

Activism and Character Formation: Analysis of *Flight of the Hummingbird* and *Unbowed* by Wangari Maathai.

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ABSTRACT: Literary activism consists of efforts to promote, impede, direct or intervene in social, political, economic or environmental reform with the desire to make changes in society towards a perceived greater good. The study gained inspiration from the conviction that the art of imagination and the creative concerns, such as the creative depiction of environmental degradation, can be communicated and understood through metaphorical representations. Meta activism encompasses these forms and places activism as a multi-faceted championing of causes. This study posits that literature and activism are intertwined and that, as such, activism could in a number of ways, inform the development of character in individuals. The objective of the study is to analyse activism as informing character formation in *Flight of the Hummingbird* and *Unbowed* by Wangari Maathai. This study, therefore, investigates Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed* and *Flight of the Hummingbird* as literary sites where explicit admirable traits are developed in individuals who took part in activist-oriented activities. This interrogation has been carried out through the lenses of eco-criticism and eco-feminism theories. The study has used an analytical research design, which facilitates an in-depth analysis of the trends in character acquisition among the champions of courses in the selected texts. The two literary texts were purposively sampled. Both primary and secondary data for this study were analysed and interrogated in response to the study objectives. This study concludes that activism – social, political and environmental – shape the character of protagonists in the two literary texts. The experiences of the protagonists in advocating for the rights women, social and environmental justice shape their identities. This study enriches the growing body of literary scholarship on activism, especially gender and environmental activism. The results of this study will be significant because they will serve as a key reference point for literary scholars who wish to explore activism as a literary virtue that goes beyond the much-publicised tirade that is commonly associated with activists and champions of causes.

KEYWORDS: Character formation, Eco-criticism, Eco- feminism, Environmental Degradation, Meta-activism, Reforms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Character can be described as the deeply internalised pattern of values and attitudes, along with the habitual ways of feeling and reacting that set one individual apart from another. Cherry (2023) defines character formation as 'the process by which the organised thought and behaviour patterns that make up a person's unique personality emerge over time' Cherry, 2023:19). She further identifies various factors influencing the development of character, such as genetics, environment, and societal variables. In essence, character can be viewed as the behavioural patterns or habitual mannerisms of carrying oneself that are unique to individuals and may differ from one person to another.

Freud (1900) describes character in relation to the unconscious mind. According to him, character is rooted in the life experiences that have had the greatest impact on a person's life, with those from early years of life manifesting themselves more in later years. This, then, means that the character deemed odd and unnecessary should always be kept in check. This emphasises that character is unique to each individual. According to Freud, character touches on three major themes: 'anatomy-physiological destiny, memory traces and more generally, the role of acquired traits' (Freud, 1900).

Aristotle argues that character develops gradually over time through interactions with others and those responsible for shaping it, such as parents and guardians, via reward and punishment. He also raises the concern of whether an individual chooses which character to adopt without any form of guidance or coercion. This study, therefore, aimed to explore how intrinsic individual choices to support the right causes can influence the development and maintenance of character. It was Aristotle's argument that particularly interested this study—namely, that character 'is achieved by means of sublimation and other constructions.' This study posits that

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activism can serve as such a construction that prevents actions that may seem unwarranted. Asuna (2021) presents three perspectives on these characters: social, institutional, and legal.

Asuna (2021) describes the social perspective, which is central to this study, as ‘how people in the community view a person’s character based on the community’s social standards.’ Asuna (2021, p. 37). According to Wrzus and Roberts (2017), ‘character is embedded in a larger view of personality’ (p. 67). This suggests that character refers to behaviour that is typical and unique to individuals. Endler and Edward (1986) define personality as ‘more stable, permanent traits that characterise a person and more transient, variable states that vary across situations’ (p. 15). Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987) arranged character development into chronological stages, illustrating an ordered growth and change in behaviour. At each stage, the change in character and behaviour is described in a way that differs from the other levels. The development and transformation of character are organised into three levels as follows:

i) Level 1- Pre-conventional morality.

In this level, the expected upright behaviour does not lie with an individual’s decision. The mannerisms and behaviour of an individual depend on the instructions given by the adults around them. In other words, the character is shaped through reward and punishment.

ii) Level 2- conventional morality.

The acceptable behaviour approved by adults is taken in and made part and parcel of daily lives. There is also the recognition of the various levels of authority. The moral and cognitive thoughts depend on the association one forges with those around them, and the people they associate with

iii) Level 3- Post-conventional Morality.

At this point, discerning right from wrong depends on individual judgment. Ethical character lies on one’s belief in the principle of social justice. According to Kohlberg (1927-1987), ‘this level of moral reasoning is as far as most people get.’

Wrzus and Roberts (2017) further suggest that character and personality development occur with age. According to them, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and social dominance tend to increase as one ages. However, the current study examines how the author of the selected works demonstrates awareness and consciousness of the need to care for her environment at a young age, contrasting with the lax attitude of the older generation around her. Berg and Johanson (2014) state that ‘other opportunities for changes often occur together with magnificent life events like transitions, changes in personal relationships and work experience.’ Berg and Johanson (2014: 43). Engelen et al. (2018) argue that ‘in the broader view of character formation, education seems to be the most important’ (p. 103).

In the broader African context, the traditional virtue of Ubuntu has been widely referenced as a path to economic, social, and character development. Ogochukwu (2022) describes Ubuntu as ‘a way of developing ethical character and behaviour’ Ogochukwu (2022, p. 78). It is presented as an effort to counteract all forms of dehumanisation, such as violence, exploitation, and poverty, while also striving to achieve freedom, liberty, and positive change for the greater good of humanity. Ogochukwu (2022) regards the Ubuntu concept as ‘an ethical idea and praxis, as well as an ethical idea which has a view of making humans better and thus tackling, in a systematic manner, our natural and man-made existential predicaments’ (p. 37). Overall, Ubuntu is generally seen as a character-building concept, based on this perspective.

Osabwa (2017) reveals that ‘through education, individuals acquire one of the most important aspects of humanity—an acceptable character trait’ (p. 3). This idea influenced the Kenyan government’s decision to develop and embed content in the curriculum aimed at moulding character and fostering moral behaviour among school children. Initially, the formal colonial education system replaced the informal, traditional system where values were taught and transmitted from adults and elders to younger members of society. This shift meant that the colonial education system took on the role of educating and shaping character, moving it from the broader community to the schools.

Consequently, the above argument reduces to the idea that the education provided by a formal school setup helps develop and shape character. However, this study was focused on showcasing the character traits demonstrated by the author that helped her champion her causes—traits that were rather gained through advocating for the right causes, not from formal schooling.

2. ACTIVISM AND CHARACTER FORMATION

Maathai’s character and that of the other activists who assist her in advocacy are shaped and developed through the various ways they champion causes. Their character development can be linked to the ideas of Piaget (1936) and Kohlberg (1932), who viewed the process of moral development as an ordered progression through stages connected to age. Maathai’s character development aligns with the three levels:

i. Level 1 - Pre-Conventional Morality

At this stage, upright behaviour does not depend solely on an individual’s choice. Instead, it is influenced by the instructions given by the adults around them. Essentially, character is developed through a system of reward and punishment. This is particularly evident in the relationship between young Maathai and her mother. The guidance her mother provides her as a young girl shapes

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her character and lays a strong foundation for her to grow into a responsible adult. Maathai herself confirms this as she recounts her experiences.

'I was her eldest daughter, and that, naturally, made us very close, because as soon as I could walk, she would ask me to help her. When you are the first girl in a Kikuyu family, you become almost like the second woman of the house. You do what your mother does and you are always with her. The two of you become almost like one. As far back as I can remember, my mother and I were always together and always talking. She was my anchor in life.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 13)

This places this study in the realisation that, at a young age, one does not freely choose one's character. The character develops as a reflection of the directions shown by adults, through rewards and punishments. Skinner (1938), in his propositions of operant conditioning, posits that 'behaviour and character that is rewarded are likely to be repeated, while behaviour that is punished is prone to happen less' (Skinner, 1938, p. 17). The care and closeness displayed by Maathai's mother towards her are the confluences of the positive traits and character that are evident in Maathai during her early years. These positive traits and character in her formative years inform the direction Maathai takes with her advocacy and championing causes for the three-dimensional meta-activism: championing environmental conservation and the sustainable use of its resources, human rights protection, and good governance.

Maathai becomes so close to her mother that, as a daughter and her mother, she recalls they never had any moments of disagreement. She perceives positivity and finds reason in the fact that her mother corrected her at times when corrections were necessary. She posits:

'In all the years we were together, my mother and I never disagreed. Sometimes you get to a point when you feel that your mother is pushing you a certain way and get fed up and even rebel. I never had that with her. I know now as a mother myself that it was a great gift and privilege that she lived long and that I was able to take care of her and be with her when in her eighties she became weak. The fact that we never had an upsetting word between us is a source of great personal inspiration.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 21)

This is a testament that Maathai cherished living with her mother and learning from her, even in her later years, by staying close and gaining lessons. Reflecting on her past, Maathai recalls profound lessons from her mother one Sunday after church. Standing in the house, her mother silently sweeps without asking her to move or hitting her with the broom. She admits she had questions in her mind, but this taught her to question herself, evaluate her actions, and do what is right.

She narrates:

'One memory of her has remained with me all the years, partly because it caused me to question my behaviour. It was Sunday and I had been in church. After the service, I followed a group of Pentecostals, a denomination that was becoming strong in Ithite and nearby villages, to the Githere shopping centre. The spirit was with me! When I arrived home, I leaned against the wall of our house, singing my heart out, as I had just heard a young boy preacher do. My mother was sweeping the compound, and without saying a word, she took her broom and swept all around me as I sang my hymns. Now, why didn't she ask me to move, or why didn't I move instead of standing there in my bare feet singing while my mother worked? Was it my responsibility to move or my mother's to tell me to?' (Maathai, 2006, p. 22)

She questions her actions and concludes that it was her responsibility, as she thought in her mother's mind. Her mother believed she ought to have known better and moved accordingly. According to Maathai, in this particular incident, her mother did not impose her sense of justice and fairness on her because one of the options the mother could have taken was hitting her dirty feet with the broom and ordering her away, but she chose not to. Even though Maathai's mother does not speak, her presence and silent actions send a strong message to Maathai. This supports the researcher's stance, aligning with Piaget (1936) and Kohlberg (1932), who argue that moral codes and character are shaped by adult standards, as in the case of Maathai's mother. This largely influences Maathai's character as she begins to question her actions. Maathai admits that her mother's calmness and dignity inspired her as she grew older enough to understand. She explains that she is very aware that her mother experienced disappointments she kept to herself. She writes that this is a trait she learned to admire as she matured and, inevitably, adopted herself.

Maathai affirms Freud's (1900) idea that character relates to memory traces of impressions that have significantly influenced a person. She sees in her mother and other women the impressions that shape her character early in life. These admired impressions help suppress impulses that might have otherwise disrupted her proper and decent character. As a young girl, Maathai learns to conserve nature and produce food for the family through her mother's words and actions. This connection ties her and her mother to the environment and supports the eco-feminist view that women are closer to nature. She often accompanied her mother to the fields, and like many other African girls with their mothers, she would also cultivate the soil whenever her mother did. Her mother eventually gave her a small plot of about fifteen square feet in the midst of her farm, along with instructions on how to plant and tend the crops. Her mother always encouraged her to plant something whenever the rains arrived, leading her to grow sweet potatoes, beans, maize, and millet.

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Through these activities, Maathai learns the art of patience, which helps her even in her adult life. She says that occasionally, she would lift the seeds out of the ground to see how quickly they were germinating. In response, her mother would tell her to allow the seeds time to germinate by covering them with soil. She narrates, 'No, no, no. You don't remove them. You have to cover them. You have to let them do all this by themselves. Soon, they will come above the ground.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 38).

Maathai writes that to her utter amazement, the seedlings slowly but steadily germinated by themselves and emerged from the ground. This patience with plants, learnt through her mother, comes into play later in her adult life when some people refuse to plant trees, claiming they would take too long to reach maturity. Maathai insists that they plant the trees and give them time to grow, since the mature trees they see now were planted by those who came before. Therefore, there is a need to plant the trees and be patient with them for the sake of future generations.

This is a proof as provided by Piaget (1896-1980) and Kohlberg (1927-1987) that character develops over time, gradually, as one acquires habits from parents and community and as well as through intentional efforts. Maathai acquires such traits that inform her decisions and choices, which are for the conservation of the environment. Insisting that the people should plant the trees and give them time to grow is an attempt at influencing the people on positive action towards the conservation of nature and the environment. Maathai further explains that when she was a child, she enjoyed listening to the birds on her family's homestead and learning their names. One particular bird sang at dusk, and whenever she asked her mother what the bird's call meant, she was told it was a warning that it was already late, signalling that it was time to bring the firewood into the house. She absorbed this lesson as a child and learnt the importance of being mindful of time and punctuality. Whenever she visited home as an adult, she always took delight in recalling what her mother had told her about the bird. She sums this up as follows: 'When children communicate with adults, they learn a lot as they grow' (Maathai, 2006, p. 44).

Moreover, Maathai learns the art of respect and obedience from her mother as a young girl. Whenever she went to collect firewood, her mother would warn her not to gather any dry wood from the fig tree or even around it. Curiously, Maathai would ask why, and her mother always told her that it was a tree of God. She would be reminded that it was so sacred that they should never use, cut, or burn it. Although she never fully understood the significance of her mother's words as she was still very young, she obeyed her and never touched the fig tree.

It is this firm instruction that Maathai receives from her mother that forms the foundation of her admiration for trees and the conservation of nature. As Piaget (1936) and Kohlberg (1932) suggest, it is the standards of adults that define character. This is the first tree Maathai learns about, highlighting the need for its conservation and, subsequently, the importance of conserving the entire environment and all the life forms within it. Spending much time with her mother teaches her a lot, and she posits that when she grew older, she took on more responsibilities on her own initiative. She particularly loved cultivating the fields late in the afternoon. Even when she was older and in boarding school, she had her own plot which her mother would help her tend while she was away at school. Maathai recalls: 'I would eagerly anticipate the holidays when my classmates and I would return home to work in the fields and touch the soil' (Maathai, 2006, p. 47).

She recalls how, at one point, when her mother was admitted to a hospital in Nyeri for an appendix surgery, she decided to assume the household responsibilities herself to ensure the fields produced enough food for the family. She resolved that, regardless of her mother's condition, food would remain a priority for her family. She therefore visited her mother at the hospital only infrequently and spent most of her time on the farms planting, without her mother knowing. After some time, it was harvest time, and she went to the fields to gather the red kidney beans she had planted while her mother was away in hospital.

She harvested, thrashed and stacked the beans in sacks. In her wisdom, Maathai borrows a donkey from a neighbour to *Gura* valley where the farmland was, and travels the whole afternoon till late in the evening with the donkey, transporting the beans home. When she arrived home, her mother couldn't believe what she saw and kept asking how the young Maathai managed to travel such a long distance carrying a sack of beans while still guiding the donkey, which also carried another sack. Maathai, in her adulthood, always recalled this incident as a big lesson on believing in oneself, no matter how tough a situation might seem.

She narrates;

'The incident has remained with me through the years and reminds me that, while it's perhaps sometimes foolhardy to take on something that's too big for you, it is incredible what you can achieve if you're single-minded enough. To walk all the way and thrash the beans, and then carry them back. Even my mother never forgot the journey.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 49)

2.2 Level 2- Conventional Morality

According to Piaget (1936) and Kohlberg (1932), the moral standards of valued adult role models are internalised at this level. Also, authority is internalised but not questioned. Moral reasoning is based on the norms of the group to which the person belongs. This study finds that as Maathai developed into early adulthood, she adopted the acceptable behaviours endorsed by the adults around her while recognising their authority.

The study further finds that Maathai developed certain traits as a result of her interactions with the adult figures around her, especially in school, where she interacted with Catholic Church sisters who showed her the way and led her to the right path. Her

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close association with the nuns (women who have dedicated their lives to serving God) moulds her life into that of a well-tended woman in her later adult years. While in school, Maathai recalls that at first, she was homesick but after a short while, she got used to life in a boarding school because of the nuns. She found them nurturing, encouraging, and compassionate.

Maathai identifies one nun, Sister Germana, whose dedication and motivation she says intrigued her. Besides Germana, she also mentions Sister Christiana from South Africa, the disciplinarian, who always went around to, as she puts it, 'put them straight.' This particular sister was a shaper of character and consistently placed the girls' hands on the right dishes of wisdom to feed from. The term 'put them straight,' as used here by Maathai, refers to the role Sister Christiana played in instilling upright moral character in Maathai and her fellow pupils. This, as the study discovers, was mainly achieved through rewarding virtues and punishing vices, as explained by Skinner (1938) in his analysis of operant conditioning. Skinner (1938) suggests that character can be shaped through reward and punishment.

Maathai recalls how a girl used a Kikuyu saying 'no turariamwaki', which colloquially meant 'we're having a great time', and she translated this phrase into her still rudimentary English in one of the letters she had written to her friends outside the school. The sister took it literally to mean 'we continue to eat fire' because she was not a native speaker of Kikuyu. That evening in the dining hall, all the girls had food on their plates except the girl who had written the letter. On her plate, she found pieces of charcoal, and the sister insisted that the girl had lied, claiming that the nuns were feeding them fire, and she therefore insisted that the girl eat the fire served on her plate. This clearly indicates an attempt by the sister to punish what she deemed as wrong behaviour in a bid to suppress it and prevent it from developing into undesirable character.

While in school, Maathai notes that they slowly shifted from a life centred on storytelling, traditional dancing, and singing to one focused on books, study, prayers, and the game of netball. Maathai, along with many of her friends, was always involved with a Christian society known as the Legion of Mary, which instilled in them a sense of service and the importance of volunteerism for the common good. At this point, this study recognises that Maathai and her classmates experienced a shift in character and behaviour as a result of their interactions with the nuns. The life they ultimately adopted was one modelled on that of the nuns. This paradigm shift in character supports the assertion in the conventional morality level of character development that an individual's moral and cognitive thoughts depend on the instructions given by the adults around them. In this case, the adults were the nuns. They visited the sick, and to ease the nuns' workload, they washed and ironed church linen and participated in prayer meetings. They worked in the school gardens and assisted other students with homework. The change in behaviour and character—from their previous norm of storytelling to a religious lifestyle—can be fully attributed to the influence of their association with the nuns and the strict supervision they provided. As Maathai states, 'The idea was to serve God through serving fellow human beings' (Maathai, 2006, p. 61).

During her time at St. Cecilia, after many lessons on Christianity and reformation, Maathai fully decides to become a Catholic, guided by the Catholic nuns who teach them the values of Christianity. Through this, Maathai learns the art and importance of prayer by regularly reciting the Holy Rosary. She recalls one night during a raid, while she was staying at her cousin's house, when a raid occurred. Hearing the noise, her cousin's mother took them to hide in a dense, dark woodland. Maathai, along with her two other cousins, knelt down and began praying the rosary, hoping that Mary, mother of God, would protect them that night. And indeed, Mary did protect them, even from the marauding leopards that they saw passing right in front of them that night.

Maathai explains that after her education with the nuns, she emerged as a person who believed that society is inherently good and that people generally act for the best. She says;

'To me, a general orientation toward trusting people and a positive attitude toward life and fellow human beings is healthy—not only for one's peace of mind, but also to bring about change. This belief came from a combination of my education and my Kikuyu heritage, which taught me a deep sense of justice.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 70).

While studying in the United States of America, Maathai attends a university run by the Catholic Church. Once again, and at the end of her four-year study, she praises the university for nurturing in her a willingness to listen and learn, to think critically and analytically, and to ask questions. She states that those skills remained with her whenever she went after that.

2.3 Level 3- Post Conventional Morality

According to Piaget (1936) and Kohlberg (1932), this level of character development is characterised by the individual judgement of moral reasoning based on self-cohesion principles. They suggest that moral reasoning relies on individual rights and justice. Wrzus and Roberts (2017) explain that character and personality development occur with ageing. According to them, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and social dominance increase with age.

On the other hand, according to Berg and Johanson (2014), the opportunity for change and character development is heavily linked to acquiring education. The current study reveals that it is indeed possible to develop character and personality through the act of championing causes and advocating for the right actions in society. This study focused on Maathai's actions as an activist, along with other activists she describes in her memoir as pro-democracy, pro-human rights, and pro-environmental conservation. The following demonstrates how the aforementioned shows that activism is a form of construction that checks harmful impulses and encourages actions and advocacy for goodwill through the development and maintenance of admirable and acceptable character.

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Maathai questions the societal wrongs she doubts, which builds her courage and stoicism to challenge issues over time. Although she was a Catholic, Maathai attends a prayer group of the Nation of Islam while in the USA as a college student, led by Hon. Elijah Muhamad. During the teachings, Muslims claim that Jesus was a black man who spent much of His early years in Africa and even attended the University of Alexandria in Egypt. To Maathai, this was not only untrue but also sacrilegious. She is shocked by this misinterpretation; during the meeting, she leaves the hall, finds a payphone, and calls the priest at the residence for immediate guidance. She informs the priest of her location and expresses her desire to leave, but the priest advises her to stay and listen, yet not to believe the teachings.

As much as she had been taught that believers do not question faith, even when it does not seem logical, here, the Muslims were not instructing her but rather urging her to question. When given the opportunity to speak, Maathai questions these teachings calmly. She states, 'It's not true that Jesus went to the University of Alexandria. There wasn't a University of Alexandria at that time. You are mis-informed about the life and times of Jesus' (Maathai, 2006, p. 89).

After some time, having voiced her thoughts, she walked out of the meeting, standing her ground. She wouldn't be convinced otherwise. Whatever the Muslims discussed conflicted with her personal beliefs as a Christian and as a person, particularly regarding the life and times of Jesus Christ. It is her intrinsic beliefs that drive her to question and even leave a meeting when the discussion contradicts her well-established understanding of Jesus Christ. This leads to the conclusion of this study that, at post-conventional morality, discerning right from wrong depends entirely on individual judgement and is further rooted in one's belief in the principle of social justice.

In a further display of questioning what she finds wrong, she questions the name that the sisters at the Mount use to refer to her. The sisters used to call her Miss. Wangari, and this seems absurd since she knows the term 'Miss' means 'The unmarried daughter of...', yet she knows she is not the daughter of herself. She decides to set things right and begins writing her name as Mary Josephine Wangari Muta. She later drops Mary Josephine and retains Wangari Muta because, according to her, that is what she should have been. As Berg et al (2014) put it, the change and development of character often occur alongside magnificent life events like transitions, changes in personal relationships, and work experience. Her encounters with different people during her educational journey inform the paradigm shift in her sense of identity and how she should be addressed.

She narrates;

'I then reversed my primary and personal names becoming Wangari Mary Josephine Muta and later dropped Mary Josephine because the name had become too long. When I returned to Kenya, I was Wangari Muta. That was what I should always have been.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 96).

Activism shapes Maathai's sense of responsibility. Most people often asked her, 'Why trees?' According to her, that particular question had many answers, but there was one essential response: she reacted to a set of problems by focusing on what could be done. Maathai observes that in the early 1970s, Kenya was the leading producer of livestock products in East Africa, but that lead was gradually declining due to the death of livestock. The sense of responsibility in her drives her to undertake post-doctoral research on the life cycle of a parasite responsible for East Coast Fever, a disease fatal to imported hybrid cattle that was spread through brown ear ticks. She does this in an effort to keep domestic animals healthy and productive not just in Kenya, but throughout the region. Maathai narrates; 'I collected hundreds of ticks from cattle, incised them through the salivary glands, cut them up for microscopic observation, and produced thousands of slides.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 121).

While outside Nairobi collecting the ticks, she notices that the rivers would rush down the hillsides and along the paths and roads when it rained, ending up adding silt to the rivers. This was very different from her experiences while growing up. The siltation of the rivers resulted from soil erosion caused by cultivation along river banks, the frequent clearing of vegetation cover, and the cutting down of trees that held the soil together. As a responsible person, Maathai observes the dire state of the rivers and decides that something must be done to protect the soil and preserve the rivers. This was to plant trees. Maathai narrates; 'That is soil erosion. We must do something about that' (Maathai, 2006, p. 121).

At a seminar organised by the National Council of Women in Kenya, of which Maathai was a member, a woman researcher presented the results of a study she had conducted, which revealed that children in the Central region of Kenya were suffering from diseases linked to malnutrition. This was a wake-up call for Maathai, as that is where she was from, and from her personal experience, she knew that the Central region was one of the most fertile areas in Kenya. The responsible part within Maathai did not let her rest over this situation back at home. Although the leadership of the National Council of Women in Kenya was largely composed of elites and urban dwellers, they were concerned with the social and economic welfare of their majority members, who were poor, rural women.

These women are concerned about their access to clean water and firewood, how they will feed their children, pay their fees, and afford clothing. According to Maathai, there was a choice. They could either sit in an ivory tower, pondering how so many people could be so poor and not take action to change their situation, or they could try to help them escape the vicious cycle of poverty and helplessness they faced. In a statement that reflects her responsible character, Maathai recounted: 'This was not a remote problem for us. The rural areas were where our mothers and sisters lived. We owed it to them to do all we could' (Maathai, 2006, p. 124).

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At the same meeting convened by the National Council of Women in Kenya, Maathai listens to the issues raised by the women. They express concerns about food shortages for themselves and their children, lack of fodder for their livestock, limited access to clean water, and widespread poverty. Driven by a sense of responsibility, Maathai feels that something must be done about energy and water. She realises that all the problems the women mention stem from environmental degradation, and that action is needed to address these environmental issues.

She narrates;

'It suddenly became clear. Not only was the livestock industry threatened by a deteriorating environment, but I, my children, my students and my entire country would pay the price. The connection between the symptoms of environmental degradation and their causes- deforestation, de-vegetation, unsustainable Agriculture and soil loss- were self-evident. Something had to be done. We could not just deal with the manifestations of the problems. We had to get to the root causes of those problems.' (Maathai, 2006, pp. 124-125)

As an individual whose main interest was in finding solutions, Maathai always took pride in thinking of what could be done. To this end, she considers a solution to the challenges wreaking havoc in the lives of rural women, their children, and livestock. She decides that planting trees would be the solution. According to Maathai, the trees would offer a multifaceted answer to all the problems faced by women in their rural homes.

This aligns with the proposition by d'Eaubonne (1974), who argues that the oppression of marginalised groups and the destruction of nature are interconnected. The chain reaction of deforestation, which was overseen by men, was blamed on women, who are the marginalised in this case. They were unable to feed their children and livestock as a result of this destruction. Maathai's solution to this problem further supports d'Eaubonne's view that a culture of domination should be replaced with an ethic of care. The decision to plant trees to provide food for women and children, fodder for livestock, restore the land, and protect water sources demonstrates how Maathai and the women resisted oppression by demonstrating an ethic of care towards the environment.

She posits;

'Why not plant trees? The trees would provide a supply of wood that would enable women to cook nutritious foods. They would also have wood for fencing and fodder for cattle and goats. The trees would offer shade for humans and animals, protect water sheds and bind the soil, and if they were fruit trees, they would provide food. They would also heal the land by bringing back birds and small animals and regenerate the vitality of the earth.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 125)

This noble thought gave rise to the esteemed Green Belt Movement, whose achievements extend beyond environmental concerns to include human rights, democracy, and women's rights. These women gather in meetings to find solutions to problems such as feeding their families and helping their children escape issues related to malnutrition. The multiple challenges facing the women mainly stem from land-related issues. Access to clean water and firewood is limited due to deforestation, which has been largely caused by men's activities. The fact that a woman researcher presents these findings to her fellow women demonstrates a group committed to finding solutions to their problems. This exemplifies a visionary feminine leadership, advocating for the sustainable use of environmental resources, as noted by eco-feminist scholar Wilkinson (2012), who states that societal transformation requires transformational leadership that is characteristically feminine. These women, being close to the problems, are compelled to seek their own solutions. The men are absent from the meetings but are responsible for the outdated practice of felling trees to clear land for coffee and tea plantations. Therefore, the women have had to address the environmental issues that threaten their families unaided. As Plumwood (2012) notes, when one is close to the problem, one is inherently close to the solutions.

This is what Maathai and the other women take in and roll up their sleeves in readiness to tackle the issues of drought and environmental degradation head on. Maathai posits that they had a choice of sitting in an ivory tower and not work to save the situation or try to find solutions on how to escape the vicious cycle of poverty that was affecting the women. The solution, according to the women, lay in planting trees. This is the ethic of care and benevolence fronted by d'Eaubonne (1974), who posits that the ethic of domination on both the environment and women, that has been a preserve for the men, should be replaced with an ethic of care and an ethic where decisions are made equitably, as is displayed by the women during their meetings.

In *Flight of The Hummingbird*, Maathai's thoughtfulness and responsibility is displayed through the symbolic hummingbird, christened 'Dukdukdiya,' which she promises to be and follow its path of agility and responsibility. Right from the foreword, Maathai details how planting of just seven trees led to the formation of the GBM, that helped thousands of communities, which were mostly rural, poor and vulnerable secure their livelihood, and through the advocacy for tree planting, the communities were protected against soil erosion, and got wood fuel from the firewood. Some even earned a living as GBM engaged several people, right from the grassroots.

Maathai's responsible trait comes out at the outset of mentioning the Buddhist word *Mottainai* that she learnt in Japan, as an advocate of goodwill. In itself, *Mottainai* is a Japanese phrase that attempts to communicate a sense of regret over waste. In English, the term could loosely be translated to mean 'What a waste.' *Mottainai* itself is activist oriented and champions against wastage of resources. Maathai's sense of preservation of resources fits perfectly into the confines of the provisions of *Mottainai*.

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Sasaki (2010) posits that Japanese environmentalists have used the term to encourage people to reduce, re-use and recycle. Maathai adopts these models and calls them the three Rs. She makes clear her intent to make *Mottainai* a global campaign and at the same time, adds another R- Repair. Maathai details that to her understanding, *Mottainai* means a continuation in planting trees and in attempt to instil the sense of responsibility among her fellow legislators, Maathai says, *'I have also called on my parliamentary colleagues to ensure that government offices use both sides of each sheet of paper so that we can halve the amount of paper we consume'* (Maathai, 2008, p. 3).

The concept and the activities around *Mottainai* go hand in hand with the provisions by eco-feminists on the need to care for the environment. *Mottainai* encompasses these problems to be affecting the whole human race and calls for a collective responsibility to reverse the dire situation on the already damaged environment. This call for a collective responsibility echoes the call by Ogochukwu (2022) on his submissions on Ubuntu ethic. Ogochukwu (2022) sees Ubuntu as having the view of making humans better, and thus tackling, in a systematic way, the natural and man-made existential predicaments. Some of these problems are environmental problems as hereby revealed by this study.

She stresses that the life we want for ourselves can only be achieved when we participate directly in the protection and restoration of the environment. She posits that we can't wait for others to do it as it is our own personal responsibility. As a responsible champion of causes, Maathai explains some of the ways that the concept of *Mottainai* can be realised in Kenya as advocating for a continuation in tree planting. She also urges the public and manufacturers to avoid using plastic bags that cannot be recycled. As an alternative to these bags which are breeding sites for mosquitoes, Maathai suggests the use of traditional *kiondos* (sisal-woven carrier bags) and other environmentally friendly baskets.

Maathai posits that this could even revive the traditional industries like basket and cloth weaving, hence creating employment opportunities. She says;

'This could become a global trend. If Kenya began exporting to developed countries at a fair price millions of kiondos woven by women from sustainably harvested sisal plants that would be an important contribution to the protection of the earth, to rural livelihoods and to fair trade.' (Maathai, 2008, p. 3).

Maathai's dream as an activist lay in the hopes of making *Mottainai* a reality. She sums up the urge for being responsible thus, *'It is our human responsibility to appreciate nature and to preserve and protect the world's natural resources. We can all be like the hummingbird, doing the best we can'* (Maathai, 2008, p. 3).

Maathai's further responsibility is displayed through the hummingbird, which metaphorically depicts an activist, and its actions those of an activist and an advocate of goodwill. The hummingbird clearly shows the directions we human beings should take in an attempt to conserve the environment as beings of higher intelligence.

Maathai's advocacy for the right way of life proves and brings out a trustworthy woman, a voice of reason and a champion of integrity. When her husband, Mwangi gives politics a second shot by running for Langata Parliamentary seat, she gives him her full support, struggling to juggle and balance between her work at The University of Nairobi, being a mother to her new-born son and a wife at home with being ever present on the campaign trail. This is a proof of how pivotal women are in the lives of the men who seek power. The men in turn use the trappings of the same power to abuse and manipulate the marginalised groups, women included. Her part herein is defined in terms of altruism and self-sacrifice; supporting her husband in his bid for a position of higher authority, while still caring for her family at the same time. She does this meticulously, unaware of the fact that to her husband Mwangi, these gender roles were delineated in such unambiguous terms that any blurring of these roles would be viewed as a threat.

One thing, however, keeps worrying Maathai. Mwangi kept promising people jobs while campaigning. In her word, she says that when she makes a promise, she expects to keep it and if she cannot deliver something, then she does not promise that she will. This crowns Maathai as an embodiment of reason. Mwangi, however, keeps on saying the jobs would be found. In those days many people had no academic qualifications or marketable skills and were illiterate. To Maathai, it was simply impossible. The activist nature of Maathai naturally aligns her to the push for honesty and meritocracy. This study reveals that Maathai's role in Mwangi's life at this point goes hand in hand with d'Eaubonne's (1974) provisions that naturally, the ethic of care is grounded in women.

Not being interested in what is not possible, she plans to make sure the people had jobs. When Mwangi wins in the elections, she raises the issue of his promise for the jobs. Her interrogation is met with a rude shock as Mwangi tells her not to worry about the jobs for the people will barely remember the promises. This caught Maathai by surprise as she didn't expect this kind of a response from Mwangi. She refuses to accept that they should break their promise easily. According to her the people would never vote for them again if they broke the promises as they would have no ground to stand on while asking for votes again. One would be left questioning the intent of Mwangi and the attitude of men, in general, towards pertinent issues in the society that touch on the lives of the less privileged and those who they are to directly serve their interests. Ironically, Mwangi runs for this position and that proves that he knew perfectly well the responsibilities that awaited him, but chose to go the direction of neglect and deceit. Seemingly, this study finds out, all that Mwangi wanted was power, power to elevate himself economically and not serve the interests of his subjects. Hutner (2020) posits that the oppressions that are meted on nature, women and other marginalised groups stem from patriarchal domination, where whoever holds the most power –the power that Mwangi fought for- dominates, controls and exploits everyone else.

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Soon after, Maathai, in her reasonable being, launches a business that she hopes could provide many jobs and would incorporate the planting of trees. She names it Enviro-care Limited. This brings young men and women together to work in the gardens within residential homes and spaces in Langata. They would trim hedges, plant trees, tend to flower beds among other duties.

Maathai posits;

'Enviro-care would employ people from the poor part of Mwangi's constituency, who needed jobs, to keep happy the richer members of the constituency who could afford to employ them. They would also plant seedlings in parts of the city that were bare of trees. In the process we would create a beautiful Nairobi! It seemed to me a perfect solution and I thought the wealthy people would support it. Enviro-care would be located in our house and my idea was that in addition to providing employment, it would become a forum through which Mwangi and I could listen and respond to the concerns of his constituents.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 127)

Indeed, Maathai proves to be an embodiment of reason as leaving the people jobless after promising them jobs never sits right with her. In connection to creation of jobs for the constituents of Mwangi, Maathai, with the support of Kimathi wa Murage, a forester in charge of Karura forest, creates a tree nursery right next to the government nursery so that the people of Langata who needed jobs could plant seedlings. She hires a young man to tend to the nursery. She says, *'It gave me the confidence that I might be able to fulfil the promises made to the Langata constituents'* (Maathai, 2006, p. 128).

These actions by Maathai proves that the belief of eco-feminists can be realised with the right intentions. Creating these jobs is an attempt to overhaul the entire masculine system of domination and exploitation as espoused by d'Eaubonne (1974) and replacing it with an attitude of care and nurturing. She deviates from Mwangi's system of 'lies for votes' to her own formation and actions that are real, genuine and well-intended. In this regard, Maathai, as a meta-champion of causes, unleashes her multi-faceted advocacy. She works towards helping meet the campaign promises made by her husband Mwangi, while caring for the environment at the same time by keeping the neighbourhood tidy and kempt. Other than these, Maathai still tries so much to be a committed mother and wife, all at one go. Mwangi, Maathai's husband, unfortunately represents the wing of the government that did not honour its pledges to the people. He is a raw manifestation of patriarchal domination and oppression.

Maathai proves to be an embodiment of reason and a voice against the oppressive dictates of the government. Maathai details several ways in which Moi's government oppressed Kenyans and subverted democracy. Corruption became the culture of those in power; the regime ignored the need of the people and hastened the destruction of the democratic space. The government clamped down on dissent and used heavy handed tactics to consolidate its power. Those who opposed it were detained under harsh, dehumanising conditions, demonstrators were killed and the country faced multiple extra-judicial killings of dissenting voices. From the murder of J.M Kariuki and Tom Mboya, Kenyans realised all was not right with the post-independence political system. The freedom of the press was curtailed and journalists got arrested while covering unlawful arrests of leaders. The University of Nairobi also faced multiple closures as it became a centre of student resistance to the government's activities. She narrates;

'When he came to power in 1978, president Moi released all of the twenty-six political prisoners then held by the government. However, any hopes invested in him were soon dashed. Kenya had been a de facto one-party state for several years, but in June 1982, parliament declared it officially so, and people the regime saw as opponents began to be harassed and intimidated. Many of them decided to go into exile abroad while others were pressured by the government to leave the country. Those deemed subversive were placed in detention. A number of them died in custody, where conditions were harsh and torture was common. Journalists were harassed when they reported such trials and arrests.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 181)

Under the stewardship of Maathai, the Green Belt Movement joined the supporters of greater political openness in Kenya, focusing energy on that year's 1988 national elections which turned out to be largely skewed. In pressing for constitutional reforms and political space to ensure freedom of thought and expression, GBM was not only an environmental, women's and human rights' movement, but also part of the broader movement for democracy. This shows the multi-faceted nature of Maathai's struggle for better spaces in Kenya, that is, the meta-activism that is the formation of the GBM. She says;

'The GBM joined others in carrying out pro-democracy activities such as registering voters for the election and pressing for constitutional reforms and political space to ensure freedom of thought and expression. In this way, the GBM was not only an environmental, women's and human rights' movement, but also part of the broader movement for democracy.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 182)

In her voice of reason and thoughtfulness, Maathai declares an impending war against the oppressive government. She puts it thus;

'I knew that we could not live with a political system that killed creativity, nurtured corruption and produced people who were afraid of their own leaders. It would only be a matter of time before the government and I came into further conflict. The incident that brought me into direct confrontation with the authorities began, simply and essentially, with one person deciding that something had to be done to protect Uhuru Park.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 183)

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The above words by Maathai paints a picture of a dire situation that had to be saved by one who had to make an informed, firm decision. This decision comes from Maathai, a woman who would end up - together with other women - as being the most affected by the patriarchal atrocities directed towards humanity and the environment. As Wilkinson (2012) posits, that as eco-feminists push for an inclusive care ethic, there is also an emphasis on the importance of having diverse leadership at the forefront of the movement, and the leadership has to be characteristically feminine. This is the transformational leadership that Maathai vows to provide in the championing of causes even as she foresees further conflict with the government. In this regard, the end would justify the means. It never mattered that the advocacy had a feminine face and outlook in its composition and leadership.

Championing causes, especially the urge to protect the environment and all its flora and fauna fosters determination and optimism in Maathai. She decides to raise awareness and finances for enviro-care by selling tree seedlings. As part of seeking market for the seedling to finance enviro-care, Maathai carries all the seedlings from Karura forest to the five-day long annual international show that took place in Nairobi in 1975. She meticulously arranges the seedlings in the shape of the map of Kenya, drawing attention to the areas and regions of the country where trees were desperately needed to regenerate the land. She narrates;

'I brought all the seedlings from the Karura Forest nursery and arranged them in the shape of a map of Kenya, drawing attention to the regions of the country where trees were desperately needed to regenerate the land. (Maathai, 2006, pp. 128-129).

The arrangement of the tree seedlings in the map of Kenya is symbolic of the love and determination for good governance, respect to human rights and the proper use of environmental resources that Maathai had for Kenya. She could have as well decided to place the seedlings on the ground without any interest in how they stood or appeared. To the intended buyers and anyone who would see the arrangement of the seedlings in the shape of the Kenyan map, it would send a message of activism on the part of Maathai and the entire organisation of enviro-care. This arrangement would make a profound impact on the target audience and get them involved in the content of the message of the Kenyan map, other than the purchase of the beautifully arranged tree seedlings.

Nobody buys the seedlings during the show and Maathai decides to carry all the seedlings to her home due to lack of a proper storage facility for the seedlings. What takes her by surprise was that in as much as some people expressed interest in tree planting, especially on their farms outside of Nairobi, they did not buy any seedlings, so the trees just sat there in her compound. She terms this as dispiriting, but still thinks planting trees was a good idea and that people were interested in doing it, if she could just find a way to make it take root. This research, therefore, comes into the realisation that to Maathai, her activism was a sacrifice to see a better, green space for her generation and the generations to come and not necessarily a career.

The fact that the seedlings were not bought stopped her not from caring for the seedlings as she carries them home to take better care of them. To this end, Maathai validates the position of Merchant (1980) that women are closer to the environment than men, who in all ways, dominate the environment simultaneously by dominating over women. Maathai, therefore, does her part in ending the male domination of nature by initiating tree planting as a recovery measure to the destroyed environment. The act of nurturing and caring for the young tree seedlings aligns with Salleh's (1984) argument that the caring nature of women is as a result of the women's consciousness being grounded in knowledge conterminous with nature, however tacit or unconscious this identity may be for many women.

Maathai's further determination and resilience comes into play after attending the women's conference in Mexico City. On her return to Nairobi, Maathai meets a water-shortage-plunged Nairobi. Most of the seedlings she had left in her home had dried up and the tree nursery collapsed. Maathai says that enviro-care, which was meant to create employment and beautify the environment had run its course, but the concept of tree planting remained alive. It is important to note that the tree seedlings dried under the watch of Mwangi, Maathai's husband, while Maathai was away, attending a conference that aimed to find solutions to the challenges facing the environment, where she went ahead and proposed tree planting as an activity of the women's council. She narrates;

'I returned to Kenya reenergized and determined to make my idea work. Sadly, I also returned to a water shortage in Nairobi. Most of the seedlings died and the tree nursery collapsed. My husband also had had quite enough of living with trees everywhere he looked. Enviro-care had run its course. (Maathai, 2006, p. 130)

This study, therefore, comes to the realisation that despite there being other forms of material domination on women such as economic advantage and political power, the domination on the environment and its destruction is as a result of the patriarchal structures that the men had put in place – in this context, Mwangi - to bury women and their potentials. Leaving the seedlings to dry up was not an accident by Mwangi, but an intentional and deliberate effort to bring to an end the enviro-care initiative that Maathai had started, which right from the inception of its idea, he had opposed and aligned himself to the politics of deceit, lies and manipulation. A few paragraphs ahead, the study discusses the deceitful nature of Mwangi and the political aura of manipulation that he clothed himself in.

In 1977, the National Council of Women in Kenya had invited Maathai to talk about her experiences at the habitat meeting. Within this setting, Maathai proposes planting trees as an activity of the women's council, as a way of assisting its rural members and to meet the women's needs. The membership agrees and encourages Maathai to put her idea into action. While Maathai decides to use the women folk to plant the trees, the foresters, mostly men, did not understand why Maathai was trying to teach the rural women

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in planting the trees. They advise her to look for professionals and people with diplomas to plant the trees. Maathai, defiantly, tells the women that they were able and could plant the trees and nurture them to maturity.

Maathai narrates;

'What the foresters were saying didn't seem right to me. You might need a diploma to understand a tree's growth and what the content of the seedling was, but I didn't believe the women needed all the technical knowledge the foresters were dispensing to plant trees successfully.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 135).

According to Maathai, this was more than the women, nearly all of whom were poor and illiterate could handle or even needed. All the women needed to know was how to put the seedling in the soil and help it grow. This study draws a sharp contrast in the reactions given by the two groups of men; Mwangi and the foresters, and the women on the other hand, in handling the issue of tree planting to restore the earth's green cloth or literary garment.

As stated earlier, Mwangi leaves the tree seedlings to dry up while Maathai is away, attending an environmental seminar abroad. The foresters on the other hand, question and cast doubts on the women's ability to plant tree seedlings while questioning their academic abilities. In contrast to the two groups of men, the women, during their council meeting, embrace Maathai's idea of tree planting at the very first mention she does of it and they adopt it as a way of helping its rural members meet their needs.

The men display sexism and class exploitation against the women in a manner that portray them as carriers of patriarchal dominance. Merchant (1980) identifies four inter-locking pillars of patriarchal dominance as believed by eco-feminists to be sexism, racism, class exploitation and environmental destruction. This study, however, traces environmental destruction to be an effect of the exploitation meted on women by the men, on top of being a pillar of patriarchal dominance as put forward by Merchant (1980).

This study finds out that the sexism and class exploitation against the women in this case was based on the fact that the men knew the women didn't have the academic understanding of forestry and therefore, they considered the women as unable to plant the tree seedlings. The ripple effect of this discrimination would be directly on the environment as its destruction would continue, if presided over by the male patriarchs. This, in turn, would affect the women who depended on the environment to feed their families and meet their needs. At another level, the study construes this manipulative patriarchal dominance that aimed to silence the women who championed causes, in particular, environmental conservation, is what Maathai dismantles by sticking to the idea of using the women in the tree planting. Maathai, further, is also very strategic and intentional in empowering women. This, thus, brings the feminist angle to her activism.

Maathai believed in the abilities of the women, whom she described as farmers who planted seeds and watched them grow all the time. She asserts to the women that they never needed diplomas to plant trees. Her determination and that of the women to see to it that the environment is conserved pays off, as the women planted the seedlings which did well across the country. Successfully, the women were foresters without diplomas.

The women as champions for environmental conservation acquire the trait of reliability and could be depended on. There was a need to save the earth, a need to save the soil and make the earth green again. There was need to make the soil productive again. With the instructions from Maathai, the women planted seedlings on their own farms and went as far as convincing others in the surrounding areas to plant trees. This turns out to be a community empowerment for their own benefits and needs. This way, the steps got replicated several thousand times. Maathai confirms that the women planted trees in rows of thousands of trees to form green belts that would restore the earth its green cloth.

Gradually, the reliability of the women pays off. To avoid planting one species of a tree, the women could collect seeds in the forests and their fields and try to grow trees native to their area. There was an inward urge in the women to reclaim the lost fortunes of the land. To this end, they could fill broken pots with soil and use them to plant trees. They could also use cans with holes punched in them to water their seedlings.

This paid off as Green Belt Movement is conceived out of this. The beauty gets reinstated as the belts of green trees could hold soil in place and provide shade and windbreaks. They also recreated the natural habitat and enhanced the beauty of the landscape. In return, the local women could also rely on Maathai. As she puts it, *'...and the rural women both accepted and appreciated that I was working with them to improve their lives and the environment. After all, I was a child of the same soil'* (Maathai, 2006, p. 138). The women, hereby, take the lead and as Wilkinson (2012) puts it, if the society is to be transformed, then it takes the transformational leadership that is characteristically feminine. Further ties are made between the women and the re-invention of environmental beauty by Plumwood (2012) who posits that when you are close to the problem, then you are necessarily close to the solution. The women, led by Maathai, were pushed by nature closer to the problem of environmental degradation, and had to find the solutions, which they did successfully.

Maathai's determination once again comes into play while trying to access Karura forest to stop illegal privatisation and constructions by private developers. After writing to the Attorney General requesting a halt to any further construction in or clearing of the forests, Maathai, like in many other previous instances, received silence in response. Maathai and other women make visits to the forest and are attacked by young men wielding machetes. Despite the attacks, she makes several other trips to the forest and even establishes a tree nursery within the forest. She uses the visits as teach-in sessions, enlightening the construction workers on the dangers of building inside the forest.

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She says;

'These visits became like the seminars we held with the green belt groups. We would talk to the workers and explain the role the forest played in Nairobi's environment and inform them that Karura was being cut down so that wealthy people could live there and that they and their families wouldn't benefit at all. Sometimes our arguments were persuasive because the workers would agree that we could plant our trees. We also invited the press so that our message got out to the public.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 263)

In a further show of determination, Maathai visits the forest again but is denied access by security officers, the section of the forest slated for private development had been blocked off by a fence and a huge gate plastered with a big sign that said, PRIVATE PROPERTY. Despite having informed the chief forester of Karura, the chief conservator of forests and the police of the planned visit, the police denied Maathai and other pro-environmental conservation figures entry to the forest. She affirms that they stood their ground.

She narrates;

'We refused to be intimidated; after all, this was a public forest. We came as we had promised but we were prevented from entering. That day our party included members of Green Belt groups, the public and a few students. Since we could not enter the forest, we planted two trees at the gate and left. When we returned the next day, we found that those trees had been uprooted.' (Maathai, 2006, pp. 264-265)

Maathai, together with the other activists, decide to get into the forest through the strip of marshlands about three hundred yards across the border on the North side of Karura. This, again, is made possible through the help of their informers.

She posits;

'Once more our unofficial network of informers helped by providing us with a guide who knew his way through the swampy area. A group of about twenty- the women hitching up their dresses, the men rolling up their trousers, and all of us removing our shoes, stepped into the wet ground using the footprints of our guide in front of us. I was armed with my watering can, and the press was with us too.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 265).

With this, they manage to access the forest and water the seedlings. The police learnt of their presence in the forest only after they had gotten in. They had beaten the police to it.

The question one might continuously ask in all these is what really necessitated the push and pull between Maathai and the people deployed by the government to either work in the forest or to guard the 'private property' inside the public forest. It narrows down to political power and the urge to protect the patriarchal ego. Hutner (2020) submits that the history of patriarchal domination lies on the notion that whoever holds the most power has the right to dominate, control and exploit everyone else. In this context, the holders of political power exploit the environment and viciously fight off any attempt geared towards the reversal of the damages that they cause to the environment. It is Maathai's determination that is served in equal measure that neutralises the arrogance that comes from the wielders of political power and might.

Maathai's days at Green Belt Movement shaped a decisive, liberal and independent woman. As she puts it, her decisiveness helps her sail through the aftermath of her husband Mwangi leaving her for reasons which are quite difficult to comprehend. The fact that her estranged husband Mwangi's major reason for divorcing her was that she was a strong woman and too high an achiever for his bruised ego beats logic.

Maathai narrates;

'In my marriage, I had done everything that was to be done. I had not succeeded, but I had to stop blaming myself for the failure. I also had to steel myself not to accept the inevitable recrimination from the public. Besides, as I like to tell people, 'Failing is not a crime. What is important is that if you fail, you have the energy and the will to pull yourself up and keep going.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 144)

Maathai's liberal nature is yet again displayed during the process involved in her divorce, filed against her by her estranged husband, Mwangi. The reasons Mwangi gives for divorcing her are untrue and slanderous descriptions on her. Mwangi accuses Maathai of adultery, of causing him high blood pressure and being cruel. These were creations of Mwangi as later, he is taken on record by the press as having said he was divorcing Maathai for being too educated, too strong, too successful, too stubborn and too hard to control. She says;

'During the trial, Mwangi was quoted as saying that he wanted divorce because I was 'too educated, too strong, too stubborn, and too hard to control.' (Maathai, 2006:146).

These false accusations levelled against Maathai by Mwangi only vindicates her as a liberal woman who could not be tamed by the patriarchal dictates of the society and specifically, her husband Mwangi. Even in the face of these humiliations, Maathai feels the intention was to victimize her based on the fact that she was a modern, educated and independent woman. She makes a firm resolution that she would give every girl and woman reasons to be proud and never regret being educated, successful and talented. She submits;

'At one point, it became clear I was being turned into a sacrificial lamb. Anybody who had a grudge against modern, educated and independent women was being given an opportunity to spit on me. I decided to hold my

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head high, put my shoulders back, and suffer with dignity: I would give every woman and girl reasons to be proud and never regret being educated, successful and talented.’ (Maathai, 2006, p. 146).

Maathai had hoped for reconciliation and displays humility throughout the trial. Back then, whenever a marriage failed, it was the woman who was not doing her job properly and obeying her husband. As far as the society was concerned, Maathai deserved to be whipped publicly for challenging the authority of the husband. And being an educated woman, this compounded her troubles. The ‘African’ man mind-set in Mwangi couldn’t allow him to be with a woman he couldn’t tame. Maathai’s high level of education and exposure makes it a little impossible for Mwangi to dominate her and suppress her abilities. This study terms this as a subversion of the male domination that the traditional African man meted on the women, ending up viewing the women as objects and subordinates to everything that is male. Of the inter-locking pillars of patriarchal dominance put forward by Merchant (1980), Mwangi brings out himself as one who really yearned for class exploitation to cement his position as a man against Maathai, but he could not due to Maathai’s high academic qualifications as earlier discussed, a professor of biological sciences, that placed her way above the bar of such demeaning discriminations. She proudly describes these achievements as herein postulated: *‘I was the first woman in East and Central Africa to receive a doctoral degree- a significant achievement that went largely unnoticed’* (Maathai, 2006, p. 113).

Maathai later expresses her dissatisfaction with the verdict that tendered a divorce on her marriage to Mwangi. Sharing with ‘Viva’ magazine, Maathai terms everything as a judgement granted through hearsay by a judge either corrupt or incompetent. This statement finds itself into the public space and Maathai is arrested as ‘a woman going round slandering judges.’ Maathai’s defiance comes into play when she refuses to retract her statement. Charged with contempt of court, she is slapped with a six-month jail term and is immediately transported to Langata women’s prison. This study finds this as a show of male domination on women. Even on expression of her personal opinion in a divorce case that involved her, the state arrests Maathai and sends her to jail. Odhacha (2021) terms Maathai as a woman who implores the society not to misconstrue her strengths. This study borrows from this description of Maathai, as she refuses to retract her statements concerning the judges who rendered the divorce verdict. She sends a message of defiance to the state by daring to serve the jail term than withdraw a statement she believed spoke the truth on the status quo of corruption and state interference in the judiciary. As a result of activism, Maathai becomes a firm and resolute woman. This is confirmed from her statement as she says, *‘When pressure is applied to me unfairly, I tend to dig in my heels and stand my ground- precisely the opposite of what those applying pressure hope for or expect’* (Maathai, 2006, p. 158).

Maathai’s steadfastness and resoluteness comes into play at a point when the government blackmails her to withdraw her candidature for the chairperson of the National Council of Women in Kenya. The opposition to her candidacy is partly due to the ethnicity, as Moi, the then president tried to suppress the kikuyu influence in the country, and partly because of her high level of education and her marital status of being a divorced woman. The government objects her candidacy and declares that she should not be elected head of the National women’s organisation because she is divorced and therefore didn’t set a good example for Kenyan women.

This comes at the backdrop of the fact that she had been elected vice chairperson in 1979, the year her divorce was granted, yet back then, her marital status had not been mentioned. Simply, this turned out to be a targeted blackmail on an educated woman with a rationale so unfair and insulting. In the face of being intimidated to back down and avoid getting embarrassed with divorce headlines again, Maathai held on, never backing down. She narrates what some women in the NCWK used to tell her in an attempt to lure her to abandon her candidacy thus, *‘You don’t want the divorce to be in the headlines all over again. Save yourself and your children from embarrassment’* (Maathai, 2006, p. 158).

She responds to the women by stating that she had nothing to save as everything had been lost and the issue of divorce could not be used to punish her. Maathai’s resolute nature makes her realise that she has to fight as a matter of principle. To Maathai, it was one thing for the women not to elect her, but quite another to withdraw before they had a chance to vote. She confirms her awareness that on a level playing ground, she would win the vote. Consequently, when the opposition sees that she wasn’t backing down, the state instructs several groups within NCWK to withdraw their membership from the umbrella group.

This manipulation, intimidation and blackmail was a continuation of male suppression on the abilities of women that had been characteristic to the then president Moi’s reign. The former president used his political power to create stumbling blocks on Maathai’s path to rise to the highest office within the NCWK. Moi was an embodiment of what the eco-feminist scholar Hutner (2020) terms as ‘a patriarchal domination where whoever holds the most power has the right to dominate, control and exploit everyone else.’ Hutner (2020: 33). The stumbling blocks created by the then president exposed him as one who feared the woman Maathai was; highly educated, firm and one who could not be compromised or be manipulated. He is constantly disturbed by Maathai’s activism. The study therefore argues that these are the same reasons that made Mwangi root for a divorce from Maathai. Sure enough, the groups, out of the fear of the oppressive regime, withdrew, led by *Maendeleo yawanawake*, (a women’s organisation championing for the progress of women) which largely represented the rural women. At the departure of these groups, those who had been officers signed cheques for every penny in NCWK’s account, plunging it to bankruptcy. With a spirited fight and resoluteness, Maathai gets elected chairperson unopposed. This becomes a milestone that is celebrated by some newspapers in her praise. This, she captures thus;

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'The controversy over the elections attracted the media's attention. Some outlets supported me, while others that were aligned with the government, formally or informally, not surprisingly did not. For the second time in two years, my character, my actions, and my suitability were being openly discussed in the media—a spotlight I had not sought. Thankfully, my friends stood by me and when the votes were cast, I was elected chairman unopposed. Believe it or not, even some of the newspapers celebrated my victory.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 159)

Although the organisations withdrew from NCWK, the women still trusted Maathai for her steadfast and visionary leadership. This kind of leadership is what Wilkinson (2012) describes as transformational, and it is often seen as feminine. As an activist, Maathai builds resilience and courage amidst government interference with the Green Belt Movement's operations. First, the government pushes for the disbanding of and separation of the Green Belt Movement from NCWK, which Maathai agrees to peacefully. When the government realizes that the Green Belt Movement is educating citizens on the importance of standing up for their rights—covering environmental, women's, and human rights—they become unsettled.

The heaviest burden on the government's shoulders was that, unlike other women's organizations in Kenya, GBM was not organizing women to support the government's agenda but was instead doing what was right for themselves, which in many cases the government had no interest in doing. To suppress this, the government invoked an old colonial law that prohibited more than nine people from meeting in one place without first obtaining a government license. Most GBM groups had more than fifteen members. Showing her stoicism and courage, Maathai questioned the government officials: 'Why can't we meet? Why do we need a license to discuss with other women in the neighbourhood how we plan to provide firewood for ourselves?' (Maathai, 2006, p. 180).

In a seeming confirmation and affirmation of her stoicism at this, Maathai posits thus;

'I assured the women that they had every right to gather without seeking the permission of the authorities.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 180).

This courage displayed in Maathai's leadership pays off as hereby stated;

'Fortunately, by this time, thousands of women had planted trees through GBM, and they had seen the value and benefit of it. They were not going to be dissuaded by the government from participating. In addition, some members of the government at the grass root level were beginning to appreciate the positive impacts of planting trees. In some cases, the wives of local chiefs and sub chiefs were either members or leaders of GBM.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 180)

Stoicism is further displayed by the women who were demanding for the release of their sons who were arrested and detained without having committed any crime. After serving the attorney general with letters requesting to be handed over their sons, led by Maathai, the women head to Uhuru Park for a number of days waiting for their sons to be released by the state. On the fourth day, the police attack the camp where the women were praying, hurling teargas into the camp, charging them from the front and behind while beating them with their batons. Maathai recalls seeing chaos, running battles filling the air; Maathai captures this chaos that rent the air as below;

'People ran everywhere including onto the streets surrounding the park. Some of the young men who had joined us fought back as the police chased them across the road to Nyayo house and down Kenyatta and Haile Selassie avenues as well as through the park. As the battle continued throughout the afternoon, teargas and the sounds of gunshots filled up the air. Police reinforcements stormed the tent where I was singing and praying with the mothers. When the police arrived in the tent, the fifty or so people inside were initially defiant, not believing the police would attack them. The protestors linked arms, which meant that when the police began their assault, they could not easily take one without taking many. I saw people rise up in groups as police batons rained down.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 220)

Of importance to note is that Maathai details that the women in the camp refused to be intimidated and did not run but sought a brave response to the police brutality. She details further;

Several of them stripped, some of them completely naked, and showed the police officers their breasts (I myself did not strip). One of the most powerful of African traditions concerns the relationship between a woman and a man who could be her son. Every woman old enough to be your mother is considered like your own mother and expects to be treated with considerable respect. As they bared their breasts, what the mothers were saying to the policemen in their anger and frustration as they were being beaten was; 'By showing you my nakedness, I curse as I would my son for the way you are abusing me.' (Maathai, 2006, pp. 220-221)

At this point, Maathai, in the hospital bed, learns that the police had reported that she had incited them to beat her unconscious, had asked to be given a black eye and a baseball-sized lump on her head. She details thus in her response against these allegations;

'I informed the press that although after what had happened to me, I would have to stay away from 'dangerous ground', I wouldn't be silenced or deterred from telling the truth and I wouldn't go away. 'The mothers', I emphasised, 'had a right to seek the freedoms of their sons.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 221)

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The day after the police attack, many women return to the freedom corner and finding the area cordoned off by the police, the women seek assistance from All Saints Cathedral Church, adjacent to Uhuru Park, where Bishop Peter Njenga gives them a temporary sanctuary. Maathai writes that they remained unbowed. These women hold on for a year and in early 1993, their sons are released en-masse, totalling to forty one out of the forty-two sons who had been arrested. Maathai further writes that the one who remained in custody, they learnt from informal sources, had been arrested on charges that were not politically motivated. However, they don't give up on this case. Their movement adopted his case and continued to fight for him to his eventual release in 1997.

The mothers had endured more than a year of suffering in wait for their sons. Upon the release of their sons, Maathai awards the mothers with certificates of endurance which they hang on their walls. Maathai herself points out to her own endurance during the course of the struggles. She posits;

'When I left the cathedral, I returned to my home in South C, satisfied with what I had accomplished. I was also relieved to be back in my home and to sleep in my bed, instead of on a hard and very uncomfortable bench. I had been able to run home and take showers and there was a shower for the women in the church, but the women and I slept in the same clothes we wore during the day and we lost all sense of privacy. Yet there was never any question in my mind of not seeing the vigil through. Having joined the women, I would not abandon their course. We stuck together to the very end. In the months and years that followed, I sensed the bond we had formed with one another as mothers and recognised the appreciation they had for what we had done for their sons. (Maathai, 2006, p. 226)

Maathai further indicates that she would never be intimidated by the government. While with some friends after a tree planting exercise, Maathai sits to have a talk. Suddenly, the gates are swung open by the police in civilian clothes who come to arrest her without any warrant or explanations as to why she was getting arrested. She is driven to Gigiri Police Station and is later released late in the evening without any charge. She confirms that all the police wanted was to humiliate and intimidate her. Courageously, she confirms that the police achieved the former, but never the latter. Coincidentally, this was the last time Maathai was ever held in jail or in police holding cell in Kenya.

Maathai together with her freedom champions show a display of courage and stoicism during a meeting in her house at a time when the government had banned meetings having more than nine people without prior licensing by the state. Three armed officers storm her house and demand for the meeting's licence. Maathai alerts the people in her living room that the police were at her door. Maathai puts it thus;

'We wanted to show that we were not afraid of the government. In 1989, all of us would have been arrested and people would have fled from every conceivable exit when there was a knock on the door. While arresting all of us there that night was a legal option, by 1992, the security forces were somewhat constrained by the press, public opinion, a more powerful opposition and at time, the court. On that night, therefore, nobody moved. The police officers could see we were no longer intimidated enough to run for our lives and that helped further the course of democracy.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 232)

Tactfully, Maathai disarms the officers figuratively, even if she couldn't do it literally. She invites them to her house and introduces all of her visitors. Once again, in an authoritative voice, Maathai affirms that that is her house, home and she could not tell people to get out because there was more than nine of them. Led by Maathai and lawyer John Khaminwa, the people present in the meeting inform the police that they were discussing the future of the county.

She narrates;

'We're trying to liberate you too because you are also misused. The law that says we can't meet if we are more than nine is a colonial and an oppressive law. These are laws we are trying to change so we can meet in our own houses, in our own county, without anybody telling us how many people can be here.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 233)

Maathai, as an activist, also displays persistence. At about learning the government's plans to construct a complex at Uhuru Park, Maathai opposes this construction by writing a series of letters to different government agencies but ends up being assumed and gets no response. Among the recipients of the letters, Maathai writes to the office of the president, Nairobi city commission, the provincial commissioner, the minister for environment and natural resources and the executive director of UNEP and the Environment Liaison Centre International. She also sends copies of the letters to the press. At the centre of her letters is an inquiry; is it true that a building would be built at Uhuru Park? All the government agencies never responded to her directly, but attacked her in the press. In a display of persistence, even though ignored, Maathai writes more letters to the resident representative of UNDP about the complex. In her letter to UNDP, Maathai explains;

There are also the millions of Kenyans of tomorrow, our grandchildren and great grandchildren, who will either curse us or feel deeply ashamed at the lack of foresight, at the magnitude of greed, and the arrogance of those who are promoting destruction and want to call it development. We must stand for the weak, for the poor, for the lonely, for the fearful, for the ignorant and for the silent. We must not stand for the powerful only, or the rich only, or for the arrogant only. Justice does not demand that. (Maathai, 2006, p. 188)

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At a press conference in mid-October, the minister for lands and housing referred to Maathai as ill informed, terming the complex as a landmark. Similarly, the minister for local government in November 7th, denied that the complex would take more than a small portion of public parkland. He lauded it as a fine and a magnificent work of architecture. Once again, the minister termed Maathai and any other people opposing the project 'the ignorant few.'

Maathai further in her persistence posits;

I wrote to him that same day and asked him to consider the environmental consequences of the decision to let the project go ahead. The logic behind the complex, I suggested was the same as the attitude of development with destruction that had led to acid rain, poisoned rivers, deforestation and climate change. I exhorted him to solicit the opinions of people whom I considered not 'the ignorant few' but the 'informed many' in Nairobi and to reconsider the plan.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 189)

In a display of arrogance, government officials resort to hurling insults and abuses against Maathai. As she recalls, on November 8th, 1989, members of parliament used a parliamentary procedure reserved for a national emergency to interrupt their ongoing debate, not to discuss anything substantive but to slander and victimize her. The MPs called GBM a 'bogus organisation,' and its leader Maathai was called a divorcee who came out to challenge the project. Some members of parliament even cursed Maathai.

The speaker of the house summed up all these by saying that they hoped Maathai had heard the sentiments of the house. To Maathai, the indomitable, stoic activist, she had, but swore never to take those slanders lying down. As Maathai read the newspaper headlines of what transpired in parliament, she says that was just what she needed to stake her ground. What had begun as Maathai's attempt to answer the call of the law student who brought her attention to the impending encroachment of Uhuru Park had now become a contest between her and the government, asking the government to explain its actions. This sparked a series of oppositions across the country and even beyond.

Despite the harassment, the push and pull that runs for years about the complex, Maathai does not tire. She details that during the last months of 1989, she wrote letters to many individuals abroad in Canada, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and West Germany. The recipients being mostly politicians, media moguls, activists and philanthropists. She asks them to put pressure on investors to ensure the complex wasn't built in the park. Maathai states thus;

Once again, I appealed to them to recognise that while people in developing countries might not know about the kind of destructive development that the Times complex represented, or be able to stop it, there could be no such excuse for those in developed countries. I asked them to pressure their governments not to do business with dictators, whom they knew full well were oppressing their citizens and stealing their money, and to hold poor people to account for the crimes of their rulers. (Maathai, 2006, pp. 202-203)

Most international media outlets report on these struggles, notably The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, and the UK's Independent. This has helped raise awareness among environmentalists and democracy campaigners worldwide. Attention is also drawn to foreign investors and donor governments, which question the worth of spending such a large sum of money on a building of questionable usefulness in a poor country already burdened with significant domestic and international debts.

On 29th January 1990, the government announced that its plans for the complex had changed, and by February 1992, Maathai details that she learned that the fence surrounding the building site at Uhuru Park had been removed during the night. Maathai and other women celebrate a dance of victory at Uhuru Park, where she hangs a wreath at the site to declare the project dead and buried. Although the battle for Uhuru Park is won, Maathai still believed there was a need to restore democracy. She vowed to remain steadfast and persistent in her quest for restoration and respect for the democratic space. She posits;

During those challenging years, we would be led down further roads of violence and fear, and all of us—including me—would have to draw upon our deepest reserves of hope, conviction and faith to keep going and never give up on freedom. She once more confirms her persistent nature after the confrontation at Karura forest as she writes; 'In all our campaigns, it was persistence that won the day more than our bravery.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 269)

Her commitment and persistence are further demonstrated after she addressed a press conference with other leaders who had been marked for assassination. Following this, Maathai and the leaders become targets of unlawful arrests and intimidation. Her house is raided by police officers who chase her into a waiting car, then drive her to Langata police station. She is placed in a water-logged cell without any protection from the chilling cold. Without access to information, Maathai relies entirely on the officers assigned to handle her.

Weak and swollen with swollen feet, Maathai had to be physically carried to the courtroom by women officers, as she could not stand to listen to the heaviest charges: spreading malicious rumours, sedition, and treason—with the latter carrying a death penalty. Facing increasing pressure from the international community, Maathai was released, albeit on bail conditions that effectively limited her freedom and ability to dissent, made travel impossible, and left her vulnerable to arrests at any time under numerous vague accusations of wrongdoing. Her persistence as a champion of causes and an advocate for human and women's rights is confirmed when she opines as follows;

What people see as fearlessness is really persistence. Because I am focused on the solution, I don't see danger. Because I don't see danger, I don't allow my mind to imagine what might happen to me, which is my definition of

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fear. If you don't foresee the danger and see only the solution, then you can defy anyone and appear strong and fearless. (Maathai, 2006, p. 272).

There is consistency in the persistent character in the *Flight of The Hummingbird*. The persistence to do what is right, however little it is by Dukdukdiya the hummingbird, clearly gives an insight onto the persistence by Maathai in her struggle for democracy, human rights and environmental conservation. The little hummingbird, christened Dukdukdiya, carries water in its tiny beak to put out fire that is razing down the forest. It carries a single droplet on each of the flight it makes, so determined to see to it that the fire is put out and the forest, which is its home, saved from the fires.

Just as Maathai had received lots of setbacks and oppositions from those who deemed her activities non-consequential, the hummingbird receives the same treatment from its fellows in the wild. While other animals cry foul and wonder what they could do, Dukdukdiya responds in a powerful statement: *'I am doing what I can'* (Maathai, 2008, p. 11).

This is a high level of persistence and responsibility and of importance to note is that in responding to the other animals, she never stops and does not get distracted from its agenda at hand; saving the raging forest. The fact that other animals do not join Dukdukdiya and only wonder what she was doing further validates Maathai's statement that we sometimes underestimate what we can accomplish as individuals, but there is always something we can do. This, in fact, is among the factors that formed the basis onto which the GBM was formed. Maathai, together with other volunteers, plant as little as seven trees, which with time, motivates the GBM, ending up planting millions of trees. The hummingbird's persistence as a symbol of an activist is displayed thus: *'But the little hummingbird persisted. She flew to and fro, picking up more water and dropping it, bead by bead, onto the burning forest'* (Maathai, 2008, p. 9).

Maathai's activism further moulds a committed and focused woman, not easily swayed from the real course by side talks. Maathai states that the day after her vilification in parliament, she wrote a letter to Philip Leakey, her constituency MP and an assistant minister for Environment and natural resources to respond to what she had read in the papers had been said in parliament about her. She details that hers was only an action in the spirit of Uhuru or freedom. She narrates: *'When I see Uhuru Park and contemplate its meaning, I feel compelled to fight for it so that my grandchildren may share that dream and that joy of freedom as they one day walk there'* (Maathai, 2006, p. 192).

Maathai further demonstrates her commitment and focus by clarifying that she was not opposed to the complex itself, but rather its placement in the park. Additionally, unlike the MPs' provocation that she would leave Kenya, Maathai reaffirms that she isn't leaving Kenya for anywhere. At that moment, Maathai remains focused on the issue at hand—the proposed times complex—and avoids being distracted by her past broken marriage.

She narrates;

At another time and in another forum, I told Mr. Leakey that I would discuss my marital status with the MPs since they were so interested but that I wanted to keep the focus at the issue at hand.' She emphasizes further thus; 'the debate is on the proposed Times complex at Uhuru Park. The MPs should not be distracted by the anatomy below the line. In spite of what the MPs might think, my being a woman was irrelevant. Instead, the debate over the complex required the use of the anatomy of whatever lies above the neck!' (Maathai, 2006, p. 192).

From this, it is clear that members of parliament went out of their way to profile Maathai and criticize her activism, simply because she was a woman in a society where women were considered the other. Maathai stands tall and vows to continue. Her focus reemerges during Jamhuri Day celebrations at Uhuru Park. President Moi singles her out as someone opposing the construction of the proposed complex. Moi suggests that if Maathai were to be a proper woman in the 'African tradition,' she should respect men and remain silent. The president asks women across the country, through their organizations, to speak against Maathai, a 'wayward' woman, and in their words, *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake*, then a loyal branch of KANU, criticized her for having 'belittled the president and the government.' Through press conferences and rallies, women denounced Maathai. They called her a stray woman who should seek guidance from her fellow women. Despite all this, Maathai, demonstrating determination and focus, writes to the Third World Network, a Malaysia-based association of groups and individuals involved in development projects, asking them to issue an international alert urging the Kenyan government to cease harassing the GBM and herself. She notes that she is gradually becoming an outlaw in her own country.

The government profiles Maathai as a poisonous woman, destroying the image of womanhood in the country. The women are asked if they wanted to identify themselves with Maathai, a woman Moi describes as having insects in her head. To Maathai, that was how those who used their own mirrors saw her, but she offered women a different mirror, one of her own. Maathai posits:

'It was okay for me to be called crazy and told I had insects in my head: that is the way people using their own mirror saw me, but I offered women a different mirror-my own. What is important, indeed necessary, is to hold up your own mirror to see yourself as you really are.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 197)

This statement from Maathai confirms that she is a true leader, ready to conquer the patriarchal world and liberate women. This study affirms that, at this point, Maathai's words were meant to encourage women to see themselves as having the potential to be independent and stand up for what is right despite interference from the state and male chauvinists. This is the exact call made by Wilkinson (2012), who postulates that those who are oppressed and close to problems are necessarily close to the solutions. The

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oppressed in this scenario are women. These solutions would only come if there is transformational leadership, as further discussed by Plumwood (2012), who argues that this leadership is characteristically feminine. This is the leadership that Maathai is well-positioned to provide to women. The literary mirror she offers would reflect a face of stoicism and resolution that she hopes women will wear even as they confront exploitation and manipulation firsthand.

The hummingbird is focused on the real issue at hand, saving the razing forest, and does not get distracted by discouragement from the other animals. It's important to note that it doesn't stop its efforts but responds to them while in motion, collecting a bead of water from the river and dropping it onto the burning forest. Time, in this case, is of the essence in saving their home. When questioned by the big bear about what it was doing, it responds but never stops. Maathai describes this as: 'Without stopping, Dukdukdiya looked down at all of the animals. She said; 'I am doing what I can.' (Maathai, 2008, p. 11).

Maathai proves to be a selfless leader of the GBM in the face of an eviction order from their offices, where they had been operating under the auspices of the NCWK. After being relocated from the previous office allocated by President Kenyatta when Moi took power, to a very old wooden building near Central Police Station, it was now time to be evicted. With an appeal against a twenty-four-hour eviction notice dismissed by the court, Maathai had to think quickly. Securing new office spaces in town proved hectic, as most landlords were unwilling or afraid of being associated with Maathai due to the potential repercussions from the government. It was either she abandons GBM or moves it to her house in South C. Maathai's selflessness is evident when she settles for the latter. She puts that in as much as the government seemed determined to do everything to dismantle the GBM, she was equally determined not to let it happen.

Maathai even uses her own money and some GBM funds to convert her small bungalow and home garden into an office for the GBM staff, numbering eighty. In her selflessness, she adds an extra underground water tank for proper sanitation and two additional toilets. With this, GBM activities continue within their communities, and millions of trees are planted. She gives her entire house as a workspace for GBM activities, except for her bedroom and her young son's bedroom. She narrates:

'My office operated out of what used to be Waweru's bedroom and everyone else worked in the area we created outside, or in the living room or in the two other bedrooms. None of these rooms is large. The receptionist sat at a table by the entrance of the living room and we made our meals and brewed tea in my kitchen.' (Maathai, 2008, p. 199)

Activists naturally conform to peace and tranquillity. Maathai proves to be a peaceable woman in the face of the ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley. After detecting the government's hand in the ethnic clashes, Maathai and other pro-democracy activists decide to bring the facts to light. She posits;

We wanted people in Kenya and overseas to understand this was not just a random tribal violence but rather cynical, political manipulation of the deadliest kind. As had happened with Uhuru Park and the mothers of the political prisoners, people came and informed me about what was happening and asked me for my help. Fortunately, I was in a position to take action. (Maathai, 2006, p. 238)

In an organized visit to the Rift Valley in 1993, Maathai and her team saw the aftermath of the clashes: houses burned, schools destroyed, people bullied or displaced from their homes. Together, they declared that politicians need to be stopped from fuelling the ethnic conflict. Maathai urges victims not to organize retaliatory attacks and to understand that this was not an ethnic quarrel but one politically instigated. In her effort to promote peace, Maathai writes, signs, and circulates leaflets to local communities with this message. She warns of the dangers if the clashes continue—escalating into violence, involving more government security forces, leading to anarchy and the use of the army to restore order. She asserts that this could cause soldiers to turn their guns on civilians and each other, and the situation could deteriorate into a chaotic showdown, 'Somalia-style.' Maathai emphasizes that she urged people to rethink their actions to prevent this terrible future from materializing.

Maathai aptly puts this thus:

I also helped to establish the Tribal Clashes Resettlement Volunteer Service. We proposed activities that could quell the violence and reignite ties within the communities. We gave footballs to some adults and urged them to form youth football clubs. The minute the ball is on the ground, the youth might forget their differences and come together to play. We then encouraged the adults to discuss the violence with the young people and persuade them to be positive and peaceful in their interactions with children from other communities.' (Maathai, 2006, pp. 238-239)

Maathai further organizes the community's tree nursery establishment and urges them to use the trees as symbols of peace during planting. She emphasizes that when the seedlings are ready, they should invite other communities and share the seedlings. She writes, 'Tell them these are trees of peace. We are not interested in conflict. We want to foster peace' (Maathai, 2006, p. 239). Maathai herself plants the Peace Trees on the land over which the two sides were fighting.

Caution is another trait shown by Maathai. Because of the dangers that threatened her, including being hurt, jailed, or worse, Maathai exercises great caution in her actions and efforts. She tries to stay within the law as she knows the authorities were always looking for an excuse to imprison her.

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Despite the fact that the government labels Maathai as someone who frequently visited the Rift Valley to incite locals to war and even banned her from traveling, she does not give up but proceeds with utmost care and caution. These strategies ranged from traveling in the early hours of the night to switching cars every twenty miles and even dressing like a nun. These are some of the frantic efforts Maathai makes to champion her causes. Her fight for peace in the Rift Valley clearly indicates that Maathai's efforts reflect the description by Wilkinson (2012) of a transformational leader.

Maathai further challenges the oppression and domination of the male patriarchs who sponsored the ethnic violence in Rift Valley by demonstrating an attitude and ethic of care. Because she cares for the young people fighting, for the children, women, and the environment, she chooses to bring the conflicting communities together to promote and restore peace. Maathai's actions strongly connect this study to eco-feminist principles, which argue that the ethic of domination should be replaced with an ethic of care.

Maathai narrates;

I also made sure I didn't deliberately expose myself to danger. As much as possible, I travelled incognito and by night. I would leave Nairobi in the early hours of the morning, often with Dr. Makanga at the wheel and arrive in the Rift Valley before dawn. Through a network of supporters, I could switch cars every twenty miles or so. This made it hard for the police to mark the car I was in. one time, I dressed like a nun. I removed the braids in my hair and wore a scuff which made me virtually unrecognisable. Local people would inform us of what was happening around their area and help us avoid danger spots where security forces were operating. (Maathai, 2006, p. 240)

Maathai also ensures the press is always present within her vicinity to record what was happening and take the news to Kenyans and the world. In one of the meetings, she posits;

Both Deutsche Welle and the Kenyan press were there to witness this encounter. Early in the day, the German crew had taken some important footage of those who had suffered from the tribal clashes. Naturally, the police didn't want the international press filming our expulsion from the meeting, since they knew that the film, along with the other footage the crew had shot would be shown outside the country. The police shouted at the camera woman to get out and stop filming or they would shoot. The woman shouted back, 'well, shoot then.' I was thinking, 'why did she say that?' they could easily have shot her and all of us. They didn't but instead forced us out with the barrels of their guns very menacingly. It was fortunate that by then, we had recorded what had been said at the meeting and shown the international and Kenyan journalists what had happened on the ground. So, our mission was accomplished.' (Maathai, 2006, p. 242)

In a further display of caution on their way back to Nairobi, Maathai and her team switch cars and drivers, arriving in the city very late that night. As a precaution, Maathai, following her lawyers' advice, presents herself before a judge to inform him that she knows the government wants to arrest her. She proceeds to plead guilty to a charge and post bail, a process known as bail before arrest. However, the next day, Maathai takes another step in her cautious approach; she goes into hiding. Her fear, she says, was not just of being arrested. She was also worried about being beaten by security forces or hired thugs. Her friends believed she was targeted for assassination, and she could only guess what might have happened next.

Maathai's fears may have originated from the fact that during Moi's presidency, there were numerous cases of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. The then-president silenced any dissenting voices, much like his predecessor, Jomo Kenyatta. As previously mentioned, Kassaje (2021) highlights the protests organized by University of Nairobi students after the murder of JM Kariuki in 1975, as they sought answers regarding what might have motivated the government to kill the minister.

In a measure of caution-while at Karura forest-Maathai reiterates that while determined, they were never reckless. While confronted with a tense situation, they always found ways to protect themselves. For example, they would sing and dance to disarm the armed men in front of them. What mattered to them was that they were in the right and had stood up for what they had believed in.

She narrates;

This is not to say we were reckless. We found ways to protect ourselves. When we were confronted with a tense situation, we would sing about the need to protect the forest and dance. This was a way to disarm the armed men in front of us- and it worked. We could see their frowns and scowls vanish and their faces soften. (Maathai, 2006, p. 273)

Maathai, as a highly sociable person, creates networks of information and protection both locally and abroad. Activism requires strict networking and the ability to mobilise human resources, a skill Maathai capitalised on. She is sociable with networks of friends, associates, and allies. She's able to put the oppressive government in check through her networks of international allies and media. This significantly boosts her operations as a human rights activist and environmentalist. It's important to note that Maathai attends many international conferences where she addresses issues related to the shrinking democratic space in Kenya. Her sociable nature is evident in the meetings she attends with international media, the letters she writes to international bodies seeking aid for the GBM, and her calls for government accountability.

For instance, Maathai narrates thus;

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Before I went underground, I issued a statement to friends around the world asking them to urge their governments not to resume the assistance that had been cut off prior to the re-introduction of the multiparty system unless the president ended the tribal clashes. I wrote that while the world was naturally focused on Liberia, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia, there was ethnic cleansing going on in Kenya. Friends and colleagues in the United States and the United Kingdom contacted their legislators, Human Rights Watch raised awareness of the situation and Amnesty International sent out an urgent action alert about the dangers we faced. They and others called on their members to appeal to the president and his government to guarantee our safety and the freedom of the pro-democracy movement in Kenya. (Maathai, 2006, p. 246)

One important aspect of these social networks is that they ensured the security of fellow activists through the creation of mutual intelligence. Maathai affirms this, stating that one feature of living in an oppressive system is developing networks of information and protection. In a network, people sometimes know one another and sometimes don't. But when you need one another, a connection is often made without you even knowing how. For instance, she captures this thus;

I would be home and someone would call or come by and say, 'We must move you out of here.' An informer might have heard that the government planned to pick people up for questioning or detention. Before the policeman had even put on his gear, that individual would know he or she was a target and head for a safe house. Only a few people would know where those who had gone underground were. (Maathai, 2006, p. 246)

Maathai explains that her networks were quite broad, including friends, members of the clergy, pro-democracy figures, and foreign diplomats. One such diplomat was Arman Aardal, a Norwegian diplomat who stayed in Kenya after President Moi severed diplomatic relations between Kenya and Norway, ensuring Norwegian diplomats left the country. This occurred because Norway and its diplomats were strong supporters of the pro-democracy movement in Kenya. Maathai states that the Norwegian government's stance so angered the president that he cut off diplomatic relations with Norway in the 1990s.

Arman, Norway's representative to UNEP, stayed behind and was supportive of Maathai. She writes that Arman was very supportive and often helped her travel from one safe place to another while she was underground. He became Maathai's good friend and a strong supporter of the disadvantaged children of the Mathare slums. These children were part of the marginalized groups that President Moi oppressed. The altercation Maathai had with the then-president Moi originated from the exploitation of the environment. This demonstrates that the oppression of marginalized groups and women are interconnected by a common factor of oppression: patriarchal dominance, as described by d'Eaubonne (1974). In this context, the key figure in this patriarchal oppression was then-president Moi.

So strong were Maathai's international ties that, while moving from one safe house to another, she was invited to a meeting in Tokyo by Green Cross International, a global environmental organization set up by former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Maathai's role as a pro-democracy activist complicates her ability to obtain travel documents. Her international connections pay off when President Gorbachev intervenes, sending a message to President Moi asking his government to assist her in securing the necessary travel documents.

Maathai affirms the importance of her social networks against the lonely life of working for justice and freedom. This she captures thus;

Working for justice and freedom is often a lonely and dispiriting business. Yet in my various struggles I've been fortunate to receive the support of many individuals and institutions, both in Kenya and overseas, who have stood by me in difficult times. Often their phone calls, faxes, letters- or later emails- or simply their presence made the difference at a crucial moment. To all of them, I am eternally grateful, as I am to the powerful who willing to use their positions to protect me. It is no exaggeration to say that these friends, the awards I received and the conferences I attended may have saved my life. As I told journalists in Edinburgh, 'I don't want to die before finishing my work. (Maathai, 2006, pp. 248-249)

Her network of informers also brings her attention to the grabbing and allocation of Karura forest land to private developers. She writes that when she heard of this grabbing, she went to Karura to see the situation herself, ultimately discovering that a road had already been dug and workers were installing what looked like a drainage system. These are the kinds of development that this study describes as development with destruction. Furthermore, the forest, a public property, was being allocated to private developers, mostly cronies and sycophants of the president. This was yet another display of arrogant patriarchal dominance, oppression, and dictatorship that called for swift redress.

Several structures to house the construction workers had also been built. In these, her network of communication included men and women from a nearby village, who herded their goats in the forests and others who rode horses or hiked there. In response to the destruction of Karura forest, Maathai writes to the attorney general on 28th September, requesting a halt to any further construction in or clearing of the forest.

Activists demonstrate empathy and understanding towards various situations. Maathai notes that in 1998, she became co-chair of the Jubilee 2000 Africa campaign, which aimed to gather one million signatures on petitions urging the world's richest countries to cancel third-world debts in 2000. This initiative was designed to benefit all Kenyans, as GBM, through the Kenyan Debt Relief

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Network (KENDREN), sought to educate ordinary citizens about how the debts were incurred and their connection to good or bad governance. The setback occurred when the government failed to value KENDREN's efforts. During a peaceful march to deliver a letter to the World Bank representative in Kenya, calling for debt cancellation, police violently disrupted the march with clubs and teargas, pushing nearly 60 marchers into waiting police vans. A serious concern was that thirteen nuns and two priests were arrested alongside other marchers.

Maathai gets so worried of this and she posits;

I hurried to Nairobi Central police station and was furious to see members of the clergy, many of them elderly, locked in those filthy, cold cells. It was the first time any of us could remember that the government had gone so far as to jail nuns and priests. We alerted the international jubilee 2000 network, which called on its supporters to fax letters of protest to the Kenyan government. Ann Pettifor, the head of the Jubilee 2000 campaign, sent a letter to Kenya's attorney general expressing her deep concern about the arrests. Even the World Bank representative called for the marchers to be released. (Maathai, 2006, p. 279)

These elderly members of the clergy who had been arrested are dumped into tiny police holding cells, already crowded with drunkards and petty thieves. In solidarity with the marchers, Maathai, along with a priest from the Catholic Church's Peace and Justice department, decides to keep vigil outside the cell in support of the marchers. Out of empathy, Maathai even attempts to join them inside the cells, but the police refuse to incarcerate her. She stays put and refuses to leave, even at the plea of the sisters in the holding cells. Maathai and the priest sit there all night, singing and praying, which lifts their spirits. The arrest of these marchers raises questions. Why were they detained when they were not protesting against the regime? Just as the University of Nairobi students—according to Kassajje (2021)—protested against British foreign policy in South Africa and Zimbabwe in 1974, Maathai and her team's protests targeted foreign lenders, not the Kenyan government. They were actually trying to help the regime by seeking the cancellation of the government debt.

These protests targeted foreign policymakers who were plunging Kenya into a debt crisis that would be very hard to escape. The study suggests that the regime may have felt threatened because the World Bank might have reduced its funding, which would have impacted the looting spree. The heavy-handed approach to handling the protesters was an effort to send a message to lenders that the protests did not have government approval. During this period, there was widespread looting of public funds, and as Maathai explains, government officials were seeking every opportunity to embezzle money. Maathai writes;

'In the last years of the 1980s, corruption became the culture of those in power in Kenya. Many people almost began to feel foolish for having a lot of money in their hands and not misusing it. In addition, the atmosphere became increasingly repressive as the regime ignored the needs of the people and hastened the destruction of the democracy we had created since independence two decades earlier. (Maathai, 2006, p. 180).

In an affirmative tone, Maathai tells the press that the members of the clergy who were arrested are even more committed to the campaign to cancel the debts. It pains Maathai that through the shock of the crowded cells where buckets served as toilets, the nuns still nursed injuries-physical and psychological. She says in an expression of empathy. *'That, too, breaks my heart. For the government to treat the religious this way was, to me, the lowest level to which the system had sunk'* (Maathai, 2006, p. 280). Maathai states that what she learnt throughout her activism was that we must be patient, persistent and committed. This is complementary to having an ethic of care as stipulated by Wilkinson (2012).

3. CONCLUSION

The foregoing illustrations demonstrate that activism inform character development. Maathai emerges strongly as an ambassador of goodwill, advocating for human rights and environmental issues. 'Unbowed' captures all her struggles against a dictatorial regime that aimed to limit democratic space for its citizens to maintain greater control over power. In doing so, the government disregards many citizens' rights and neglects environmental dignity. Someone had to stand against this, attempting to hold the government accountable. Wangari Maathai, along with a few others, began movements to disarm the oppressor, in this case, the government. She builds strong movements comprising women and men, whom she assists in voicing their grievances, including professionals such as lawyers, doctors, and clergy. In this advocacy, Maathai, along with other pro-democracy advocates, develops certain traits that help them persist and succeed in their push for reforms despite the oppressive and violent disruptions they face in their activism. These traits, mostly formed as a result of encounters with government forces, prove to be invaluable in the quest for justice and democracy. The personal choices made by these activists to champion the right causes help them develop and maintain character through sublimation and other mechanisms that are not part of formal education, but are instead cultivated through advocacy and activism.

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