of strength as it opens up the possibility of multiple readings of environmental concerns in the text. In the following sections the paper discusses the multifarious depictions of ecofeminist concerns in *The Sacred Seed*.

Rape as Violation of both Women and Nature

In the depiction of rape, the novel deconstructs dualisms between men/women and humans/nature. Njau fictionalizes the twin violation of women and nature in a manner that exposes dualistic thinking that privileges men over women. Moyer 2001, reminds us that dualism as an ecofeminist concept differs from mere binarism or dichotomy as it involves distinction between two realms in such a way that one member of the pair is subordinate to the other. For ecofeminists, the invention of such concepts allowed man to degrade women since they are deemed an inferior other and also justifies the dominating and oppressing nonhuman others. In the novel, Njau intertwines the man/woman and man/nature dualisms to depict both women and nature as victims of male maleficence.

The novel portrays three instances when women are raped in forests thus simultaneously defiling both the women and the land where the atrocities take place. Tesa recalls an incident when she and her friend Waema had been accosted by a rapist marauding as a forest guard. Although she manages to escape, her friend is not as lucky and she gets raped. Consequently she develops depression and eventually commits suicide. In this portrayal Njau contrasts the serene environment of the natural forests with the immoral acts of the rapist. The scene changes from being a space of tranquility to

one of bestial violence and trauma for the innocent minor.

In the simultaneous depiction of twin violations of women and the natural environment, Njau fictionalizes the view of (Warren 2000, p.1) that there are strong “connections between the unjustified dominations of women, people of colour, children, and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature.” Before the violation, the girls’ nature walk is described as one in which they are in sync with nature as they bask in the beauty of the natural flowers from the bushes and enjoy the refreshing morning breeze (Njau 2003, p.20) The rape reduces the carefree girl to a humiliated victim who can no longer enjoy the smell of the flowers or the music of the birds and ends up committing suicide. In the same breath the moral deprivation of the rapist transforms the natural forest from being a space of enjoyment to one to exploitation and horror.

The novel further engages with the crucial role played by nature in the socio-economic spaces within the African societies. The omniscient narrator describes the girls’ experience in the forest before the rape as a practical encounter with the theoretical knowledge they have about the symbiotic relationship between nature and humans. In the course of their walk, “they came across a rare shrub whose fibre had been used for generations to weave traditional baskets (Njau 2003, p.20) The author presents these young people as engaging in a form of informal education in which the natural environment connects them to the wealth of nature and its ability to sustain humanity in spiritual and economical dimensions. Human evil signified by the rape introduces drastic changes that sever the tranquil co-existence as envisioned earlier. It can therefore be argued that it is not just the girls who are subjected to defilement but the land is too, as the young generation is likely to associate pristine nature with rape hence develop an aversion to nature walks and healthy interaction with the ecosystem.

The setting of the forest as a site of rape recurs when Tesa is abducted by the dictatorial president, Chinusi and imprisoned in a small cottage inside a forested area. She is continuously subjected to rape and brutality which condemn her to a state of helplessness and terror. In the negative representation of a president as rapist, Njau exemplifies an ecofeminism ideal of exposing and challenging all practices of domination. As the president is the most powerful man in the land, his victims have no one to appeal to. He is described as “an animal” that “uses sex to humiliate and subdue women...to him and many other men, women are just sexual objects. It does not matter how old or young the woman is, their fate is the same. To be overpowered and used by men.” He is further depicted as a psychopath who believes that when he rapes women of talent their intelligence and strength will be absorbed in his own blood stream (Njau 2003, p.12-13). Here the text satirizes what Plumwood (1993) refers to as “objectification” in reference to the feature of dualism in which the dominant member of the pair treat the underdog as a mere means to an end. According to him: “the dualising master self does not empathetically recognize others as moral kin, and does not recognize them as a centre of desires and needs of their own account hence on both counts he is free to impose his own ends”(Plumwood 1993, p.53). Through Chinusi’s obsession with raping of women to strip them of power, the author deconstructs instrumentalism and castigates the patriarchal mindsets that sanction the dehumanization of women.

The author forcefully brings to our attention the traumatic impact of these ordeals so as to highlight the urgency of resisting all forms of human and ecological degradation. After the rape ordeal the protagonist associates forests with terror. Tesa exemplifies Cathy Caruth’s argument that “the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs; it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (1995, p.8). When Mumbi invites her for a walk in Kimina forest Tesa’s trauma of the ordeal in the forest resurfaces. Her “mind was thrown back to the dreadful encounter with

the forest rapist,” and she is engulfed by such a dread that she contemplates turning back to the safety of the familiar huts (Njau 2003, p.49). Her trauma captures the impact of human violation of nature. It takes the loving assurance and help of Mumbi to inspire a healthy mentality towards forests. In fact she is able to tune in with nature to the extent that she is able to replicate the re-inscription into a harmonious coexistence with nature for other victims of trauma.

In yet another episode, the author fictionalizes the forest as a setting for the rape and killings of women during an episode of ethnic clashes. Lina and fifteen other women are kidnapped and taken to the killers’ camp in the forest where they cooked for them during the day and were turned into sex objects in the night.

“The beautiful forest with its virgin scented wood, and the springs of cool waters was in danger of being raped and destroyed by people with uncontrollable desire to rape not only innocent women, but nature’s heritage” (Njau 2003, p.164). Just as Tesa, Lina too escapes to Mumbi’s sanctuary and is able to reconfigure her relationship with nature. In narrating the traumas of the various categories of women accosted in forests, Njau projects her social vision as one of environmental conservation and the upholding of the dignity of women. She highlights the possibility of restoration by subverting the intrusion of natural heritage transforming it to a place of healing and rejuvenation for the deflowered women.

Nature as source of Spiritual and Physical Healing

This section examines how the text engages with the ecofeminist concept of the interdependence between humans and nature. For instance, the text fictionalizes the argument advanced by critics such as Mbiti, (2011), and Onyemelukwe (2019), that the physical environment is the abode of the spirits within African spirituality. Njau depicts a sacred grove reminiscent of the one in Ngugi wa Thiong’os novel *The River Between*. In *The Sacred Seed*, the grove is a place of worship “where the elders had performed religious rites for generations. (Njau 2003, p.38).

This writing exemplifies spiritual connectivity as one of the benefits of a harmonious relationship between nature and people. In his reading of Birago Diop's poem "Breath" Onyemelukwe (2019) describes Diop as an Eco poet who in line with the traditional African religion. In *Breath*, the dead are not gone away but are in natural elements where they can commune with the living. This continual cycle of communication between the living and the dead is at the heart of African sensibilities underscoring the centrality of nature as the abode of the spirits. In *The Sacred Seed*, however, this connection is depicted as having been severed by human violation of the ecosystem. The sacred grove, a formerly hallowed ground, turns into a disgusting eyesore due to human neglect and violation. The omniscient narrator informs us that "the area around the tree, which was once a sacred place was polluted with filth and animal droppings...a crime had been committed around the tree at the sacred grove and no more religious rites could be performed there... Although purification rites had been carried out to remove the uncleanness; misfortunes of various kinds continued to occur (Njau 2003, p. 38-41). Here there is a clear correlation between the violation of nature and the discontinuity of the benefits derived from natural resources. the text symbolically delineates the implications of failing to engage in responsible use of natural resources to solve human problems. The spiritual alienation experienced by the community exemplifies the perception of nature as unforgiving (Maathai, 2004).

In the text, Njau portrays nature needing nurturing and protection in order for it to be of benefit to mankind. The overpowering tree around the sacred grove "had ruined the spring, the source of clean water". Mumbi gets it uprooted and the pool is cleaned up. She then creates out of that sacred place, a new sanctuary for women where they would find refreshment and nourishment, a place of refuge where they would express their pain and their joy" (Njau 2003, p. (40). The creation of an ecological refuge for the women underscores the core ecofeminist mandate of empowering women and nature.

The tree at the sacred grove can be read as a symbol of moral degradation that warrants the violation of humans and nature. Just as the ugly tree polluted the flesh springs and prevented the community from enjoying physical and spiritual nourishment, so does moral degradation impede harmonious co-existence. The act of uprooting the tree is therefore significant of the elimination ecofeminist threats. It is significant that after Mumbi eliminates the pollution around the sacred grove, she is crowned a priestess whose duties included offering prayers, performing religious rites and protecting the forest with all its natural resources. This promotion that positions a woman to work alongside the male elders symbolizes the toppling of oppressive dualisms and the attainment of agency for both women and nature. This change is captured in the suggestion that in such a set up "a new relationship with the soil, the trees, the plants and the water will be born, and hope, confidence and love will replace the spirit of fear and hatred" (Njau 2003, p. (44). In the characterization of strong female protagonists who advocate for nature's conservation, Njau engages in an ecofeminist critique of dualism as she envisions a framework within which men and women work together for the promotion of nature and culture.

The text further delineates the interconnectedness of nature and human health in the depiction of Kimina's pool in Kimina Forest. It never dries up and is treated with awe by the elders who regard it as one of the dwelling places of their ancestral spirits. Other than its spiritual significance, this pool is depicted as medicinal. When Tesa arrives at the sanctuary bearing both physical and psychological wounds, Mumbi takes her to the forest where she asks her to dip herself in the kimina pool, an allusion to the biblical New Testament Bethesda pool reputed for its curative abilities. Later she uses herbs such as those of the neem tree to treat her wounds (Njau 2003, p. (51). This combination of medicinal water and herbs underscores the potentialities of nature's bounty in the resolution of human challenges.

The text explores the place of intersection between traditional medicine and spirituality that characterizes tranquil environments as part of the gifts of nature to humanity. The mystical character, Mumbi is said to have inherited the knowledge of herbal medicine from her mother Ngonyo. The text records that she had learnt to “recognize different types of herbs, roots, barks, seeds and leaves from certain trees which had healing properties” (Njau 2003, p.37). The author singles out the neem tree as one whose leaves and bark Mumbi’s mother had used many times to treat various illnesses. Under Mumbi’s tutelage, Tesa is exposed to the effectiveness of herbal medicine and she is able to convert others into ecological consciousness that transforms their lives. When Ellen, a returning prodigal, acknowledges her misguided involvement in patriarchal webs of domination and seeks healing from nature, the process Tesa takes her through is to a large extent a replica of the natural medication regimen that she too had experienced in the hands of Mumbi. The text records the tranquility experienced as Ellen gets in tune with nature in a picturesque language that draws in the reader to marvel at the inner peace harmony as she tunes into the rhythms in the environment. The text records that: as they sat at the pool “the sparrows were twittering and hopping from branch to branch. As they listened to their happy chatter, Ellen was filled with such peace that she closed her eyes and allowed herself to sink slowly into the unexpected primeval forest of her inner self” (Njau 2003, p.165). After the spiritual cleansing, Tesa asks her to dip herself in the medicinal pool after which she takes out the worm from her wound, and using oil from the seeds of the neem tree she treats the wound and covers it with a soft medicinal leaf on which she had applied honey. The combination of physical and spiritual treatment by natural methods is so effective that Ellen is completely cured yet modern medicine had failed to help her. Here the text points a correlation between psychological healing and physical healing from the resources of nature. This medical encounter exemplifies the conceptualization of indigenous forests as “community’s pharmacy.” (Lusinga

2016, p.39) In his words, such forests are vast laboratories, “where trainees receive lessons through empirical observation”. His argument is exemplified in the way Tesa graduates from being a student to a practitioner in natural intervention to human maladies.

The motif of herbal medicine is further foregrounded through the medical doctor Dr. Kim Mwera who symbolizes a reconciliation of contemporary and traditional herbal medicine. He relocates from the city to tap into the natural resources in Kimina forest. Doctor Mwera is so much interested in the indigenous heritage that he not only engages in environmental activism in which the community protest against the destruction of Kimina forest; but he also sets up a clinic in the village so that he could practice herbal medicine and watch over the land and its natural resources. (Njau 2003, p. 235).

Relations between Humans and Non-human others in the Ecosystem

The harmonious existence between man and nature is symbolized in the portrayal of the relationship between humanity and non-human others. The text explores animal imagery to contrast healthy and destructive approaches to natural heritage. Mumbi’s mother had taught her to develop environmental awareness as exemplified in her friendly approach towards animals to the extent that other people consider her strange. For instance she did not fear bees. She handled them gently and let them crawl over her arms. They on the other hand “seemed to recognize her scent” and did not harm her (Njau 2003, p.37). The text deconstructs derogatory stereotypes surrounding relations with certain birds and animals as detrimental to the pursuit of environmental consciousness. Pastor Jonah denounces Mumbi as a witch citing her friendship with birds and other forest beings as evidence (Njau 2003, p.95-7). Jonah’s attitude can be read as a satire of Africans’ mimicry of derogatory colonial denunciations of Africa’s affinity to nature and traditional modes of spirituality. Jonah embodies an alienation from authentic cultural sensibilities that manifests as hostility towards any

ideologies and practices that are out of tune with his colonial indoctrination.

The text further explores bird imagery to underscore the interconnectedness of all life forms on earth. Mumbi and her pet bird Fina are depicted as friends who spend time together and are sensitive to each other's needs. The novel records that "those who heard the bird's call marveled at her ability to imitate its sound. There seemed to be a mysterious understanding developing between the two" (Njau 2003, p. 40). In the depiction of a friendship between a human being and animals, Njau dramatizes concern of Mwangi 2019, p.1 for the non-human other. In his view there is need to approach animals by recognizing their needs and rights as sentient beings; and not as symbols for interpersonal human relationships. Njau dramatizes this concern for animals' rights through the character Mumbi, an epitome of kindness and preservation of life in the ecology.

In the novel Njau furthers the motif of immersion into the rhythms of nature by depicting bird watching as both therapeutic and inspirational. Mumbi learns life lessons by observing her natural environment. In a specific episode she sits on a rock and watches weaver birds making their nests perched on a thorn tree. The omniscient narrator informs us that:

She noticed the patience, the single mindedness and the thoroughness of the little birds.

They selected their material carefully and as a spider weaves an intricate pattern with care

and love, so did the little birds weave their nests to produce the best abode for themselves

and their little ones (Njau 2003, p.38). The inspirations from these birds rejuvenate her in her pursuit of the ecofeminist goals of preserving the natural heritage and empowering women who are victims of abuse. Her affinity to nature is dramatized as a source of courage and life lessons.

Mumbi's relationship with nature is contrasted with Jonah's and Chinusi's, the two men who are symbols of evil and destruc-

tion. Muturi complains that his father had killed his little bird. He narrates his trauma to Tesa detailing how Jonah had brutally murdered his pet bird. "In his rage, which resembled a mad man's, he took a cane and hammered the cage several times; killing the bird" (Njau, 2003, p. 113). Jonah comes out as a violent unfeeling man who for whatever reason he may have had to be annoyed at his son had no right to harm the innocent bird. Later Tesa makes a sculpture of a bird that she names "Imani" (faith) to inspire love and faith in him after the trauma of living with a domineering father. The little sculpture reminds him of the little bird he dearly loved but was destroyed by the father (Njau 2003, p. 236). The motif of birds as pets suggests a harmonious loving coexistence between men and natural beings. The severing of such a bond is presented as creating pain, loss and trauma.

The author uses satire to castigate individual who engage in destruction of nature and humanity. Chinusi the epitome of destruction is portrayed as an ogre of sorts. His physical features connote the evil within him that drives him to devour others. He is described as exhibiting an eccentric personality that thrives on hurting other people and animals (Njau 2003, p. 92). Chinusi detests people who are gentle and loving and enjoyed seeing people even those close to him suffer. The omniscient narrator informs us that "he takes great pleasure in pumping bullets into every part of harmless animals during his hunting expeditions" (Njau 2003, p.92). The author uses the image of a carnivorous bird to castigate the blood thirst that dominated his thoughts and actions. "Like a vulture that fought for meat to survive, he would seek out his enemies and fight them. He would pursue even those agile jackals and destroy them with one shot" (Njau 2003, p.92). The wanton destruction of wildlife comes out as a gross violation of animal rights. His treatment of both human and animals appears unnatural and catastrophic. By portraying this destroyer of nature as a mad man, Njau seems to channel the empathy of the reader to the beings in the ecosystem and instill an aversion to such deranged characteristics.

Through such negative character representation the text castigates hostility towards nature.

Deforestation as Symptomatic of Moral Decadence

Eco critics view man as one part of a huge and complex family and his actions affect the balance in the rest of the wider family. They interrogate the representation of rocks, trees and rivers and other components of natural environment rightfully co-existing with humanity. In *The Sacred Seed*, Njau presents natural forest as endangered by modern capitalistic forces described as “thieves of public property and the people’s natural heritage”. (Njau 2003, p. 144) Kimina is a primeval forest with large live trees, dead trees and logs as well as bushes and shrubs that sustain the people of the village. It bears historical landmarks such as “a large cave where warriors took shelter whenever an attack was predicted” (Njau 2003, p.49). The area around the Kanoni sanctuary is a catchment area that is richly endowed with exotic trees, medicinal herbs, and indigenous birds and wildlife that are of great value to the community. It is this rich natural heritage that the president, an epitome of capitalist materialism, is intent on destroying to grab the land. He intends to manipulate Jonah, his greedy accomplice posing as a pastor to sanitize the “development agenda” that will not only destroy nature but also dispossess the locals as the women are to be forcefully moved to the plains far from the forested area (Njau 2003, p. 150). Dr. Mwera unmasks the scheme in the following explanation:

The plan is for the church to annex the land, including the sanctuary in the pretext that it

would be used to put up a church institution and a school for the poor children in the area.

... the trees in the forest cut and sold for a lot of money. Prime hardwood timber will be

wiped out. Everything will be destroyed, and the spring will die. Then a well will be sunk

from the ground to provide piped water. Jonah is merely being used as a tool to make the

deal look clean... There will be no church institution. The land will finally go

to Chinusi

and his associates. (Njau 2003, 162)

In portraying the indigenous forest as endangered by greedy politicians Njau castigates leadership that fails to prioritize environmental concerns in postcolonial Africa.

Njau further draws on historical land injustices in post-colonial Kenya to comment on the unequal access to the natural resource of land in the contemporary Kenyan society. Land ownership and preservation is a very significant discourse in environmental conservation since in as Carson 1962, p.53 notes: “it is the soil that controls all forms of life on earth and without soil, terrestrial plants could not grow, and without plants no animals could survive (53). The land in question symbolizes the rich “white highlands that were now available for the Africans at the departure of the Europeans. By portraying Pastor Jonah and his rich friend Kihanya as colluding to disadvantage the poor villagers, the text explores the historical injustices meted out by the emerging bourgeois class in postcolonial African nations which disenfranchised the masses. It is ironical that a pastor who is expected to be concerned with the improvement of the life conditions of his congregants opts to amass wealth for himself and sacrifice the poor villagers to please his already rich friend. This act further exemplifies the concept of “instrumentalism” tackled earlier, as the pastor takes advantage of the trust the people have to enrich himself. To him thus, they are mere pawns to aid him attain his economic goals. (Plumwood 1993, p. 53).

The text depicts a symbolic victory of the underdogs against the enemies of nature through magical realism. When Ellen steals the beautiful gourd that had sprouted from the sacred seed that Mumbi had given Tesa to plant, she develops worm infested wounds that defy modern medicine. It is only when she asks the women to forgive her that she believes in herbal medicine that she gets cured. To the women “the gourd seed symbolized the new generation of united and liberated women. Destroying its fruit meant destroying that bond of unity” (Njau 2003, p.109).

This excerpt implies that any of the characters who engaged in stealing the women's gourd symbolically stole their unity and liberation.

Jonah steals the women's gourd from Ellen's room and gives it as a gift to Chinusi. Henceforth, the hitherto unchallenged Chinusi begins to hail and his physical and mental health goes downhill until he eventually dies. Jonah does not fare any better. The ugly worms wriggling at the bottom of the fetish gourds magically appear in his body and he develops incurable wounds until he dies in severe pain. The deaths of the two men are significant of the downfall of patriarchal forces manifesting as impediments to the thriving of women and nature. Their symbolic deaths serve as a critique of adoption of individualistic and materialistic tendencies that threaten a harmonious co-existence between humans and fellow humans as well as humans and nature. The social vision of the author is clear as one that entails advocacy for the recognition of the place of women and nature within the context of the 21st century capitalistic society. By the end of the novel the women in support with the peasants of Kimina win the war against ecological degradation. In tilting the scales in favour of the underdog Njau conceptualizes the defeat of traditional subordinations envisaged within dualistic thought.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that literary works can contribute to a sustainable physical en-

vironment by raising consciousness in the society of the need to promote environmental conservation. When people become aware of environmental crises, they are better equipped to solve them. The novel has highlighted environmental concerns and offered possible approaches to resolving them. The text highlights the need for preservation of the environment by portraying characters who are actively involved in advocating for the preservation of natural resources such as forests.

Njau demonstrates that regardless of the rampant greed and corruption in contemporary Kenya, The hope of the Kenyan society lies in the unity of the people in opposing the forces of destruction. By granting victory to the villagers who come out in large numbers to protect the primeval forest under threat, the author's social vision comes out as one that promotes a symbiotic relationship between man and nature in which none is threatened by the other. Through the metaphoric portrayal of resistance to environmental degradation motivated by materialism, the author seems to suggest that society can and should stand up to the forces of greed, and pursue the principles of dependence and mutualism between man and nature. This paper concludes that exposure to ecologically conscious literature promotes healthy interactions between nature and humanity.

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