

## Wangari Maathai in the Media: A critical perspective

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*"People often ask me what drives me," Maathai revealed.*

*"Perhaps the more difficult question would be: What would it take to stop me?"<sup>1</sup>*

### Abstract

*No one is a prophet in their own land.* The aphorism is far from a platitude in Kenya where an iconic international figure incarnated by Prof. Wangari Maathai was little appreciated in her homeland Kenya but feted globally. To be true, Wangari's life trajectory is a reminder not only of the gender inequalities and iniquities that have beleaguered Kenya since time immemorial but also it is symbolic of an individual's dogged determination to make the world a better place through sound management of the environment. It is, therefore, important to review how the media impacted on her life and more broadly how the media handles celebrities in Kenya. Of particular interest is the manner in which the male-dominated media in Kenya had been downplaying Wangari's image as a leader save from the 'tree-hugging' stereotype. Similarly, Wangari's political initiatives had little if any impact on Kenya due to her inexperience in playing dirty in the Kenyan political arena. Upon recognition by the Nobel Committee and her commendation, Wangari assumed a larger than life profile albeit in a media environment that was hardly friendly. Nevertheless, her contribution was not lost to Kenyans, Africans and the world at large. The world feted Wangari and Kenya had no choice. This article critiques the role of the media, mainly the mainstream media, and problematizes its coverage of Wangari's epic efforts until 2012.

**Key words:** *Wangari, environment, peace, media, politics, development*

### Introduction & conceptual framework

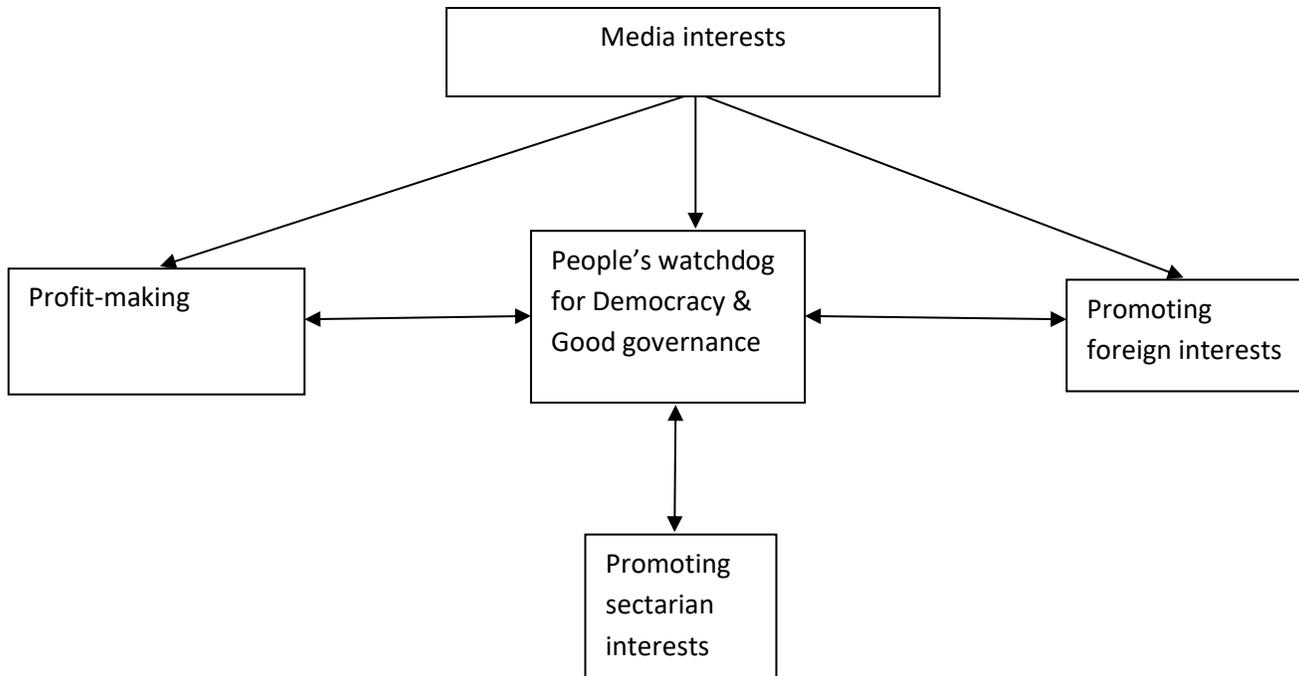
The names of media institutions in Kenya and elsewhere in the world invariably evoke directly or figuratively the assumed role of the media in society. *Habari za mwezi, East African Standard, Nation, Taifaleo, Citizen, Leader, Herald Tribune, Washington Post, Le Monde* and so on are

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<sup>1</sup> According to an interview by Judith Stone of *O Magazine* retrieved from <http://www.notablebiographies.com/news/Li-Ou/Maathai-Wangari.htm> on 23 January 2012.

labels that epitomize authority and legitimacy in news manufacturing and ventilation. Moreover, the institutions purport to represent the people by providing them with an avenue to air their views and improve their lot. To wit, the Kenyan media presents a mixed picture in its role but there is no denying that it has played a significant role in representing the people's point of view. However, media buffs have also come to the realization that apart from informing, educating and entertaining the people, the media institutions are also subject to power games by local and international mischief makers. Further, media institutions are first and foremost business outfits whose shareholders are keener on the bottom line than lofty ideals like democracy or ethics. In this logic, newsworthiness as a construct informs the balance between business, politics and lofty concerns.

Wangari's coverage, or lack of it, has to be analyzed and understood within a conceptual framework that underscores the imperatives as well as interests of the media houses. To be covered or not to be covered in the media is not the innocent work of an editor but it obfuscates a cold reality dictated by media interests. Media houses are invariably owned by shareholders or individual owners who are keen on making return on their investment. In this perspective, news is a product to be packaged, marketed and sold like any other commodity, and the more the money raked in, the better for the owners. Here, all tricks in the book are important to augment readership and money. To wit, some news sells while others do not. In the Kenyan context, political news sells while environmental information does not. Secondly, media houses are also known to take certain political positions, either to reflect the position of the owners or to please certain international powers. In this perspective, the media houses are partisan and lend their quiet or overt support to certain political figures or formations. Here stories that do not comfort the chosen position are "spiked" by editors while those supporting the "cause" are highlighted and given prominence. In other words, the media world replicates the tensions, prejudices and contradictions prevalent in the Kenyan society. For instance, some editors are known to support certain political figures or formations, hence the twists and spins in their stories. But this is not surprising as the practice is common in the rest of the world. What is surprising is the expectation by the citizenry that the media be unbiased, reliable and democratic. The idle expectation is not without a reason because the media in Kenya has also played a very positive role in informing, educating and entertaining the citizenry. It is therefore within this problematic framework that we intend to review Wangari Maathai's image in the Kenyan media.



**Figure 1: Media role framework**

### Discussion of the framework

A great deal of ink has flowed with respect to the role of the media in nascent democracy such as Kenya (Ochieng 1992, Nyamnjoh 2005, Mwita 2009, Iraki 2010). However, it is evident, though not uncontroversial, that the media has conflicting roles. At its best, it is a powerful tool for ensuring that democratic structures are created and energized. To be true, the media can play the watchdog role for the citizenry by keeping at bay the abuses of power by the political class. *The Nation* played this role for the most part of the early 1960s. On the other hand, the *Baraza* the precursor of the *East African Standard* was seen as promoting White settler interests in colonial Kenya<sup>2</sup>. Media outlets such as Royal Media Services owned by media mogul S.K. Macharia had been supporting the Mwai Kibaki government since 2002 but later shifted its support to Raila Odinga in anticipation that he would win the following presidential election. Similarly, K24 a television station popularized by Jeff Koinange soon changed hands to the Uhuru Kenyatta team. Although these shifts could be attributed to ordinary entrepreneurial spirit, it is however quite evident that the media outfits mentioned were potential political tools to be employed in the run

<sup>2</sup> See Ochieng 1992 and Iraki 2010 for a historical review of the media in Kenya.

up to the General Elections of 2013. This is what we term as sectarian interests. Further, the local media is also linked in many ways to the international forces invariably referred to as Euro-powers, i.e. Europe, Canada and America (Munene 2008). The major shareholder of Nation Media Group (NMG) that owns a wide array of media outlets is H.H. The Aga Khan<sup>3</sup> who resides in Paris, France. This in itself does not necessarily mean that he controls the editorial policy of NMG. However, it goes without saying that the NMG would not contradict or embarrass its major shareholder in its publications. But more importantly is the way the editorial class, especially in the major media houses, hobnob with foreign dignitaries. The latter suavely employ the media houses to ventilate the Western perspective on local affairs especially politics. Of particular note is the role played by US ambassadors in influencing local politics and in using the media to make their case.<sup>4</sup> This is the dark side of the media that counterbalances the noble role of the Fourth Estate as the voice of reason and justice. It is within this framework that we propose to analyze how the media handled Wangari Maathai until 2012.

### **Wangari in a nutshell**

Wangari Muta Maathai was born on 1 April 1940 in Nyeri District<sup>5</sup>. She excelled in school and proceeded to the US for bachelor's degree in biological sciences in 1964 and a Master of Science degree in 1966. She got her doctorate from the University of Nairobi in 1971. Due to her diligence, she became an Associate professor in 1977. In all these endeavors, Wangari was a trail-blazer<sup>6</sup> as no other woman had had similar achievements in Kenya. Later, Prof. Wangari headed the National Council of Women 1981-87 and it was during this stint that she mooted the concept of mobilizing and engaging rural women in planting trees in homes, schools and churches. The initiative led to the Greenbelt movement (formally EnviroCare) that she founded and planted over 40 million trees to improve the quality of life, especially the promotion of peace. In her commendation, the Nobel Committee observed that the Nobel Peace Prize 2004 was awarded to Wangari Maathai "*for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace*". It also hailed her as "a strong voice speaking for the best forces in Africa to promote peace and good living conditions on that continent ... her unique forms of action have contributed to drawing attention to political oppression."<sup>7</sup>

Wangari won many awards and was even cited by *Earth Times* as being among the 100 most influential people in matters environment. She also won a parliamentary seat in 2002 and was appointed as an Assistant Minister for Environment. She devoted her life to the Greenbelt

<sup>3</sup> The Aga Khan is also the spiritual leader of the Ismailia community worldwide.

<sup>4</sup> Smith Hempstone and Michael Ranneberger were the most notorious in this respect.

<sup>5</sup> See the link for a more detailed biography:[http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/)

<sup>6</sup> See Daily Nation of Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020, "Kenya's Female Trailblazers" by Maureen Kasuku.

<sup>7</sup><http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/professor-wangari-maathai-environmental-and-political-activist-who-became-the-first-african-woman-to-win-the-nobel-peace-prize-2361407.html>

movement across Africa to promote a sustainable environment. She passed away on 25 September 2011.

In accord with the conceptual framework above, Wangari's life was at times useful to the media but other times the media kept mum about her achievements. To begin with, the Kenyan media has always displayed a bias for political news because in a society that is highly polarized along ethnic lines (Karega-Munene 2003) governance issues foreground all other issues. In this regard, Wangari's presence was more forceful within the political arena and much more nuanced in other domains. For instance, her earlier triumphs as the first woman to become an Associate professor in the Region are muted in the local media, primarily *Nation* and the *East African Standard* etc. The deafening silence is also explicable within the newsworthiness framework (Galtung & Rouge 1965). Whereas the news about a woman climbing to professorship in 1977 Kenya was potentially exciting, the media downplayed it since it was low on its scale of values. Nevertheless, her troubled marriage with Maathai and subsequent accusations of sexual impropriety with a politician, Waruru Kanja, were tit bits that the media relished and considered newsworthy.

The other consideration was obviously gender. In a male-dominated world, the media can only be male-dominated too. Prior to the 1984 forums on mainstreaming gender in development it was almost natural to invisibilize women in national development. Women had not begun to accentuate their demand for equity and equality in development. As a result, there was pretty little coverage of women and women issues. To be true, even the *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* (Women Development) movement was largely seen as an appendage of a male-dominated political apparatus. In fact, it later metamorphosed into KANU-Maendeleo ya Wanawake as a wing of the ruling party during the reign of Daniel Arap Moi. The media was as culpable in invisibilizing Wangari as was the rest of the society. The values prevalent in a society can also influence the behavior of the media<sup>8</sup>. Within this paradigm the media is not above society but a product of the same. But Wangari's diligence and commitment to the environment was to propel her into the media space with great force and influence from the late 1980s.

### **Moi: Wangari a 'mad woman'**

In its website, the Green belt movement spells its mission thus:

The mission of the Green Belt Movement (GBM) is to mobilize community consciousness- using tree planting as an entry point- for self-determination, equity, improved livelihoods and security, and environmental conservation.

Starting as a small NGO dependent on donor-funding, GBM blossomed from the 1980s to become a formidable machine for social transformation in the 1990s. Wangari's subsequent life would be inextricably linked to GBM. Her determination and struggles to make a better world did not escape the attention of the media, especially when the political class was entangled with the GBM's

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<sup>8</sup>See Cottle (2006) for a detailed discussion of this paradigm.

mission. The conflict also caught the attention of the international press making Wangari the people's defender of human rights, especially the right to a clean environment.

In 1989 Wangari almost single-handedly opposed President Moi's attempt to have a 60-storey skyscraper meant to house government offices and a TV station on Uhuru Park in Nairobi. The drama that ensued made for excellent media coverage. Wangari mobilized women to demonstrate and place a curse on Moi's administration by baring their backside<sup>9</sup>. The move was an instant media hit and cameras were clicking at maddening speed to cover the women protest. Moi was unrelenting, and so was Wangari. In the face-off, Wangari, nay a woman, won against Moi's daunting behemoth of a phallocratic government. The government backed off and the activists named the famous building site as Freedom Corner. Meanwhile, Moi termed her 'a mad woman'.<sup>10</sup>

The triumph of Wangari was also described as a triumph for Kenya, a blow against Moi's dictatorship and despoliation of the environment. Similar scenarios will be enacted later; this time round with Moi's cronies trying to hive off sections of Karura Forest for private constructions. The media coverage of an embattled Wangari was eloquent of oppression and insensitivity of the Moi regime. The Friends of Karura Forest website noted that:

“Wangari shed her blood in 1999 in Karura Forest leading a group of citizens in a confrontation against thugs hired by lawless developers who were trying to grab the land.”<sup>11</sup>

It is due to this relentless fight that upon her demise, a number of people suggested that the Karura Forest be named after Wangari Maathai.<sup>12</sup>

For Wangari, leadership was key in paving the way for African development. Indeed, she noted “...perhaps the most important quality the African leadership needs...is a sense of service to the people” (SOURCE). Further, she opined that:

“...Africans need to stand up for the leaders they want and not settle for the leaders they get. Too many African leaders have been the narrow heroes of the micro-nations rather than genuine statesmen of the whole macro-nation.” (ibid, p.285)

Since then, the media could no longer ignore an icon of freedom. A woman, not a man, had challenged President Moi to a staring game and Moi had blinked first. Wangari became synonymous with the struggle for wider political freedoms, especially the political pluralism. It

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<sup>9</sup> Wangari hailed from the Gikuyu community where the act of an elderly woman baring her backside is one of the worst curses to be heaped on the target. The protest is also revisited albeit in a literary sense in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* as a mordant indictment of Moi's administration.

<sup>10</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/201110040050.html>. retrieved on 30 January 2012.

<sup>11</sup> [www.karurafriends.org](http://www.karurafriends.org) retrieved on 30 January 2012.

<sup>12</sup> [www.capitalfm.co.ke](http://www.capitalfm.co.ke) retrieved on 30 January 2012.

was now common to associate Wangari with political reformers such as Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Ken Matiba, Raila Odinga, Charles Rubia, Martin Shikuku, Paul Muite, Willy Mutunga, just to mention a few.

### **Wangari, politics and environmental accolades**

It is highly probable that Wangari's interest in politics was initially inspired by her husband Mwangi Mathai in the early 1970s. Mwangi won the Lang'ata parliamentary seat in 1974. They were later estranged in 1984. Attempts to run for the Nyeri seat in 1982 were thwarted by a hostile Moi regime but Wangari managed to be elected as Chair of the National Council of Women in Kenya (NCWK) from 1981-1987. By the 1997 General Elections Wangari had formed the Liberal Party of Kenya (LPK) to vie for presidency. However, just a month before the elections she withdrew her presidential candidacy and lost the parliamentary elections. Moi won as President, as expected. Wangari sustained her struggle for more democracy in Kenya.

In 2002 Wangari in the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) bandwagon contested and won the Tetu parliamentary seat. She had garnered 98% of the votes cast. In 2003, Kibaki appointed her as an Assistant Minister in charge of the Environment where she acquitted herself with diligence and professionalism. She embarked on many reforestation initiatives and HIV/AIDS campaigns. These initiatives did not escape the attention of the Nobel Prize Committee. In 2004, she became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. About this stellar achievement, Wangari would note that the Nobel Prize:

“It was also saying to African women, in particular, that women can make an impact, although their ideas and actions are often dismissed.” (Challenge for Africa, p.287).

No doubt, a woman of many firsts, Wangari's star kept on shining brighter. However, Kenyan politics can be amazing especially when local opinion is at variance with international perspectives.

Wangari had her share of political problems in her homeland of Tetu. In the quicksand of politics, Wangari appeared to be gradually losing political ground in her homeland. Tetu constituency borders the Aberdare forest and the people were keen on re-introducing the *shamba* (farming) system that would allow them to farm in the forest. Wangari was opposed to this move.

“It is her opposition to cultivation in forests, popularly known as the *shamba* system that was the final nail in her political coffin.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/InsidePage.php?id=2000043568&cid=159&story=Environmental activism cost Maathai Tetu parliamentary seat](http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/InsidePage.php?id=2000043568&cid=159&story=Environmental%20activism%20cost%20Maathai%20Tetu%20parliamentary%20seat). Retrieved on 30 January 2012.

Wangari's popularity waned rapidly among her constituents but she was unrelenting. She preferred to lose her seat to succumbing to the shamba system. She opined:

"If fighting against the re-introduction of the barbaric system will cost me my parliamentary seat, so be it." (ibid).

Wangari's loss of popularity could, in part, be attributed to her lackluster support of Mwai Kibaki's regime.<sup>14</sup> The Gikuyu community considered her a stumbling block since she continued to fight against land grabs and corruption, even during Kibaki's first term. Her popularity dwindled so much to the extent that she was defeated in the 2007 General Elections. But she continued with her international and regional engagements to promote peace and development via environmental sustainability. And she won many accolades including <sup>15</sup>:

- Woman of the Year Award (1983);
- Right Livelihood Award (1984);
- Better World Society Award (1986);
- Woman of the World (1989);
- The Hunger Project's Africa Prize for Leadership (1991);
- Goldman Environmental Prize (1991);
- Jane Adams Leadership Award (1993);
- Golden Ark Award (1994);
- Kenyan Community Abroad (2001);
- Outstanding Vision and Commitment Award (2002);
- WANGO Environment Award (2003);
- The Sophie Prize (2004);
- The Petra Kelly Prize for Environment (2004);
- The Conservation Scientist Award (2004);
- J. Sterling Morton Award (2004), and finally
- The Nobel Peace Prize (2004).

Other awards include Japan's Order of the Rising Sun, the Légion d'honneur and the Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights. Wangari also obtained doctorates *causa honoris* from Yale University, Ochanomizu University in Japan and the University of Norway.<sup>16</sup>

The awards were emblematic of her international recognition which was in sharp contrast with her rather low-key local recognition or lack of it, especially in the political arena. Perhaps it encapsulates the saying that *No one is a Prophet in their own land*. Nonetheless, while there is no

<sup>14</sup> Mwai Kibaki is the member of parliament for Othaya constituency in Nyeri.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/maathai-bio.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/maathai-bio.html)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/politics-obituaries/8790642/Wangari-Maathai.html>. accessed on 30 January 2012.

denying Wangari's enviable role as a political activist in Kenya, her political influence was somehow mitigated. Suffice it to say that she was an acclaimed leader on environmental issues but politically she was seen by many, and the media as well, as a neophyte. Indeed, she had many problems navigating the mined political terrain in Kenya and it came as no surprise when she even failed to capture a preliminary contest within the Party of National Unity (PNU) and ultimately was defeated in the 2007 General Elections. The environmental giant had lost touch with her own constituents. They rejected her as their political representative while respecting her as an environmental icon. But Wangari was not new to such disappointments; she had run unsuccessfully before and was familiar with the vicissitudes of politics.

### **Wangari and the AIDS controversy**

Wangari was also not very new in strange controversies. She was reported by the *East African Standard* to have claimed that the AIDS virus was engineered by white people to decimate black people:

"In fact it (the HIV virus) is created by a scientist for biological warfare".<sup>17</sup>

She later refuted the claim adamantly in an article entitled *The Challenge of AIDS in Africa* on 12 December 2004:

"I have therefore been shocked by the ongoing debate generated by what I am purported to have said. It is therefore critical for me to state that I neither say nor believe that the virus was developed by white people or white powers in order to destroy the African people. Such views are wicked and destructive."<sup>18</sup>

The accusation came as a surprise since Wangari herself was a scientist holding a PhD in veterinary anatomy. But it is important to note that Wangari may have been airing a nagging feeling by some pockets of Africans that AIDS was actually exported to Africa by the West. Although this was a serious gaffe on her part, Wangari's political instincts rushed back in and she rescued her reputation by issuing the denial article just a day before she won the Nobel Prize.

### **Wangari, family & Media**

Mary Joseph Wangari married Mwangi Mathai in 1969. Mathai was a politician who won the Lang'ata seat in 1974 but the relationship was fraught with problems and it was eventually

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<sup>17</sup>Article by the counterpunch entitled *African Woman Ecologist and Nobel Peace laureate Wangari Maathai claims HIV/AIDS deliberately created* on 9 October 2004. Retrieved from <http://thecounterpunch.hubpages.com/hub> on 23 January 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Retrieved from <http://greenbeltmovement.org/a.php?id=30> on 23 January 2012.

dissolved in 1984 amidst claims of infidelity on the part of Wangari. The issue was highly sensationalized by the media since she was the wife of a prominent politician in Nairobi.

Wangari's refusal to drop her husband's name claiming that he was the one who removed her virginity was a strong indictment of a male-dominated system where women were of little consequence. To placate her livid husband Wangari added an extra "a" to Mathai to become "Maathai". She had earlier dropped her Christian names of Mary Jo. This was hardly surprising as it was and remains fashionable among Africa scholars to drop their Christian names, especially after studying abroad.<sup>19</sup>

When Wangari's issue of her affair with Waruru Kanja was alluded to in parliament she reminded politicians to concentrate on issues 'above the belt'.<sup>20</sup> The rebuttal can be understood within the gender paradigm where women were demeaned by regarding them as sex objects. Wangari represented a woman 'difficult to control, too strong-minded' as claimed by her ex-husband in a world where women were voiceless and objectified<sup>21</sup>. It is this irrepressible voice that became instrumental in fighting for gender rights in the 1980s and beyond. The GBM remains committed to empowering young girls and women in Africa. In her Nobel speech she observed that "I am especially mindful of women and the girl child. I hope it will encourage them to raise their voices and take more space for leadership."

Wangari had three children with Mwangi Mathai. Her hardships with the government in the 1990s made her bequeath the children to Mathai as she had to take up a job in Zambia for the Economic Commission of Africa. Little is known in the media about Wangari's children. These are Waweru, Wanjira and Muta. She also has a grand-daughter in the name of Ruth Wangari. Wangari commitment to family values and the role of women is unambiguous:

"Women are responsible for their children. They cannot sit back, waste time, and see them starve."<sup>22</sup> On the role of men in the family, Wangari noted "A critical element in promoting and sustaining development in Africa is to keep African families intact. Achieving this will involve what we might call the "re-introduction" of the African man to his family." (SAME SOURCE, *ibid* p. 275).

### **Wangari's legacy**

Wangari Maathai succumbed to ovarian cancer on 25 September 2011 at Nairobi Hospital. The media joined the rest of the world in saluting this great daughter of Africa. The *East African Standard* noted:

<sup>19</sup> James Ngugi changed to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for instance.

<sup>20</sup> Personal account from Prof. Vincent Simiyu, a Kenyan historian.

<sup>21</sup> See *Unbowed*, 109-111.

<sup>22</sup> National Geographic.com retrieved on 30 January 2012.

“ I guess for most people, the highlight of Maathai’s active life was the presentation of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her work as the CEO of the Green Belt Movement and her agitation for peace and democracy in Kenya and the region at large. She made every Kenyan, nay, every African proud to see one of its daughters being honoured to what is perceived as the most prestigious accolade in the world.”<sup>23</sup>

Unlike many African dignitaries who dream of classy and costly funerals, Wangari preferred an environmental-friendly send-off. She had directed that a coffin made of a weed, the hyacinth, be used to entomb her remains. But the more lingering legacy is the determination to make the world a better place for all through small acts. Wangari insisted that it was the small works that ultimately change the world. She often narrated the analogy of a small bird working toward the salvation of a forest while the big animals watch. She was determined to bring change through reflection, engagement and praxis, rather than empty rhetoric. Inspired by the indefatigable efforts of the small bird to rescue the burning with her feeble and tiny wings, Wangari declared “I will be a humming bird and I’ll do the much I can to bring about change in the world”<sup>24</sup>

As a wife, a mother, a politician, an activist Wangari remains an enduring inspiration for all, irrespective of age, ethnicity, race or gender. She fought and won many battles. But she also lost some. And that is the destiny of great men and women.

## Conclusions

Wangari Muta Mary Jo Maathai had an illustrious academic and professional life epitomized by her professorial appointment at the University of Nairobi, her appointment as an Assistant Minister for Environment and ultimately the award of the Nobel Peace Prize. She had many firsts in the Region and in Africa. However, the media while pursuing its interests and biases of the time had a love-hate relationship with Wangari. For instance, she is virtually absent from the media scene until a rocky marriage with a politician breaks into the fore. Clearly, political satire was more newsworthy than coverage of this great African woman.

Wangari gets more than her fair share of media spotlights when she gets on to the political arena in earnest from the late 1970s. The Green Belt Movement that she founded in 1977 also became a great success in the 1990s in promoting sustainable development through tree planting. Although she did not by any means set out to push for peace, Wangari knew all too well the indirect link between environmental conservation and peace. "I wasn't working on the issue of peace specifically. I was contributing toward peace, and that is what the committee recognized: that, indeed, we need to step back and look at a more expanded concept of peace and security."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/InsidePage.php?id=2000043603&cid=569> retrieved on 30 January 2012.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGMW6YWjMxw> retrieved on 30 January 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.notablebiographies.com/news/Li-Ou/Maathai-Wangari.htm> on 23 January 2012.

Further, at the Nobel ceremony, Wangari noted that “The environment is very important in the aspects of peace because when we destroy our resources and our resources become scarce, we fight over that.”<sup>26</sup> At any rate, it is a common reality conflicts in Kenya are tied to scarcity of resources, especially land and water. In this melee it has been recognized that environmental protection is one of the ways of ensuring peace between communities. Some NGOs are providing water points to pastoral communities to reduce conflict.

Whereas Wangari’s prominence in environmental issues is highly impressive, her political star shone less brightly due in part to the prejudices against women but also due to her inexperience in *realpolitik*. Kenyan politics has a logic of its own. A world-class figure like Wangari could not secure a parliamentary seat in 2007 to represent her constituents. The world heroine could not win in her backyard. Since then the media lost interest as it was wont to and only came back to fete her with the rest of the world after her exit from the world. This time round, the media did her justice and feted her as the giant she was.

Be it as it may, Wangari will continue inspiring young women to rise up and fight for their place in the sun. But she will also be a great inspiration to rural women and men who have over time seen the product of her determination to reforest land and improve people’s lives. The little strokes finally felled the oak.

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<sup>26</sup> CNN.com retrieved on 30 January 2012.

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