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Prof.
Bethuwell
Allan
Ogot
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Editorial

Bethwell A. Ogot:

The Man, His Fellow Travellers and His Commitment to an Idea

To tell the story of a past so as to portray an inevitable destiny is, for humankind, a need as universal as toolmaking. To that extent, we may say that a human being is, by nature, historicus.¹

This issue of the *CODESRIA Bulletin* is dedicated to the memory of Prof. Bethwell Allan Ogot, his commitment to the idea of the authenticity of African history, and indeed ‘the African in history’, as the above quote aptly suggests. In this commitment, Prof. Ogot was accompanied by fellow travellers, colleagues whose corpus of work laid the foundation for reworlding the world from an African standpoint by centring its history and intellectual traditions.² That is the reason why a tribute to Amadou-Mahtar M’Bow, Prof. B. A. Ogot’s fellow traveller has been republished in this issue. The scholarship of Prof. Ogot and of his generation contributed enormously to building institutions and nurturing knowledge ecosystems through which subsequent generations of African historians—and indeed, social scientists—have come to blossom.

In search of a recommitment to Prof. Ogot’s ideals, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) in partnership with the Department of History, Archaeology and Political Studies at Kenyatta University (HAPS-KU) has convened a conference in Kisumu City in his honour. Titled *The Indelible Footprints of B. A. Ogot on the Sands of Time³: History, Method and Knowledge Production in Africa*, the conference, which takes place from 21 to 23 September 2026, aims to memorialise his work and reflect on the future of the discipline, not just in Kenya but in Africa as a whole. It is self-evident why we chose to dedicate a conference in honour of Prof. Ogot, but there is no harm in reiterating the reason.

Born in 1929 in Gem, in what is today Siaya County in Kenya, Prof. Bethwell Allan Ogot (1929–30 January 2025) lived an illustrious life, becoming an accomplished pioneering academic and renowned

intellectual. When he passed away on 30 January 2025, he was one of Africa’s most celebrated historians, with numerous accolades to his name. That more than a year and a half has passed since his interment at Yala with no African institution formally crowning his achievements with a memorial conference has been a glaring omission that CODESRIA and HAPS-KU now seek to fill.

Prof. Ogot was nurtured and matured in the same tradition that gave us some of Africa’s most innovative thinkers. He was a fellow traveller with illustrious historians like the late Joseph Ki-Zerbo from Burkina Faso, Jacob Ade Ajayi from Nigeria, A. Hampate Ba of Mali and Adu Boahen from Ghana. Beyond this small circle of Africa’s founding historians are many other luminaries, among them Bernard Magubane and Archie Mafeje. These two are particularly relevant because their interventions changed how we looked at the notion of ‘tribe’ or the question of ‘social change’ in anthropology.⁴ Vansina adroitly sketches out the vibrant debate in ‘the roaring sixties’ among Africanists in the US and Europe to find reliable sources that met the threshold for legitimising non-written sources.⁵ But in Africa this agenda was coupled with an even more immediate demand, the overall struggle to establish institutions and facilitate the teaching of African history as a discipline that gave value to our humanity. This was the consuming preoccupation of those we describe here as fellow travellers with whom Prof. Ogot ‘broke bread’, to reiterate the title of one of Archie Mafeje’s articles. There were others, perhaps too many to mention here, with whom Ogot broke bread in less cordial ways: his former colleague at the University of Nairobi, Okot p’Bitek, whom he thought too frivolous, or, later, Yoweri Museveni, whom he considered the perfect reincarnation of the Greek youth Narkissos, from whom the word narcissism draws its meaning.

Within this group, Prof. Ogot distinguished himself not just as a leading historian seeking to reconstruct African history based on sources that his own teachers and mentors doubted could be legitimate, but, when the time came, as the leader of the team. For all of them, their work and collective intellectual commitments intervened in the hostile and often racist debate that questioned whether Africa had a history, or in contexts filled with Eurocentric concepts that rendered African historical agency an appendage of European history. It was not just a context or debate about history, it was an environment that doubted the humanity of Africans and reduced them to, at best, sub-human status.

The standard measure of what qualified as history was always imported from European history, while any contradictions that challenged this measure were erased for the purpose of establishing the assumption that Africa had no history. Above all, the debate hived off portions of African territory and reassigned them to cartographies that were dubiously invented based on the assumption that there was a contraption named sub-Saharan Africa. As a result, any traces of achievement by African civilisations were likewise co-opted and transferred to non-African identities. Not only did such a reassignment constitute a colonising project before formal colonialism but it also set the agenda for the work that pioneering African historians like K. O. Dike had to undertake to rescue the continent's history.

Prof. Ogot, working independently of the Belgian historian Jan Vansina, found and adopted a unique and innovative way of addressing the Eurocentric and racist dismissal of Africans and their history. The basic argument on which this dismissal was based was the lack of written documents. Documents, as E. H. Carr had previously characterized nineteenth century fetishism of facts, were "the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of facts."⁶ It was assumed that documents did not just establish that an event occurred, they also indicated when it occurred, thus enabling the establishment of chronology. Ogot instead referred to oral traditions as sources of history. It is a no-brainer that oral traditions were an alternative source of history, because so much written history has an oral pedigree before it is documented. To elevate written sources into the only form that a historian can reference as a source is to dismiss the oral pedigree that give way to documentation. Documents, for Ogot, were not the ark of the Covenant in the temple of facts. By expanding the range of admissible sources, Ogot and his fellow travellers forced a change in thinking, to the extent that an agreement emerged that not only were oral

sources legitimate but that 'at least [they] were fully the responsibility of historians'.⁷ Although Ogot's work on the Southern Luo was only published only in 1967, Vansina confirms that the results of Ogot's work were already known in 1961.⁸

Through this approach, Ogot and his fellow travellers transformed the discipline. They challenged colonial historiography while establishing African-centred approaches to writing history. His pioneering work demonstrated that Africa possessed rich historical traditions long before the advent of European colonialism, which contributed significantly to the decolonisation of historical knowledge. While the agenda of decoloniality had yet to acquire this vocabulary, his extensive scholarship did what the vocabulary has only more recently caught up with. While his entry point was to reconstruct the history of the Southern Luo, his emphasis on the possibilities offered by oral traditions as sources of history, and his reflections on the experience of nationalism and state formation, led to the emergence of an African historiography that remains influential in universities across the world. His numerous publications, too many to dare a full citation here, and the broad breadth of thematic issues covered, continue to shape contemporary historical research and teaching globally.

Beyond scholarship, Ogot provided support to the Kenyan nationalist struggles, served with distinction as a university administrator, contributed as a public intellectual and advocated for African cultural heritage. His debate with the late Prof. Ali Mazrui on reparations, published in the pages of local Kenyan newspapers in and around August 2005, captured the imagination of the reading public. At the policy level, Ogot's persuasion was nationalist in orientation. He was less enamoured by the radical Marxist politics of the time and, in the words of a keen observer, appeared 'stand-offish', almost overtly looking down on radical 'progressive upstarts'. When colleagues and former students characterised him as a petty bourgeois academic, a label he grudgingly accepted, he nevertheless wondered why they found it necessary to minimise him as 'petty' instead of simply as 'bourgeois'. That such criticism of Prof. Ogot came from his students and colleagues and that his response was this humorous, is a demonstration of the mentor he was to generations of historians and leaders in academic institutions. He laid the intellectual foundations for the growth of professional historical studies in Kenya, in East Africa and across the African continent. He was the founder and President

of the Historical Association of Kenya (HAK)—a platform that convened historians in Kenya and the region. The HAK led publishing initiatives and ran, for a period, the *Kenya Historical Review*, in which groundbreaking work on African history was published. By the time he retired as head of the HAK, his footprints on the story of the reconstruction of Kenyan history had become indelible.

Prof. B. A. Ogot's imprint on CODESRIA was indirect. This was unlike Joseph Ki-Zerbo or Ali Mazrui, who became life members of CODESRIA at the 30th Anniversary celebrations in 2003 and published in the Council's platforms several times. Instead, Prof. Ogot's influence within the community of scholarship in CODESRIA was felt through his role as President of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa—a role he accepted following the groundbreaking support extended to the community of African historians under the leadership of Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow (1921–2024), the first African Director-General of UNESCO. We republish Amy Niang's tribute to Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow in this issue to provide context.

To begin with, the agenda and vision of the historians associated with the UNESCO project also influenced the shape of CODESRIA's own agenda. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, for instance, remained a strong pillar for CODESRIA and spoke at the 13th Triennial CODESRIA General Assembly in Rabat, Morocco in 2011; Joseph Ki-Zerbo was a life member of the Council and published extensively with CODESRIA. Many other historians associated with the General History of Africa project also played a key role in the Association of African Historians, whose scientific publication, *Afrika Zamani*, CODESRIA supported until 2020, when it was formally returned to the association. As President of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a *General History of Africa*, a magnificent series of books that represent the best of African historical thinking, Ogot presided over the publication of volumes that brought together and were edited by contributors who affirmed the existence of a vibrant community of scholarship in Africa. The UNESCO project, which initially published eight volumes, has recently launched three more volumes under the leadership of, and with the participation of scholars associated with, the Council.

So much has been accomplished in the service and work of Prof. Ogot and his fellow travellers. The outstanding challenge for the current generation is to redouble its efforts and consolidate the institutions

through which Africa's knowledge project needs to be anchored. This is precisely because old challenges that had been settled are re-emerging in new ways. Revisionist claims regarding the benefits of colonialism and value of empire abound; knowledge institutions that Prof. Ogot and his generation helped build are either functionally struggling or have collapsed; universities across the continent operate under stress, and are unable to provide the kind of infrastructure capable of prosecuting Africa's case in a world that is quietly embracing parochial nationalisms. The emergence and adoption of AI, while potentially enabling the globalisation of African knowledges, comes with new marginalising tendencies that, if not intellectually confronted, may exploit, erase and ultimately extinguish Africa's historical legacies by reintroducing new Eurocentric narratives. This generation needs to amplify its efforts to restore Africa's intellectual agency against the distortions emerging from postcolonial historiography.

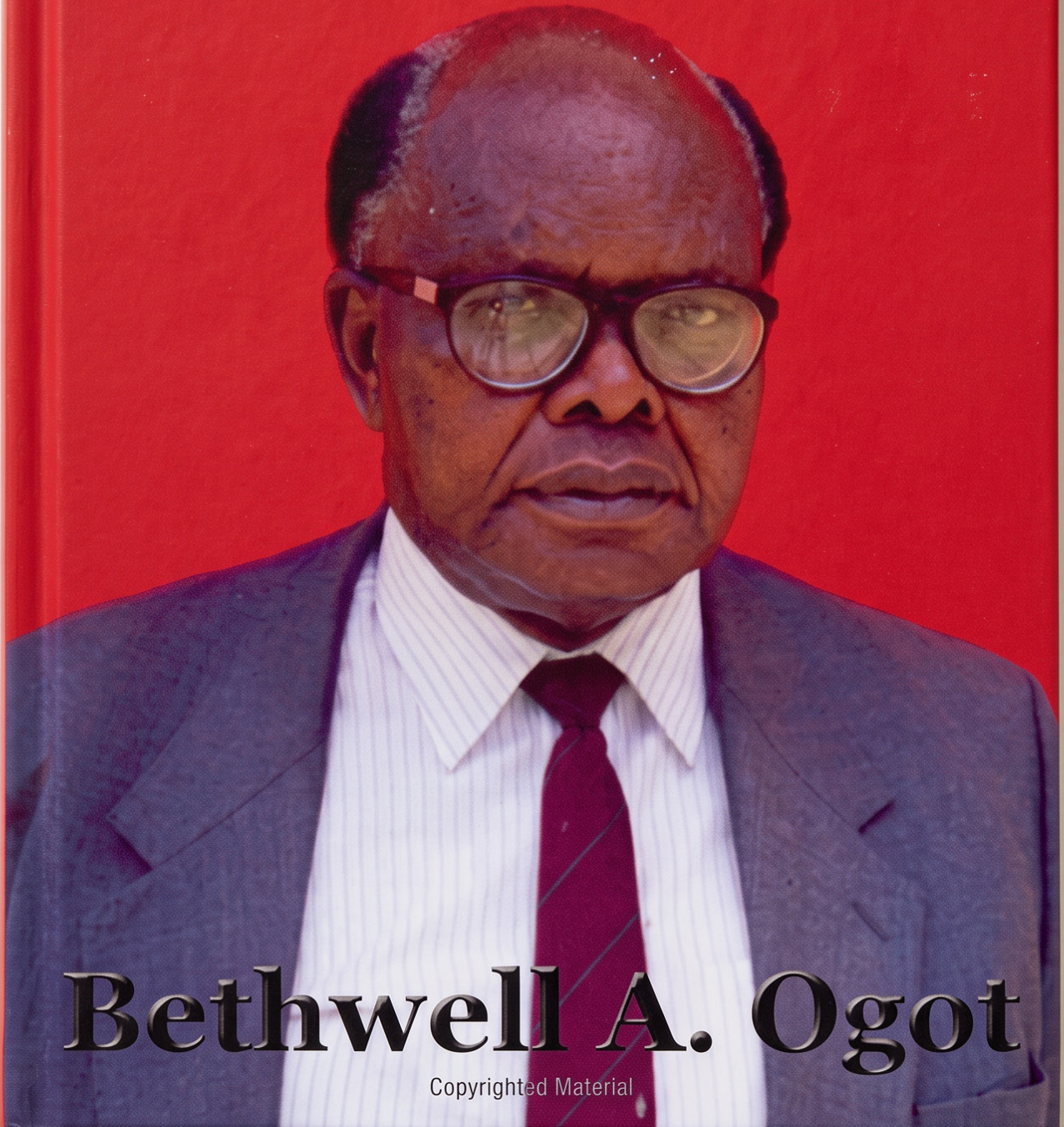
Notes

1. B. A. Ogot, 2005, *History as Destiny and History as Knowledge: Being Reflections on the Problems of Historicity and Historiography*, Kisumu: Anyange Press, p. 8.
2. The notion of 'Fellow-travellers' is borrowed from the title of Archie Mafeje, 1995, 'Theory of Democracy and the African Discourse: Breaking Bread with my Fellow-travellers,' in Chole, E. and Ibrahim, J. eds, *Democratisation Processes in Africa: Problems and Prospects*, Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
3. This theme draws, in part, from B. A. Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time*, Kisumu: Anyange Press, 2003.
4. See Bernard Magubane, 1971, 'A Critical Look at Indices Used in the Study of Social Change in Colonial Africa,' in *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 12, no. 4/5, pp. 419-445 and Archie Mafeje, 1971, 'The Ideology of 'Tribalism' in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 9, Issue 2, pp. 253 – 261.
5. See chapter 6 of Jan Vansina, 1994, *Living with Africa*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
6. E. H. Carr, 1969, *What is History?* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p. 15.
7. See Jan Vansina, 1994, *Living with Africa*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, p. 127.
8. See Ogot, 1967, *History of the Southern Luo, Vol. 1: Migration and Settlement, 1500-1900*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House. See the citation from Jan Vansina, 1994, *Living with Africa*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, p. 277.

Godwin R. Murunga
Executive Secretary,
CODESRIA

An Autobiography

My Footprints on the Sands of Time



Bethwell A. Ogot

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Éditorial

Bethwell A. Ogot : l'homme, ses compagnons de route et son dévouement à une idée

Raconter le passé de manière à y inscrire un destin inéluctable constitue, pour l'humanité, un besoin aussi universel que la fabrication d'outils. En ce sens, l'on peut affirmer que l'être humain est, par nature, historicus.

Le présent numéro du Bulletin du CODESRIA est dédié à la mémoire du professeur Bethwell Allan Ogot, à son dévouement à l'idée d'une histoire africaine authentique, et plus encore de « l'Africain dans l'histoire », comme le suggère si judicieusement la citation ci-dessus. Dans cet engagement, le professeur Ogot fut accompagné par des compagnons de route, des collègues dont le corpus d'œuvres a jeté les bases d'une remondialisation du monde d'un point de vue africain, en plaçant son histoire et ses traditions intellectuelles au centre de la réflexion. C'est la raison pour laquelle un hommage rendu à Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, compagnon de route du professeur B. A. Ogot, est republié dans ce numéro. Les travaux scientifiques du professeur Ogot et de sa génération ont grandement contribué à l'édification d'institutions et au développement d'écosystèmes du savoir au sein desquels les générations ultérieures d'historiens africains — et, à vrai dire, de chercheurs en sciences sociales — ont pu s'épanouir.

Soucieux de renouveler l'engagement envers les idéaux du professeur Ogot, le Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique (CODESRIA), en partenariat avec le département d'histoire, d'archéologie et d'études politiques de l'université Kenyatta (HAPS-KU), a organisé un colloque en son honneur à Kisumu. Intitulé *L'empreinte indélébile de B. A. Ogot dans les annales du temps : Histoire, méthodologie et production des savoirs en Afrique*, ce colloque, qui se déroule du 21 au 23 septembre 2026, vise à commémorer son œuvre et à mener une réflexion sur l'avenir de la discipline, non seulement au Kenya mais à l'échelle du continent tout entier. Les raisons qui nous conduisent à consacrer un colloque au professeur Ogot sont évidentes; il n'est toutefois pas superflu de les rappeler.

Né en 1929 à Gem, dans l'actuel comté de Siaya au Kenya, le professeur Bethwell Allan Ogot (1929 – 30 janvier 2025) a mené une vie remarquable, s'imposant comme un universitaire accompli, pionnier dans son domaine, et un intellectuel de renom. Au moment de son décès, le 30 janvier 2025, il figurait parmi les historiens les plus renommés d'Afrique, fort de multiples distinctions à son actif. Le fait que plus d'un an et demi se soit écoulé depuis son inhumation à Yala sans qu'aucune institution africaine n'ait formellement couronné ses accomplissements par un colloque mémoriel constituait un manquement flagrant, que le CODESRIA et le HAPS-KU s'emploient désormais à combler.

Le professeur Ogot a été formé au sein de la même tradition intellectuelle qui a donné à l'Afrique certains de ses penseurs les plus novateurs. Il fut le compagnon de route d'historiens illustres tels que les regrettés Joseph Ki-Zerbo du Burkina Faso, Jacob Ade Ajayi du Nigeria, Amadou Hampâté Bâ du Mali et Albert Adu Boahen du Ghana. Au-delà de ce cercle restreint d'historiens fondateurs de la discipline en Afrique figurent de nombreuses autres figures éminentes, parmi lesquelles Bernard Magubane et Archie Mafeje. Ces deux derniers ont joué un rôle particulièrement important, tant leurs interventions ont bouleversé notre approche de la notion de « tribu » ou de la question du « changement social » en anthropologie. Vansina esquisse avec adresse le débat vibrant qui a animé « les rugissantes années soixante » parmi les africanistes en Europe et aux États-Unis, engagés dans la recherche de sources fiables répondant aux critères de légitimation des sources non écrites. Mais en Afrique, ce programme s'articulait toutefois à une exigence encore plus immédiate : la lutte globale pour fonder des institutions et promouvoir l'enseignement

d'une histoire africaine érigée en discipline valorisant notre commune humanité. Telle fut la préoccupation absolue de ceux que nous qualifions ici de compagnons de route, avec lesquels le professeur Ogot a « rompu le pain », pour reprendre le titre de l'un des articles d'Archie Mafeje. Il y en eut d'autres, sans doute trop nombreux pour être tous cités ici, avec lesquels Ogot rompit le pain de manière moins cordiale : son ancien collègue de l'Université de Nairobi, Okot p'Bitek, qu'il jugeait trop frivole, ou, plus tard, Yoweri Museveni, en qui il voyait la réincarnation parfaite du jeune Grec Narkissos, dont le terme narcissisme tire son origine.

Au sein de ce groupe, le professeur Ogot s'est distingué non seulement comme un historien de premier plan, soucieux de reconstruire l'histoire africaine à partir de sources dont ses propres enseignants et mentors contestaient la légitimité, mais aussi, le moment venu, comme le chef de file de cette équipe. Pour chacun d'eux, leurs travaux et leurs engagements intellectuels collectifs constituaient une intervention directe au cœur d'un débat hostile et souvent raciste qui mettait en doute l'existence même d'une histoire africaine, ou s'inscrivaient dans des contextes saturés de concepts eurocentriques réduisant la capacité d'action historique de l'Afrique à un simple appendice de l'histoire européenne. Il ne s'agissait pas simplement d'un contexte ou d'un débat sur l'histoire ; c'était un environnement qui contestait l'humanité même des Africains et les ravalait, au mieux, au statut de sous-hommes.

Le critère standard déterminant ce qui relevait de l'histoire était invariablement importé de l'histoire européenne, tandis que toute contradiction susceptible de remettre en cause cette norme se voyait effacée, dans le but d'asseoir le postulat selon lequel l'Afrique n'avait pas d'histoire. Par-dessus tout, ce débat a amputé des pans entiers du territoire africain pour les réassigner à des cartographies inventées de toutes pièces, fondées sur la supposition qu'il existait un artifice nommé « Afrique subsaharienne ». En conséquence, la moindre trace de réussite des civilisations africaines se trouvait ainsi cooptée et attribuée à des identités non africaines. Non seulement une telle réassignation constituait un projet de colonisation antérieur au colonialisme formel, mais elle a également dicté le programme des travaux que des historiens africains pionniers, à l'instar de K. O. Dike, ont dû entreprendre pour sauver l'histoire du continent.

Le professeur Ogot, œuvrant indépendamment de l'historien belge Jan Vansina, a trouvé et adopté une

approche unique et novatrice pour contrer le rejet eurocentrique et raciste des Africains et de leur histoire. L'argument fondamental sur lequel reposait ce rejet était l'absence de documents écrits. Les documents, comme E. H. Carr avait déjà caractérisé le fétichisme des faits au XIX^e siècle, constituaient « l'Arche d'alliance dans le temple des faits ». Il était postulé que les documents n'établissaient pas seulement l'occurrence d'un événement, mais qu'ils en indiquaient également la date, permettant ainsi d'asseoir une chronologie. Ogot fit au contraire le choix de se référer aux traditions orales comme sources de l'histoire. Il est évident que les traditions orales constituent une source historique alternative, dans la mesure où une part considérable de l'histoire écrite possède une filiation orale avant d'être consignée par écrit. Ériger les sources écrites en unique référentiel admissible pour l'historien revient à nier la filiation orale qui a précisément rendu possible la documentation. Pour Ogot, les documents ne constituaient pas l'Arche d'alliance dans le temple des faits. En élargissant l'éventail des sources admissibles, Ogot et ses compagnons de route ont imposé un changement de paradigme, au point qu'un consensus s'est dégagé pour reconnaître non seulement la légitimité des sources orales, mais aussi le fait qu'« elles relevaient, à tout le moins, pleinement de la responsabilité des historiens ». Bien que les travaux d'Ogot sur les Luo du Sud n'aient été publiés qu'en 1967, Vansina confirme que les résultats de ses recherches étaient déjà connus dès 1961.

Par cette approche, Ogot et ses compagnons de route ont transformé la discipline. Ils ont contesté l'historiographie coloniale tout en instaurant des démarches afrocentrées dans l'écriture de l'histoire. Ses travaux pionniers ont démontré que l'Afrique possédait de riches traditions historiques bien avant l'avènement du colonialisme européen, contribuant ainsi de manière significative à la décolonisation du savoir historique. Alors que le projet décolonial n'avait pas encore trouvé les mots pour désigner cette démarche, l'œuvre scientifique considérable d'Ogot mettait déjà en pratique ce que ce vocabulaire n'a commencé à conceptualiser que plus récemment. Si son point d'ancrage fut la reconstruction de l'histoire des Luo du Sud, l'accent qu'il a mis sur les potentialités offertes par les traditions orales comme sources de l'histoire, ainsi que ses réflexions sur l'expérience du nationalisme et de la formation de l'État, ont donné naissance à une historiographie africaine qui demeure aujourd'hui influente dans les universités du monde entier. Ses nombreuses publications, trop vastes pour être intégralement citées ici, et la large envergure

des thématiques abordées continuent de structurer globalement la recherche et l'enseignement historiques contemporains.

Outre sa production scientifique, Ogot s'investit dans le soutien aux luttes nationalistes kenyanes, marqua de son empreinte la gestion universitaire en y exerçant de hautes responsabilités, s'engagea pleinement en tant qu'intellectuel public et se fit l'ardent défenseur du patrimoine culturel africain. La controverse intellectuelle qui l'opposa au regretté professeur Ali Mazrui au sujet des réparations, relayée par la presse locale kenyane aux alentours du mois d'août 2005, marqua durablement les esprits des lecteurs. Sur le plan des orientations générales, la sensibilité politique d'Ogot était fondamentalement nationaliste. Guère séduit par la mouvance marxiste radicale de l'époque, il adoptait, selon les termes d'un observateur perspicace, une posture « distante », trahissant un certain dédain pour ceux qu'il percevait comme de jeunes « parvenus progressistes ». Lorsque des collègues et d'anciens étudiants le qualifiaient d'universitaire petit-bourgeois — une étiquette qu'il acceptait à contre-cœur —, il s'étonnait néanmoins que l'on jugeât nécessaire de le rabaisser au rang de « petit » plutôt que de le définir simplement comme « bourgeois ». Le fait qu'une telle critique à l'égard du professeur Ogot émanât de ses propres étudiants et collègues, et que sa réponse fit preuve d'un tel humour, témoigne de la nature du mentor qu'il fut pour des générations d'historiens et de dirigeants d'institutions académiques. Il a jeté les bases intellectuelles de l'essor des études historiques professionnelles au Kenya, en Afrique de l'Est et à l'échelle du continent africain. Il fut le fondateur et le président de la Historical Association of Kenya (HAK) — une plateforme qui a fédéré les historiens du Kenya et de la région. La HAK a impulsé des initiatives éditoriales majeures et a dirigé, pendant un certain temps, la Kenya Historical Review, au sein de laquelle des travaux novateurs sur l'histoire africaine ont été publiés. Au moment où il s'est retiré de la présidence de la HAK, son empreinte sur le récit de la reconstruction de l'histoire kenyane était devenue indélébile.

L'empreinte du professeur B. A. Ogot sur le CODESRIA fut indirecte. Sa trajectoire différait, à cet égard, de celles de Joseph Ki-Zerbo ou d'Ali Mazrui, qui devinrent membres à vie du CODESRIA lors des célébrations du 30^e anniversaire en 2003 et publièrent à plusieurs reprises sur les plateformes du Conseil. L'influence du professeur Ogot au sein de la communauté scientifique du CODESRIA s'est plutôt

fait sentir à travers son rôle de président du Comité scientifique international pour la rédaction d'une Histoire générale de l'Afrique, une fonction qu'il accepta dans le sillage du soutien novateur apporté à la communauté des historiens africains sous la direction d'Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow (1921-2024), le premier **directeur général africain** de l'UNESCO. Nous republions dans ce numéro l'hommage d'Amy Niang à Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow afin d'en éclairer le contexte.

Pour commencer, le programme et la vision des historiens associés au projet de l'UNESCO ont profondément influencé les orientations du CODESRIA. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, par exemple, est demeuré un pilier solide du CODESRIA et a pris la parole lors de la 13^e Assemblée générale triennale du Conseil à Rabat, au Maroc, en 2011 ; Joseph Ki-Zerbo était un membre à vie du Conseil et a abondamment publié sous l'égide du CODESRIA. De nombreux autres historiens associés au projet de l'Histoire générale de l'Afrique ont également joué un rôle clé au sein de l'Association des historiens africains, dont la publication scientifique, Afrika Zamani, a été soutenue par le CODESRIA jusqu'en 2020, date à laquelle elle a été formellement rétrocédée à l'association. En sa qualité de président du Comité scientifique international pour la rédaction de l'Histoire générale de l'Afrique, Ogot a présidé à la publication d'une magistrale collection d'ouvrages représentant la quintessence de la pensée historique africaine, qui rassemblaient des contributions éditées par des chercheurs affirmant l'existence d'une communauté scientifique africaine dynamique. Le projet de l'UNESCO, qui avait initialement publié huit volumes, a récemment lancé trois volumes supplémentaires sous la direction de chercheurs associés au Conseil et avec leur participation.

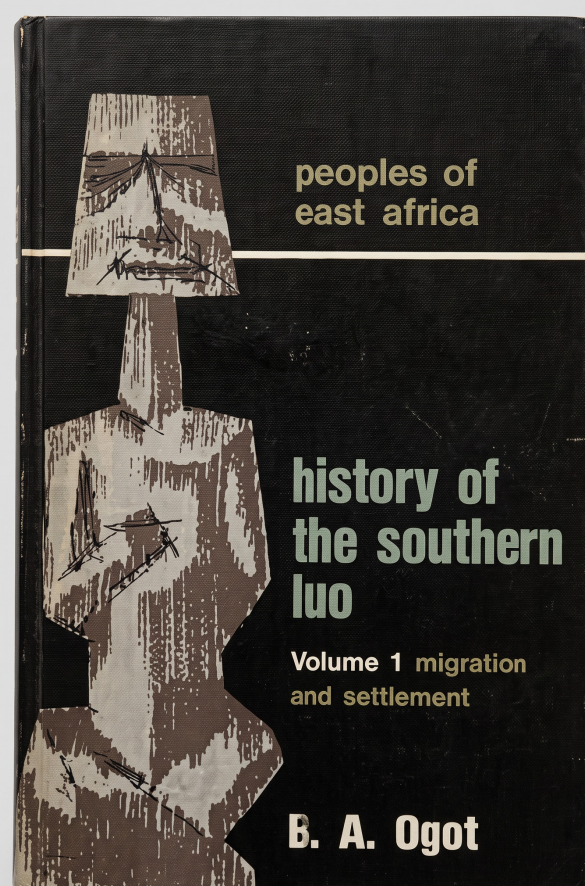
Tant de choses ont été accomplies grâce à l'œuvre du professeur Ogot et de ses compagnons de route. Le défi majeur qui incombe à la génération actuelle est de redoubler d'efforts et de consolider les institutions au sein desquelles le projet de connaissance africain doit s'ancrer. Cela s'explique précisément par le fait que d'anciens défis que l'on croyait résolus réémergent sous des formes inédites. Les thèses révisionnistes vantant les bienfaits du colonialisme et la valeur de l'empire abondent ; les institutions du savoir que le professeur Ogot et sa génération ont contribué à bâtir sont soit en crise fonctionnelle, soit effondrées ; les universités à travers le continent fonctionnent sous forte pression et se trouvent incapables de fournir le type d'infrastructures aptes à défendre la cause de

l'Afrique dans un monde qui renoue discrètement avec des nationalismes de clocher. Bien qu'elle puisse potentiellement favoriser la mondialisation des savoirs africains, l'émergence et l'adoption de l'IA s'accompagnent de nouvelles tendances à la marginalisation qui, si elles ne sont pas combattues sur le plan intellectuel, risquent d'exploiter, d'effacer et, à terme, d'anéantir l'héritage historique de l'Afrique en réintroduisant de nouveaux récits eurocentriques. Cette génération doit redoubler d'efforts pour restaurer l'autonomie intellectuelle de l'Afrique face aux distorsions issues de l'historiographie postcoloniale.

Endnotes

1. B. A. Ogot, 2005, *History as Destiny and History as Knowledge: Being Reflections on the Problems of Historicity and Historiography*, Kisumu: Anyange Press, p. 8.
2. The notion of 'Fellow-travellers' is borrowed from the title of Archie Mafeje, 1995, 'Theory of Democracy and the African Discourse: Breaking Bread with my Fellow-travellers,' in Chole, E. and Ibrahim, J. eds, *Democratisation Processes in Africa: Problems and Prospects*, Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
3. This theme draws, in part, from B. A. Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time*, Kisumu: Anyange Press, 2003.
4. See Bernard Magubane, 1971, 'A Critical Look at Indices Used in the Study of Social Change in Colonial Africa,' in *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 12, no. 4/5, pp. 419-445 and Archie Mafeje, 1971, 'The Ideology of "Tribalism" in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 9, Issue 2, pp. 253 – 261.
5. See chapter 6 of Jan Vansina, 1994, *Living with Africa*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
6. E. H. Carr, 1969, *What is History?* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p. 15.
7. See Jan Vansina, 1994, *Living with Africa*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, p. 127
8. See Ogot, 1967, *History of the Southern Luo, Vol. 1: Migration and Settlement, 1500-1900*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House. See the citation from Jan Vansina, 1994, *Living with Africa*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, p. 277.

Godwin R. Murunga
Secrétaire exécutif,
CODESRIA



Family Tribute

When Prof. Bethwell Allan Ogot wrote his autobiography, *My Footprints in the Sands of Time*, he asked himself a fundamental question: What had he to offer and to whom? He concluded that his experience had been confined almost entirely to the academic community, mainly in education and social sciences, specifically history. At the same time, the circumstances of his life had exposed him to a wide variety of cultural and political settings.

Bethwell Ogot was born on 3 August 1929, in Gem, Siaya County, to Paulo and Rhoda Awino Opiche. He was the third child, after the late Abigael Agina and the late Lorna Stella Auma, and was followed by the late Professor Jasper Antippa Okelo. He first attended Luanda School, founded by his father in 1920. In 1939, his mother died, completely changing his attitude to life. He and his brother, who was then barely a month old, were taken in and looked after by their elder sister, Abigael, for two years. In 1943, he continued his education at Ambira School, where his classmates included Isaac Omolo Okero, a former cabinet minister and MP for Gem.

Joining Maseno School in 1946, Bethwell found himself in a remarkable class, which included five future cabinet ministers—Isaac Omolo Okero, William Odongo Omamo, Burudi Nabwera, Samuel Onyango Ayodo and Joseph Odera Jowi—and two future professors at the University of Nairobi, Thomas R. Odhiambo and Erastus Muga. After Maseno, he joined Makerere College (today Makerere University) in 1950, graduating in 1953 with a Diploma in Education, specialising in mathematics and history. His first posting was to Alliance High School in January 1954 to teach mathematics.

Ogot enrolled at the University of St Andrew's in October 1955, on a Kenya Government Bursary, for a general degree, with mathematics as his main subject. In his third year, he changed his academic focus from mathematics to history. He extended his stay at

Madara Ogot*

University of Nairobi,
Kenya

St Andrews by one year to complete a combined MA Honours Degree in Philosophy and History, graduating in 1959. In October of the same year, Ogot married Grace Emily Akinyi Nyanduga. He immediately took up the post of Tutorial Fellow in the Department of History at Makerere College.

Together, they had four children—David, Milton, Madara and Grace; three daughters-in-law—Eileen, Sally and Atieno; one son-in-law, Peter Baridi; ten grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

In 1960, when not buried in his academic work, Ogot consulted for Kenyan leaders at the Lancaster House Constitution Conference, especially Tom Mboya. In 1964, he joined the History Department of University College Nairobi (today University of Nairobi), becoming chair of the department and promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1965, rising to full Professor and Department Head in 1966 and Dean of the Faculty of Arts in 1967. In 1970, University College Nairobi became the University of Nairobi. The Senate elected Prof. Ogot as its first (and last elected) Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, a position he served in until 1973.

Prof. Ogot was instrumental in forming the Kenya Historical Association in 1966, was elected its first president, and was re-elected annually until 1986. The association's main aim was to advance the study and teaching of history and, in so doing, to increase public interest and awareness in all aspects of the subject.

Presidents Kenyatta, Nyerere and Obote appointed Prof. Ogot as the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs Secretary-General in 1965. Headquartered in Nairobi, the institute founded the East African Publishing House to promote African authorship, with Prof. Ogot as chair. It also established the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation to publish school textbooks, with Ogot as its first Secretary.

There was discussion in 1967 among Luo leaders about establishing a formidable, unified Luo football team from the two existing clubs, Luo Union and Luo

Sports Club. Five prominent Luos—Prof. Ogot, Tom Mboya, Samuel Ayan, Joab Omino and Zach Ramogo—were tasked with coming up with a new name. Gor Mahia Football Club, named after the legendary Luo leader and warrior, was unveiled on 17 February 1968, and won the Kenya National Football League in the same year. Prof. Ogot later also served as chair of the club in the 1970s. During his tenure, he was officially invited by Manchester United for a weeklong visit to the club, in return for which he remained a die-hard Man U fan to the very end.

Prof. Ogot served various organisations, including as a member of the East African Examinations Council (1967–1974) and the National Commission for UNESCO (1968–1980), on the Executive Council of the British Institute in Eastern Africa (1969–1978), as a Trustee of the National Museums of Kenya (1969–1977), and as a Member of the East African Legislative Assembly (1974–1977).

In 1983, Prof. Ogot shifted his academic base to Kenyatta University. For the next two decades, he also served as the Chairman of the Board of three strategic state corporations: Kenya Posts and Telecommunications Corporation (1983–1986), Kenya Railways Corporation (1986–1988) and the National Oil Corporation (1988–2001).

At the international level, Prof. Ogot was appointed to the UNESCO International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of the General History of Africa, in 1971. The committee had been eight years in the making, starting with the approval of the project by the Organisation of African Unity in 1963 and approval by UNESCO in 1964. The committee had thirty-nine members from around the world. Over the next twenty years, they completed the eight volumes of the *General History of Africa*. Prof. Ogot served as their president from 1977 to 1985.

Prof. Ogot was elected to the Executive Board of UNESCO (1987–1991) and was its Vice President from 1989 to 1991. In 1991, he was elected President of the UNESCO General Conference, the highest decision-making organ of UNESCO, a post he held until 1993, when he was awarded the UNESCO Gold Medal for Service, its highest award. During his term as president, Prof. Ogot notes in his autobiography, this was his closest encounter with world power. ‘I interacted and discussed international problems on equal terms with Queens, Presidents, Foreign Ministers, Ministers of Education, Ambassadors and Directors-General and Secretaries-General of international organisations.’

In 1991, Prof. Ogot joined Maseno University College (elevated to a full-fledged university in 2000), where he founded and directed the Institute of Research and Post-Graduate Studies until 2003. During this period, he oversaw the construction of the new institute’s library building, which was soon stocked with over 12,000 volumes, many of which had to be moved to the main library due to lack of space. His time at Maseno inspired him to revisit his first love, the history of the River-Lake Nilotes, or, to use a term he coined, the ‘Jii-speaking Peoples’, who include: the Luo of Kenya; the Acholi, Padhola, Paluo, Alur, Langi and Kumam of Uganda; the Alur of Eastern Congo; and the Naath, Pari, Jieng and Collo of South Sudan. In 1996, he published *The Jii-Speaking Peoples of Eastern Africa*, where he compressed and updated the history he had first published in 1967, *The History of the Southern Luo*, with more emphasis on economic change. In the new book, he challenged the myths that in East Africa change resulted from external trade and that East African societies were divided into two compartments of ‘nomadic pastoralists’, stereotyped as conservative or warlike, and ‘sedentary agriculturalists’, deemed docile and receptive to change. Instead, he demonstrated the paramountcy of internal developments as determinants of social and economic change, and the integration of crop farming and animal husbandry, among many East African communities, including the Jii-speaking people.

Prof. Ogot became the first scholar from East and Central Africa to win the distinguished Africanist Award by the African Studies Association based in the United States, awarded to scholars worldwide who have contributed immensely to African studies. He received his award at the association’s annual meeting in Houston, Texas, in 2001. In their citation, the association stated:

while fostering, supporting, and encouraging scholarship of individuals across the world through his critical commitment to several significant institutions and organisations, Allan Ogot has remained a scholar of exceptional productivity, authoring hundreds of articles and books covering an extraordinary range of topics, most of them original contributions, virtually all of them stimulating to and challenging of young scholars.

In 2003, Prof. Ogot became Emeritus Professor of History of Maseno, a position he held until his passing in 2025. He immediately embarked on the task of writing the 912-page *History of the Luo-Speaking Peoples of Eastern Africa*, who are today concentrated in Southern Sudan, along the White Nile, the Bahr-el-Ghazal and

adjacent wetlands; North-West Uganda and adjacent areas between Lake Onekbonyo, the Victoria Nile and Lake Kyoga; South Eastern Ethiopia; and in Kenya and Tanzania around Lake Victoria. Published in 2009, the book has become the go-to reference on Jii-speakers. In 2007, the European Business Assembly of Oxford, which brings together European University Rectors and Vice Chancellors, business and industrial leaders, diplomats and civil and religious leaders, awarded him the prestigious International Socrates Award for his personal contribution to the intellectual development of modern society, at a colourful ceremony in London.

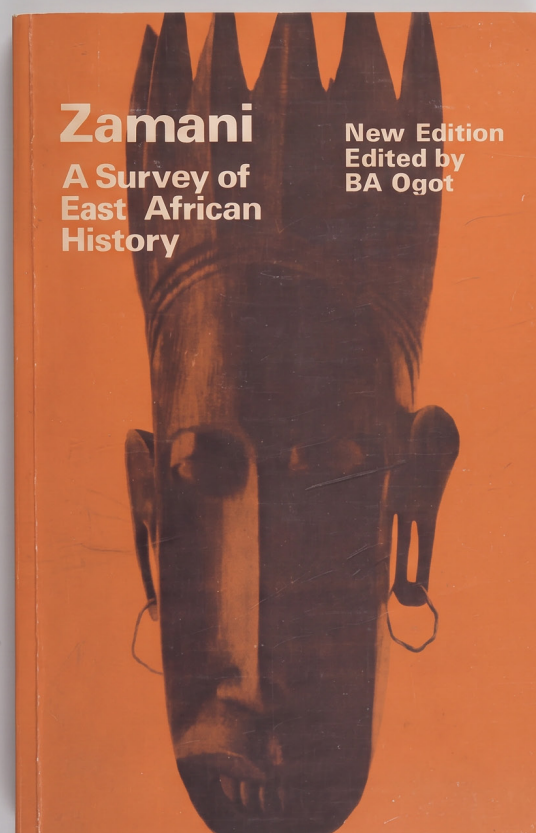
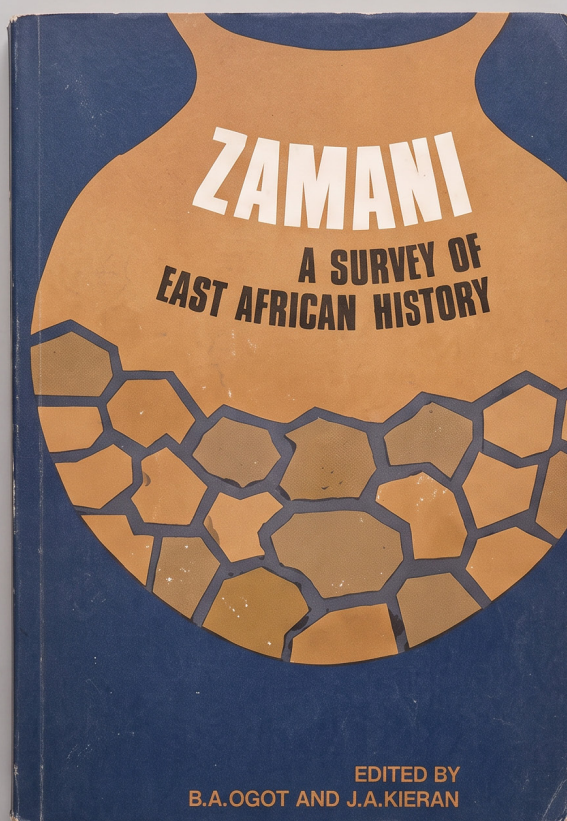
President Kibaki appointed Prof. Ogot Chancellor of Moi University from 2003 to 2013. During this period, he oversaw the formation of several university colleges, which were later upgraded to full-fledged universities: Chepkoiel, Garissa, Kabianga, Maasai Mara, Masinde Muliro, and Rongo.

Kenya's recent history in the context of the development histories of African towns and cities has been largely ignored. After concluding his chancellorship,

Prof. Ogot took up this challenge. He published *The History of Nairobi, 1899–2012* in 2020, *Mvita: The History of Mombasa 12th Century–2012* in 2023, and was finalising *The History of Kisumu 1901–2012*, a revised and expanded version of his earlier Kisumu history text.

An avid academic and writer, Prof. Ogot published 43 books and over 100 articles in refereed journals. His last two booklets, *Dholuo-English Dictionary* and *Odera Akang'o*, were published in 2025, when he was 95. He holds honorary Doctor of Letters degrees from Kenyatta, Moi, Maseno, Kabianga and Maasai Mara universities.

* **Professor Madara Ogot** is the Chief Executive Officer of the UbuntuNet Alliance for Research and Education Networks. He is also an author, and a Professor of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Nairobi, Kenya.



Condolence Message for Bethwell A. Ogot

It was with deep sorrow that I learned of the passing of one of Africa's foremost scholars, historians and Kenya's first Professor of History, Prof. Bethwell Allan Ogot.

Prof. Ogot will be eternally remembered for his immense contribution to African history, research methods and theory. His work, especially on the global stage, particularly in education, will have a lasting impact. His academic journey, both at Makerere and the University of Nairobi, was instrumental in the creation of the Institute of Development Studies and the Institute of African Studies, at a time when history and development studies were seen as lesser academic disciplines.

His time as Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academics and Dean of the School of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Nairobi stands as a testament to his leadership and the many achievements realised during his tenure. Prof. Ogot's contributions were not confined to Africa; his influence was felt globally, notably as the President of the International Scientific Committee for UNESCO's *General History of Africa*, which culminated in the publication of a comprehensive nine-volume history of Africa. He also served as a member of UNESCO's International Commission for the History of Humanity.

As we celebrate his life, we remember the pivotal roles he played, alongside scholars such as Prof. David Some, Prof. Mibey and Bob Wishitemi, in the founding of academic institutions like Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Narok University, Karatina University, Kabianga University, Rongo University College and Odera Akang'o Colleges, which

Peter Anyang' Nyong'o*

Kisumu County
Kenya

continue to shape the minds of students today. His tenure as Chancellor of Moi University was also marked by great success.

Prof. Ogot's contributions were not limited to academia. He played a vital role in the political sphere, particularly at the East African Legislative Assembly, where he represented Kenya with great dedication following his appointment by President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta.

Kenya, the Luo community and the people of Gem have lost an outstanding scholar and historian, whose legacy will be difficult to match. However, we take comfort in the many books and papers he authored, which will continue to inspire intellectual discourse among scholars, researchers and future generations.

As you take your final bow, Prof. Ogot, we salute your remarkable body of work, which has contributed immensely to Africa's intellectual independence and the study of human history. Your legacy will remain an enduring force for generations to come.

I had the privilege of visiting Prof. Ogot a few months ago at his home in Yala, where we engaged in rich discussions about the state of academia in Kenya today and the political challenges related to underdevelopment, which continued to concern him deeply. During our meeting, he graciously presented me with copies of his latest publications, *Dholuo-English Dictionary* and *Odera Akang'o*. I insisted on purchasing the books out of respect for his intellectual labour, and he, though reluctantly, honoured my gesture.

Fare thee well, Wuod Gem ...

* **Professor Peter Anyang' Nyong'o** is the Governor of Kisumu County, Kenya, and a distinguished scholar, author, and veteran politician whose career spans academia, public service, democratic governance, and national development.

Gratitude in Remembrance

Bethwell Ogot began lecturing in the Department of History of the University College, Nairobi in September 1964. At the time I was the Principal of Strathmore College, an A-level college in Nairobi. I had received my Master's degree from Harvard University and completed the required course work for my PhD but had not yet written my doctoral dissertation. Though not a member of the Department of History of the University College, I began to attend the weekly Wednesday seminars of the department at the invitation of my friend John Kieran, a history lecturer who knew of my interest in African history.

The weekly history seminars were active, engaging forums at which one of us would present a 'paper' for discussion. It was at one of the weekly seminars in late 1964 where I first met Bethwell Ogot and where we continued to meet and see each other.

In early 1966, Bethwell told me of his vision and wish to promote the foundation of a Kenya Historical Association. He had received a grant from the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs to cover the expenses of a national conference on African history, which he hoped might lead to the establishment of such an association. He asked me whether he could hold the conference at Strathmore College, to which I agreed. We began working closely together to prepare the agenda and logistics of the conference, which took place during the days of 17–20 April 1966. The conference attracted some seventy history teachers from secondary schools in Kenya. Professor Ogot gave the opening address, which was followed by numerous break-out sessions dealing with specific historical themes. The conference made numerous recommendations about revising the school history syllabus to

David Sperling*

Strathmore University,
Nairobi, Kenya

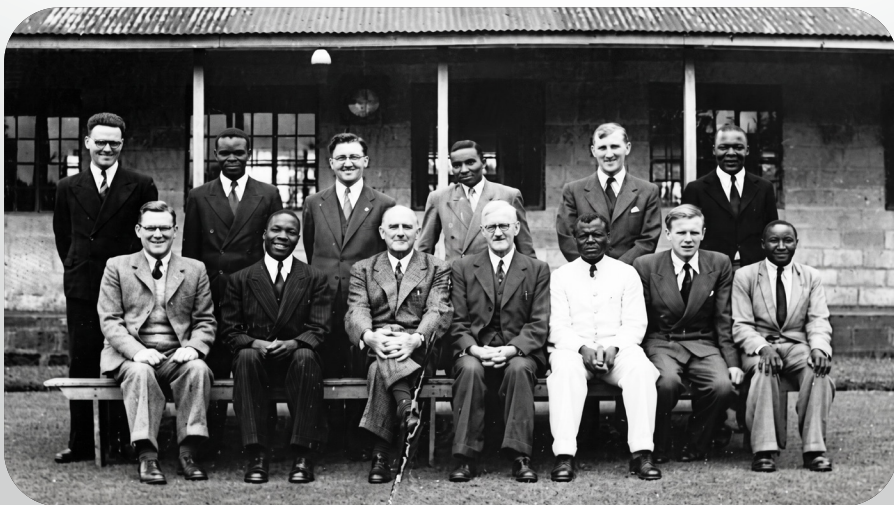
include a much higher proportion of precolonial African history. On the closing day, the meeting resolved to form the Historical Association of Kenya and Professor Bethwell was unanimously elected chair.

Many people know Professor Bethwell Ogot as the Chairman of the International Scientific Committee for the drafting of the eight-volume UNESCO *General History of Africa*, elected to that position by his fellow professors of history from the other countries of Africa. As can be seen from the above, Bethwell also had a deep concern for the study of history in his homeland and took specific actions to enhance the quality and extent of the teaching of the history of Kenya.

I was subsequently elected to be the Treasurer of the Historical Association of Kenya, which gave me the opportunity to meet Bethwell regularly. He encouraged me to complete my doctoral studies, which I did at his old school, the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London, before joining the staff of the Department of History of the University of Nairobi in 1988.

I had a memorable last meeting with Bethwell at his home in Gem.

* **Professor David Sperling** is a Research Professor at the Institute of Public Policy and Governance, Strathmore University. A historian and governance scholar, his research focuses on development, public policy, law, and governance in Africa.



Quest for Nationhood — A Tribute to Bethwell A. Ogot

With the passing of Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot, Kenya lost an intellectual giant—the greatest scholar of Kenyan history in our time.

He was also a towering figure in the global community of African historians, one of their pioneers, among the first to show the value of African scholarship, not least in his critical use of oral history to open up previously unexplored territories of the past.

Distortion of history

Ogot was a man of moral and political courage, a patriot. Throughout his life, he argued that Kenya's history had been distorted and its ethnic identities manipulated—first by the British and then by independent Kenya's politicians.

His courage lay in arguing, with evidence, that a more complicated history of Kenya's nationalism, its diverse heroes and struggles, was more unifying, more national, more truthful, than the conventional single-stranded story of the fight for freedom.

This heroic single-stranded story rested on a distorted history, the root of many of Kenya's present challenges.

Bethwell was not alone in his dismay at how Kenya had fared since independence. In his contribution to a book we helped to edit, *Ethnic Diversity and Economic Instability in Africa: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2012:111), he wrote:

At independence, political leaders promised material and political progress; they have delivered little more than crushing poverty and repression ... Independent Kenya's history has been characterized by poor governance, corruption, poverty, inequality, impunity and now chronic ethnic balkanization. Ethnic citizenship is still more powerful and more engulfing than national citizenship

John Lonsdale*
Trinity College,
Cambridge, UK

Hiroyuki Hino**
Kobe University
Japan

To some this will be too negative an assessment. Truth thrives on reasoned argument. So, we believe that most Kenyans would accept that although history cannot be undone, a critical look at a past may help to identify the origins of today's challenges and so chart a path towards a better future.

Roots of ethnicity-based politics

Ogot longed for the moral ethnicity of precolonial days:

'In the territory that became Kenya, there were no pure ethnic groups. Each was a dynamic and living unit whose continuity depended less on its purity or a single origin than on its ability to accommodate and assimilate diverse elements and ideas' (p 273).

How had Kenya lost this dynamic and tolerant interconnectedness? In Ogot's view, the British forcibly replaced precolonial ethnicities with 'imagined, (p93) inward-looking, self-regenerating, and exclusive units'—tribes—constructed for administrative convenience. Many tribes were confined to a single district, their ethnic enclave. Africans were prohibited from owning land or engaging in political activity across tribal boundaries. Ethnic-based politics was born in these separations.

Ethnic antagonism politicised and the culture of impunity

By retaining much of the colonial administrative apparatus, so Ogot argued, postcolonial governments entrenched competitive ethnic politics. He wrote, 'ethnic barons continue to dismember Kenya, perpetuate disunity and exploit their client masses' (p93). Baronial patronage fosters ethnic solidarities; national citizenship suffers and, with it, a rationally argued democracy.

Political leaders around the world habitually divert public resources to benefit their closest constituents. Independent Kenya's first leaders, Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi, took this common practice to the extreme. They enriched themselves and their ethnic followers while depriving other communities of development projects and public services.

Ogot's critique was unsparing: this culture of 'my turn to eat' enabled a small political elite to enrich themselves while impoverishing the vast majority and exacerbated inter- and intra-ethnic inequalities. Over time, ethnic antagonism sharpened; positive precolonial moral ethnicity degenerated into negative 'political ethnicity'. Interethnic conflict became more frequent, creating the conditions for violent confrontation. The 'ethnic wars' of the late 1990s and the postelection violence of 2007–08 followed. Killers and rapists were judged ethnic heroes, not brought to justice. A culture of impunity took root.

Ogot concluded: 'A history of impunity means Kenya lacks the political will to reconcile citizens, dispense justice and build a democratic and prosperous future'(p114). To end impunity one had to confront historical injustice. The recent wave of abductions suggests Kenya has yet to do so.

Towards a Kenya where all citizens belong

How can Kenyans create a prosperous and peaceful nation of equal citizens?

Ogot saw hope in the national message conveyed in the new Constitution of 2010. The Constitution offered a vision of the development of a just society in which big ethnic groups do not push smaller ones to the periphery. The vision 'proclaims the possibility of Kenyans living together in harmony while appreciating national diversity'(p126).

He stressed, however, that the carriers of this national message must be Kenya's people. Kenyans must exercise their new constitutional right to participate in important government decisions. In democracies, citizens tell their elected leaders what to do. The state does not own a nation; citizens do.

Ogot lamented that 'ethnic citizenship enjoys greater legitimacy and exercises more persuasive authority over Kenyans than their weak and fragmented nation-state'(p126). Only by fulfilling its duty to protect all citizens can government regain legitimacy in the eyes of all its citizens.

Economic development must also benefit all Kenyans. Ethnic hostility flourishes on unemployment, poverty and inequality. But the state cannot drive economic development alone. Citizens, especially young Kenyans and informal entrepreneurs must also lead.

Social media is a powerful asset that Kenyans have now acquired. Social media gives Kenyans instant contact with anyone in the country or abroad, regardless of ethnicity, region or religion. Kenyans can now hear other opinions, and no longer be reliant solely on traditional media or community leaders.

This democratised knowledge gave Ogot hope that Kenyans would outgrow ethnic-identity politics, to build a national culture rooted in respected diversity.

Ogot's message to Kenyans

Bethwell Ogot ended his chapter in our book—one of his last major publications—with a question: 'So, who needs Kenya?' His answer was clear: Kenyans had to build a nation where every citizen felt a sense of belonging, had a stake in its future, and could prosper. He himself fought to realise this vision throughout his life, in the hard work of presenting inconveniently honest history.

* **Professor John Lonsdale** is Emeritus Professor of Modern African History at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Trinity College. He is widely recognized for his influential scholarship on Kenya, nationalism, ethnicity, and colonialism.

** **Professor Hiroyuki Hino** is a Visiting Professor at Duke University's Center for International and Global Studies and an economist whose research focuses on African development, economic transformation, poverty, inequality, and international finance.

Tribute to Bethwell A. Ogot

Introduction: The passing of a titan

The passing of Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot represented a profound moment in African intellectual history. His departure was not only a personal loss to those who knew him but also created a significant void for the academic community in Kenya, Africa and the wider world. Bethwell Ogot was more than a historian; he was a guardian of Africa's collective memory, a mentor who nurtured generations of scholars, and a visionary leader who reshaped the discipline by insisting that African history be reclaimed and authored through the agency of African scholars. His life's work dismantled Eurocentric distortions and established African historiography as a discipline capable of standing confidently on its own terms while engaging with global scholarship (Ogot 1967, 1992).

For those of us who had the privilege of interacting with him, his passing was deeply personal. I first learned of his death through Professor Maurice Amutabi, and I received this news with sorrow, a devastating sense of loss, and a profound reflection on his lifetime impact on the African higher education academy. Ogot's influence on my intellectual journey was immense, as I am about to elaborate.

In my 1996 tribute to Professor Gideon Saul Were (Aseka 1996), I emphasised the stature of Ogot, his contemporary, as a foundational figure in the building of an Indigenous East African historiography. Together, Ogot and Were dismantled the colonial fiction and historiography that misrepresented Africa as a continent devoid of history. Their scholarship opened new intellectual frontiers by affirming the significance of precolonial African experiences and challenging Eurocentric frameworks that had long denied Africa historical agency. This reorientation of African histo-

Eric Masinde Aseka*

Africa International University
Nairobi, Kenya

rical studies was not merely a matter of thematic expansion but a methodological struggle, waged in Kenya at a time when Western scholarship routinely excluded Africa from the historical record and discourse.

Roland Oliver's (1966) reflections had illuminated the magnitude of this challenge. He noted that Africa's past had been neglected not only because of the perceived paucity of evidence but also because of the extraordinary range of skills required to interpret it. Oral traditions, hitherto transmitted across hundreds of languages, demanded careful recovery and analysis, just as archaeological inquiry, beginning with human origins, required technical expertise in reconstructing the past. The adaptation of historical method to contexts lacking conventional documentary sources, and harnessing these other sources, including historical linguistics, called for innovation. In such circumstances, Oliver (1966: iii) rightly observed, collaborative scholarship was indispensable, both in research and in the presentation of historical facts and realities. It was within this demanding intellectual terrain that Ogot and Were advanced a rigorous historiographical project. Their work not only reclaimed Africa's past from deliberate colonial erasure but also established methodological standards that continue to shape the discipline today. In doing so, they inaugurated a decisive break with Eurocentric denials of African historicity and laid the foundations for the institutional growth of African historiography.

In my reflections, I have consistently regarded Ogot as an intellectual pioneer. He advanced a disciplined approach to the study of oral traditions, treating them not as peripheral anecdotes but as legitimate sources of profound historical knowledge creation and its perception. By systematising the collection, verification and interpretation of oral traditions, Ogot shifted the

practice of history in Africa, navigating it away from its dependence on colonial archives and the biased epistemic grounds of colonial written records. This methodological turn was, for me, a profound intellectual breakthrough. It restored African voices to the centre of historical imagination and reconstruction, thereby challenging the ontological and epistemological dominance of Eurocentric narratives. Ogot's scholarship demonstrated that Africa's past could be studied with the same intellectual rigour and precision as any other regions that have been historically studied, even in the absence of extensive written documentation. In this sense, his innovations laid the groundwork for a historiography that affirmed African agency and provided a durable framework for future generations of scholars.

Ogot's encouragement of bold intellectual engagement was evident in 1995, when he welcomed my radical critique of postmodernism and affirmed the necessity of African scholars contesting Western visions in their academic discourses. His warmth and humour, often recalled by Professor Henry Mwanzi with great alacrity, made scholarly exchange both rigorous and enjoyable, reminding us that serious inquiry could co-exist with humanity. Mwanzi himself advanced this spirit of intellectual independence in *A History of the Kipsigis* (Mwanzi 1977), where he challenged the prevailing preoccupation of early East African historians with the spectacle of tribal migrations. He argued that communities such as the Kipsigis were not merely products of migratory movements but were shaped fundamentally by their geography and ecological environment. This perspective marked a significant methodological shift, situating African societies within their material and spatial contexts rather than reducing them to simplistic migration narratives. In this way, Mwanzi's work complemented Ogot's broader project of reclaiming Africa's past, both scholars insisting that African history must be studied on its own terms, with frameworks rooted in African realities rather than colonial constructs.

Ogot's scholarship: Reclaiming Africa's past

Ogot's scholarship was a determined reclamation of Africa's past, achieved through a methodological reorientation that became a pivotal challenge to the profligacy of colonial racist denials of African historicity. He elevated oral traditions to the status of credible historical sources, thereby breaking the dependence on written colonial records and demonstrating that Afri-

ca's unwritten heritage could be studied with scholarly rigour. He also was a supportive voice for emergent scholars who espoused a radical departure from the preoccupation with migratory narratives, such as Professor Elisha Stephen Atieno-Odhiambo, Professor Paul Tiyaambe Zeleza and Professor Eric Masinde Aseka, who variously delved into divergent political economy approaches to the study of these historical realities. Ogot's work provided a framework for reconstructing precolonial African experiences, thereby restoring African voices and agency in providing a richer and more engaging historical discourse. Ogot's innovations directly addressed the challenges of his time, showing that interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches to historical reconstruction could overcome them. In this way, his scholarship established African historiography as a disciplined undertaking that was rooted in achieving methodological precision and intellectual independence, and laid the foundation for future generations of historians to continue reclaiming Africa's past (Aseka 1996; Oliver 1966).

In the politics of historical knowledge production, colonialism, as reflected in the works of Stephen Atieno-Odhiambo, Paul Tiyaambe Zeleza and Eric Masinde Aseka, was not only a political and economic system but also a deliberate attempt to control the dynamics of knowledge production and dissemination. Atieno-Odhiambo emphasised how colonial authority in Kenya entrenched domination through administrative structures and economic re-organisation, while simultaneously shaping intellectual discourse to sustain imperial power (Atieno-Odhiambo 1981). His analysis showed that colonialism was as much about defining the terms of African existence as about ruling over African societies.

Paul Tiyaambe Zeleza, another Ogot mentee, extended these reflections by situating colonialism within broader debates about the perfidies of imperialist knowledge production. He demonstrated how colonial historiography and social sciences perpetuated Eurocentric visions of Africa, presenting the continent as ahistorical and dependent (Zeleza 1997). Aseka advanced this critique by highlighting the epistemic dimension of colonialism and arguing that colonialism imposed European categories of thought, silenced African intellectual traditions and monopolised the authority to interpret Africa's past and present. In *Transformational Leadership in East Africa* Aseka (2005) underscored that the colonial archive and institutional frameworks were designed to delegitimise African voices, thereby denying Africans the right to construct

their own historical narratives. This perspective revealed colonialism as a project of intellectual domination, not simply political control. It deliberately undermined African agency, portraying the continent as lacking history and culture, while imposing Eurocentric narratives that justified foreign rule.

Together, Atieno-Odhiambo, Zeleza and Aseka insisted that decolonisation required dismantling both the structures of domination and the epistemological frameworks that sustained them. Their scholarship affirmed that reclaiming Africa's intellectual agency was central to liberation, ensuring that historical and scholarly production reflected African realities rather than colonial constructs. Within this context, Professor Ogot rose to prominence as a pioneer of Africacentred historiography, determined to restore Africa's voice and dignity in the historiographical traditions of Africa.

Despite Mwanzi's disquiet about migratory histories, Ogot's early publication, *History of the Southern Luo: Migration and Settlement, 1500–1900* (Ogot 1967), remains a landmark in reconstructing African migration patterns in the peopling of East Africa. In this study, Ogot meticulously traced the movements and settlement patterns of the Luo people, demonstrating the complexity of their political institutions, cultural practices and social organisation. By doing so, he challenged the colonial narrative that depicted African societies as static and ahistorical. Later, his coedited volume *Zamani: A Survey of East African History* (Ogot and Kieran 1968), became a foundational text for students across the continent of Africa, offering a comprehensive survey that placed African experiences at the centre of historical analysis.

Ogot's writings were not simply academic exercises. As a matter of fact, they stood as acts of resistance that affirmed the strength of African voices in shaping historical knowledge production and dissemination. His scholarship challenged colonial misrepresentations and revealed the complexity of African societies in the form of their migrations, settlements and innovations. By insisting on African agency, he transformed the discipline of history, showing that Africa's past could not be explained through Eurocentric categories alone. In placing African perspectives at the centre, he established a historiography that was both rigorous and liberating.

Aseka was to view migration not simply as the movement of people but as a process deeply tied to leadership visions and initiatives, which emanated from the

exigencies and challenges of community formation and demands of sociopolitical transformation. He argued that migration shaped the structures of authority and the evolution of East African societies, influencing how power was organised and contested (Aseka 2005). He was to opine that precolonial migrations were not random movements but processes that created new political communities and their leadership imperatives. These movements shaped clan structures, leadership hierarchies and authentic systems of governance throughout Africa.

Equally important was Ogot's intervention in the form of methodological creativity. Ogot's embrace of creativity in the reconstruction of Africa, integrating Indigenous traditions into historical analysis and countering colonial dismissals of oral traditions, myths and cultural practices. Aseka would consistently emphasise African creativity as a vital force in reclaiming intellectual agency and shaping emergent forms of leadership. For him, creativity is not limited to artistic expression but is a transformative capacity that allows African societies to reinterpret their histories, innovate within their traditions, and resist imposed Eurocentric frameworks (Aseka 2005).

Jan Vansina's framework for using oral traditions offered him a disciplined approach, distinguishing between direct testimony and narratives passed across generations in revealing the facticity of our history. The latter emphasised the need for source criticism, examining narrators' reliability, transmission processes and social contexts, while classifying traditions into genealogies, origin accounts and historical narratives, each of which serves distinct functions (Vansina 1985). Ogot's embrace of these methods profoundly legitimised African voices and expanded the possibilities and horizons of historical inquiry.

Crucially, Vansina enamoured Ogot in his quest to write an alternative history of Africa, advocating for interdisciplinary verification and encouraging historians to corroborate oral traditions with archaeology, historical linguistics and anthropology, to strengthen their historical validity. Vansina noted, however, that oral traditions are dynamic, evolving with each generation, and therefore must be analysed with attention to how political and cultural contexts shape their transmission from one generation to the other. Through these methodological insights, Vansina demonstrated that Africa's unwritten past could be reconstructed with scholarly rigour to challenge unwarranted Eurocentric dismissals of African historicity (Vansina 1985).

Likewise, Ogot insisted that oral sources were not mere folklore but legitimate repositories of fundamental historical knowledge. His approach expanded the methodological horizons of historicising the past, legitimising African epistemologies and demonstrating that history could be reconstructed through multiple lenses. This methodological openness was later reflected in Ogot's editorial leadership of the UNESCO *General History of Africa* project (Ogot 1992), which brought together scholars from across the continent to produce a collective narrative rooted in African perspectives.

Mentorship and radical encouragement

Beyond his publications, Ogot's influence was felt most deeply in his mentorship of a coterie of scholars. He nurtured the first and second generations of Kenyan historians, including the late William Ochieng', Stephen Atieno-Odhiambo, Henry Okello Ayot and Henry Mwanzi, who themselves became pillars of African historiography. To some extent, he mentored a good number of the third generation of scholars, including Paul Tiyaambe Zeleza, Henry Mutoro, Eric Masinde Aseka, the late Theodore Ayot, Mildred Ndeda and Peter Odhiambo Ndege. His mentorship was marked by openness, humour and a refusal to impose dogma. He encouraged his students to venture into controversial terrain, to interrogate entrenched assumptions and to challenge both colonial historiography and its post-colonial successors.

I remember clearly and with fondness how Ogot welcomed my critiques of postmodernist interpretations of African realities during the Historical Association of Kenya (HAK) Conference in 1995, which culminated in a paper entitled 'Postmodernism, a Theory Without Theoretical Rigour'. This paper formed part of a wider intellectual movement at Kenyatta University during the 1980s and 1990s, when African historians worked to place African perspectives at the centre of historical scholarship. Aseka's critique of postmodernism went beyond abstract theory; it was a rallying call for African scholars to reject intellectual dependency and to construct analytical frameworks grounded in Africa's lived experiences.

At that point, the HAK was struggling and efforts were underway to restore its vitality. Ogot had left the History Department at Kenyatta University in the early 1990s, and having earlier provided stability as chair of the HAK, he was central to these revival initiatives. His commitment was evident in moments such as personally financing the Kisumu

conference in 1992, to sustain scholarly exchange. The 1995 revival sought to reposition HAK as a forum for debate, publication and mentorship, re-affirming its role in advancing African-centred historiography.

Ogot's involvement reflected his dedication to building intellectual institutions and defending the coherence of African history against poststructuralist/post-modernist fragmentation. His support for my stance revealed his conviction that scholarship must remain dynamic, while his humour reminded us that intellectual work could be both rigorous and joyful. In this way, Ogot was more than a mentor, he was a cultivator of intellectual courage, enabling scholars to generate new ideas that enriched the discipline of history.

Institutional leadership: Makerere, Nairobi and beyond

Professor Ogot's role as an institutional leader was as influential as his scholarship. At Makerere University, he was part of a vibrant intellectual community that produced some of Africa's most distinguished thinkers. Later, at the University of Nairobi, he played a decisive role in transforming the Department of History into a leading centre of African scholarship. His vision extended beyond the training of graduates as he sought to build institutions that were capable of sustaining Africa's intellectual independence and shaping the continent's future through robust knowledge production.

He consistently emphasised that universities must transcend their function as teaching factories. In his view, they were meant to be centres of research, debate and impactful innovation. His leadership style was inclusive, encouraging collaboration across disciplines and fostering a culture of openness. By creating space for dialogue and interdisciplinary engagement, Ogot ensured that the university environment was dynamic and responsive to Africa's intellectual voices, their critiques and needs. He cautioned against uncritical imitation of Western academic models, urging African institutions to root their scholarship in local realities while engaging with global debates (Ogot 2002).

His later reflections in *The Challenges of History and Leadership in Africa* (Ogot 2002) underscored this vision. In that collection of essays, Ogot articulated the need for African universities to nurture leaders who combined intellectual rigour with a strong sense of social responsibility. He believed that higher education should produce individuals capable of addressing Africa's pressing challenges with creativity, integrity and a sense of

historical consciousness. Through his leadership and writings, Ogot left a lasting imprint on the architecture and institutional landscape of African scholarship, reminding future generations that universities must serve as engines of both knowledge and societal transformation.

Generational impact: A living tradition

Ogot's legacy is best understood through the generations of historians he guided and inspired. His mentorship created a ripple effect, producing scholars who themselves became mentors, ensuring that African historical studies expanded in depth and bounciness. I consider it a privilege to belong to the third generation of historians who were shaped by his pioneering work and intellectual heritage. My own teachers were distinguished students of Ogot, and through them I absorbed his spirit of inquiry, openness and robust engagement. His influence reached far beyond those he taught directly, embedding his ethos into the wider fabric of African historiography.

Ogot's influence has continued to shape successive generations of historians. Through his mentorship, African historiography has become a dynamic tradition, constantly renewed by new voices yet firmly grounded in the values he upheld: intellectual boldness, methodological creativity and loyalty to African scholarly agency. His vision endures across time, carried forward as part of a collective movement of resistance and imagination.

For Ogot, radicalism was never about provocation for its own sake. It reflected his conviction that scholarship must remain a space for fearless debate and open inquiry. He understood that intellectual progress cannot thrive in silence or conformity, and he treated controversy as fertile ground for serious thought. In defending African traditions against colonial erasure, he insisted on their central role in historical reconstruction, while remaining receptive to reinterpretation when new evidence appeared. His essays in *War and Society in Africa* (2001) embody this spirit, exploring conflict, power and transformation with striking candour. Ogot demonstrated that warfare, though destructive, also reshaped African societies politically and culturally. His radical scholarship was therefore defined by rigorous honesty, confronting hard truths while nurturing creativity and resistance across generations.

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* **Professor Eric Masinde Aseka** is Professor of Leadership and Governance and Director of the Leadership and Governance Hub at Africa International University, Nairobi. He specialises in African political history, leadership, governance, and political economy.



Tribute to Bethwell A. Ogot

Some lives are so full, so luminous, that even in passing their glow remains, illuminating the paths of those they touched. Professor Bethwell A. Ogot was such a life—a giant in African historiography, a scholar of extraordinary depth and breadth, a public intellectual of rare conviction, and above all, a mentor whose wisdom and generosity shaped countless lives, including mine.

I first met Professor Ogot in 1976 when he was an external examiner at the University of Malawi. We used to joke that he was the one who ‘gave’ me my first-class degree. It was the beginning of an extraordinary journey of mentorship and friendship that spanned nearly five decades. Later, our paths crossed again when we taught together at Kenyatta University College, later Kenyatta University, from 1984 to 1989. I remember fondly how, every week, he would take me to lunch at the Safari Park Hotel, where we would discuss my work, my ideas, my aspirations. Those lunches were not just meals; they were masterclasses in scholarship and intellectual engagement.

When I moved to the United States, our connection remained unbroken. I recall Professor Ogot’s visit to State College, Pennsylvania, where his son, Madara, and I were both teaching at the Pennsylvania State University. It was my honour to host him in my home, a small gesture of gratitude for all he had done for me over the years. In 2008, when I became President of the U.S. African Studies Association, he graced our annual meeting in Chicago with a magisterial M. K. O. Abiola Lecture—an unforgettable testament to his enduring influence on global Africanist scholarship. And in 2019, when I was back in Kenya as Vice Chancellor of USIU-Africa, I had the privilege of visiting him in Yala to celebrate his ninetieth birthday. It was a moment of reflection and gratitude, a recognition of a towering intellectual and personal legacy.

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza*

The Africa Institute,
Global Studies University
Sharjah, United Arab Emirate

Professor Ogot was one of Africa’s greatest historians of the twentieth century, a scholar who reshaped the discipline and rescued the history and humanity of African peoples from the distortions, fabrications and silences of Eurocentrism.

He was a principal architect of

the monumental UNESCO *General History of Africa*, the unrivalled historiographical achievement of the twentieth century, editing one of its volumes. He was the intellectual godfather of East African and Kenyan historiographies, producing pioneering scholarship and nurturing generations of scholars across the continent and beyond. His commitment to knowledge transcended the academy—he was a public intellectual in the truest sense, a scholar-statesman who led key national institutions and served on international scholarly bodies, always seeking to advance the dignity and agency of African peoples.

To be in Professor Ogot’s presence was to bask in intellectual glory. He was a man of vast erudition, a historian who dabbled effortlessly in multiple disciplines, a mentor who took pride in the successes of those he guided. His life was not just lived; it was deeply consequential.

Thank you, Professor Ogot, for your scholarship, your mentorship, your unwavering belief in the power of history and scholarship to illuminate, liberate and inspire. Thank you for shaping my journey from that young graduate in Malawi to the scholar I became. I will forever be grateful for the nearly fifty years of wisdom and friendship you shared with me.

* **Professor Paul Tiyambe Zeleza** is Professor of African History, Diaspora, and Interdisciplinary Studies in the Department of Social Sciences at Global Studies University, Sharjah, United Arab Emirate. He is a distinguished African historian, intellectual, author, and higher-education leader.

A Tribute to Bethwell A. Ogot

The passing of Prof. Bethuel Allan Ogot on 30 January 2025 caught many by surprise, although at 95 he was at a ripe age. He had defied age and had remained the longest-serving emeritus professor in Kenya. He outlived his wife Grace Ogot, who died on 18 March 2015, about ten years earlier, which is rare in Africa. Prof. Ogot still supervised many graduate students at Maseno University where he was professor emeritus, spoke at a couple of events per year, and continued writing. His impressive academic career spanned seven decades.

Prof. Ogot was the chairman of the Historical Association of Kenya, and after he left no other chairperson steadied the association the way he did. There are many who would argue that, as a man of means, sometimes he single-handedly paid the association's expenses from his private pocket, the way he did in 1992 at Gulfstream Hotel in Kisumu and other places. This was perhaps more to do with his great dedication to scholarship and interest in mentoring young scholars and serving humanity—we were made aware that Prof. Ogot had paid for our meals and beverages and the entire conference expenses, with some support from Maseno University. That is how big his heart was.

I first met Prof. Ogot in 1986 at the University of Nairobi when I had joined as a first-year student. We were little academic greenhorns, almost empty but equipped with open minds, eyes and ears, curious and keen to absorb any fascinating ideas thrown our way. We were entranced when heavyweight professors on campus entered any room because we had read their works in secondary school and high school and wanted to hear from the horses' mouths, so to speak. Linking their faces to their books was exciting. Older students would point us in their direction, saying, for example, 'That is the famous Prof. B. A. Ogot', and we would all turn to look in their direction despite the whispered order not to look there immediately. They never

Maurice N. Amutabi*

Technical University of Kenya
Nairobi, Kenya

seemed to mind the attention. My classmate Edward Onyango Odiyo would ask politely to shake their hands, telling them that his village of Alego Kaugage had no professor, and he could not pass up such a privilege of shaking the hand of a professor. We

would follow suit because, as the African saying goes, when one cow moos for water, you give it to all and not just the one that mooed. Then there were others, like Prof. Gideon Saulo Were, Prof. E. S Atieno Odhiambo, Prof. Ahmed Idha Salim, Prof. Joseph Nyasani, Prof. Odera Orika, Prof. Chris Wanjala, Prof. William Ochieng, Prof. Daniel Sifuna, Prof. Florida Karani, Prof. Vincent Simiyu, Prof. Simiyu Wandibba, Prof. Henry Mutoro, Prof. Godfrey Muriuki, among others. They all frequented the Senior Common Room in the Gandhi Wing of the University of Nairobi, and we frequently bumped into one of them.

Prof. Ogot was an academic giant and quite progressive in scholarship compared to his politics, which some regarded as conservative. He was an academic goliath with a Solomonic mind and a towering figure in African intellectual discourses, known for his stimulating and wide-ranging contributions to African studies, especially social, cultural, political, economic theories and global affairs. He was astute and very aesthetic in his manner of speech and dress, and nuanced in changing scholarly genres and landscapes, embracing precolonial, colonial, postcolonial and postmodern theories just as easily as he handled modernisation, dependency, underdevelopment, gender, feminist and globalisation theories. He got on board almost any intellectual debate and was able to insert himself in many anachronistic, pedantic and newer discourses with great ease for a scholar of his generation, unlike many of his contemporaries who were circumscribed to their narrow disciplinary specialisations. His interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach to research allowed him to intervene and connect to many disciplines.

Style and simplicity were part of Prof. Ogot's modus operandi. He had gravitas in his immaculate clothing as much as in his writing and speaking. There was something about him that radiated brightness, intelligence and academic prowess that was unique. He was always reflective and insightful in his comments during seminars in Education Theatre I and II at the University of Nairobi. His comments were friendly, stimulating and deeply intellectual. In many of the seminars, he spoke last and most of us took out our notebooks and pens to write whenever he took the floor because he tended to be encyclopaedic, voicing thoughts that came out as wisdom and historical facts that you did not want to miss because the information was not found in any textbooks.

Prof. Ogot's reminiscences were so gratifying that you wanted him to digress all the time, for each diversion produced rare originality and great insights. I recall the time he talked about his times at Ambira High School, Maseno School as a student and at Alliance High School as a teacher of mathematics. He would remember most of his classmates and where they were and what they did or did not do. We would read about many of them later, in his autobiography, *My Footprints in the Sands of Time* (2006), which I have had the chance to read more than three times. The autobiography reads like a novel and many of the things he mentions in it he had shared in informal meetings around the fire, such as at the Gulfstream Hotel in Kisumu in 1992, the Kericho Tea Hotel in 1993, at Baraton University in 1994 and Egerton University in 1995. He could engage us with stories from the past, until long after 1 am, and we would still be glued to our seats, wanting to hear more.

The interlocutor or discussant in many meetings with Prof. Ogot was his former student Prof. William Robert Ochieng, who would prompt or remind him to tell us his stories. He would urge his mentor to tell us about Ambira Primary, Maseno Secondary School, Makerere University, Alliance High School, Royal Technical College, University College Nairobi, St. Andrews University, University of Nairobi, and more. He readily responded and would share deep information and facts, including how he met his wife Grace Ogot and how ethnicity caused him to miss out on becoming the first Vice Chancellor of the University of Nairobi. He, David Wasawo and Simion Ominde were the only three Kenyan professors at the time, but an academic nymph, Dr Josephat Karanja, was plucked from his diplomatic posting in London and appointed Vice Chancellor.

Prof. Ogot's stories were fascinating because they were well articulated and always informed by facts. He was a master storyteller who looked into your eyes to see the effects of your absorption. He always left you laughing and able to remember the stories many years later because of the manner in which he told them. One day in Kisumu, during one of the Historical Association of Kenya conferences, he told us the story of the President of Liberia, William Tubman. Under William Tubman, Liberia became militarily involved in World War II in January 1944, when it declared war on Germany and Japan. At the time, Liberia and Ethiopia were the only independent African countries. President William Tubman had read the news that many countries across the world were declaring war against Germany, Italy and Japan, and he followed suit, without the necessary military capability to respond in the event that these powers took on Liberia.

Of course, Tubman did not believe that any major power could take his declaration of war seriously. However, Germany did, and Adolf Hitler quickly arranged for a military flotilla to invade Liberia and teach the African country a lesson. Prof. Ogot told us that as the news of the arrival of the German flotilla arrived in Monrovia, President William Tubman asked the church bells to be sounded, and people thronged churches to pray against the invaders. Tubman ascended the pulpit of the main church in Monrovia and asked the clergy to step aside and allow him to pray in church for the first time, while his diplomats cabled Britain, France and the United States for assistance. Tubman prayed as follows: 'God, the last time there was calamity in the world, you sent your only son Jesus Christ to come and save the world. But this time Lord, come down yourself'. This sent us into great and prolonged laughter.

Prof. Ogot is regarded as the father of the study of the history of Kenya, just as Prof. Simion Ominde is regarded the father of the study of geography in Kenya, Prof. Filemona F. Indire the father of the study of education in Kenya, and Prof. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o the father of the study of literature in Kenya. Prof. Ogot was therefore part of the first generation of pioneer African scholars at African universities.

He is perhaps the most successful historian that Kenya has ever produced; many of his works have become classics in Kenyan and African studies at home and abroad. His seminal work, *History of the Southern Luo* (1967), remains the most comprehensive, making him the leading authority in the history of the Luo of Kenya. It was he who introduced the Joka-Jok, Jok-Owiny

and Jok-Omolo to African academic audiences. The work relied mainly on oral sources and mapped more than 1,000 years of the history of the Lwo and Luo. It inspired many studies to use a similar approach, as in *A History of the Abaluhia of Western Kenya* (1967), by Gideon Saulo Were, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500–1900* (1974), by Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kipsigis* (1977), by Henry Mwanzi, and *The Living History of the Embu and Mbeere to 1906* (1973), by Henry Stanley Kabeca Mwaniki, among others. His towering example produced a unique genre in African history used by African scholars elsewhere, such as *A Political History of the Pare of Tanzania, c. 1500–1900* (1969), by Isaria N. Kimambo.

Prof. Ogot's works also inspired a new stream of African scholars, such as Uganda's Grace Stuart Ibingira and Tanzania's Anselim Baluda Itandala, Ghanaian historian Albert Kwadwo Adu Boahen and Nigerian historian Emmanuel Ayankannui Ayandele, who were his contemporaries. He had great admiration for Prof. Kenneth Onwuka Dike, who was a Nigerian historian and the first Nigerian Vice Chancellor of Nigeria's premier college, the University of Ibadan. He literally dragged us into lectures by visiting speakers on campus, such as those by E. A. Ayandele, Adu Boahen, A. B. Itandala, Chinua Achebe, Ali Mazrui and Cyprian Ekwensi, whenever they were in Kenya. He never missed these lectures, and he would be there in the front row, taking notes like a student in class, meaning that he never stopped learning, unlike some undergraduates in our midst who regarded themselves as very important and too knowledgeable to take notes.

As young scholars, we looked up to Prof. B. A. Ogot for intellectual affirmation. I recall that in 1992 I presented a paper titled 'Mau Mau in Western Kenya' at the conference on 'Mau Mau, 40 years later', in Kisumu. My paper raised eyebrows. I had come across archival material on correspondence between government officials discussing elements in western Kenya who were regarded as sympathetic to the Mau Mau. Two of them were people known to me, and so I had proceeded to have conversations with them and their relatives. In fact, it turned out that the information about Harrison Ngota being a Mau Mau detainee at Mageta Island was conveyed to our village in Ebunagwe by my own father, Jackan Nyamanga, who worked as a prison officer on Mageta Island Prison at a time when everyone believed that Harrison Ngota had died.

In my talk I mentioned how freedom fighters such as Harrison Ngota, who was from Vihiga and worked as a driver for a European school, and Abednego Mukalo,

who worked as a clerk in the civil service but quietly supported the Mau Mau, were arrested and detained. After my presentation, my discussant, a lecturer at Maseno University, tried to throw flak at my presentation, terming it a personal family story that had nothing to do with the Mau Mau. But I was delighted when Prof. Ogot stood up and told the upstart lecturer that history was built from such micro stories which fed into the meta narratives of the bigger picture. He encouraged such stories, which gave me licence to continue my love for micro histories as part of social history. From that point onwards, the great historian affirmed many of my presentations and I owe him huge gratitude for making me a good historian.

On 17 November 2001, I was in Houston, Texas, attending the forty-fourth Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, when Prof. B. A. Ogot delivered the Bashorun M. K. O. Abiola Distinguished Lecture, attended by thousands of delegates. As he spoke, one could tell that he was in his true element, moving carefully from one topic to another, with great dexterity and the academic nimbleness for which he was famous. The award to present a lecture at the ASA Annual Meeting is given to a senior African scholar, and this was one of the highest points in Prof. Ogot's career. The trip is usually fully funded. So Prof. Ogot showed up with his wife, the Hon. Grace Ogot, who was always supportive and beside him despite her busy political career as MP for Gem from 1985 and Kenya's first female assistant minister. She was Assistant Minister for Culture, Sports and Social Services.

In Houston, another great Kenyan historian, E. S. Atieno Odhiambo, who was seated next to me, whispered to me and Prof. Osaak Olumullah that without Prof. B. A. Ogot, Kenyan and African history would never have been presented to the world in the manner in which it had. Odhiambo attributed this success to the creative mind of Prof. B. A. Ogot and his great desire to liberate African history from the colonial archives, structures and forms. Many white scholars were not yet reconciled to the fact that oral sources were reliable instruments in reconstructing African history. During dinner, there were three prominent white historians who were still in doubt about the centrality of oral sources in history.

As the conference ended, and we departed to the University of Illinois, where I was studying for my doctorate under a Fulbright Scholarship, my colleagues expressed their fascination with Prof. B. A. Ogot's intense and deep knowledge. I was quick to share with them that it was from such a great intellectual tradition

that I had been brought up and nurtured at the University of Nairobi, which enabled me to graduate ahead of my class. After Prof. Ogot's lecture, the African Studies Association started the Bethwell A. Ogot Book Prize, which recognises the best book on East African studies published in the previous calendar year.

Prof. Ogot was one of the most prolific writers in Kenya and Africa. He published over fifty books, the most famous of which is *History of the Southern Luo: Volume I, Migration and Settlement, 1500–1900* published in 1967, which launched his academic career towards professorship. His critics, like Prof. Ali Mazrui, teased him about volume II of his book, which was apparently never published but which he made comments about from time to time. Ogot often said that the book was complete and only awaited release, and that it covered Luos in the diaspora in their various 'Kisumu Ndogos' and elsewhere. Until the book comes out, we shall never know what it contains. We can only speculate. It is possible that the book has a chapter of Barack Obama in the State House in the United States of America, among other narratives.

As early as 1964, Prof. Ogot edited the book titled, *East Africa, Past and Present* (1964). Two years later, he co-wrote with F. B. Welbourn, *A Place to Feel at Home: A Study of Two Independent Churches in Western Kenya*. My Master's thesis presented at the University of Nairobi, and my article on 'Drums, Flags, Uniforms, Ranks and Religious Independency: Reflections on Independent Churches in Western Kenya', drew a lot of inspiration from this book. In 1968, Prof. Ogot, together with J. A. Kieran, edited *Zamani: A Survey of East African History*, which has been widely cited. Other books include his edited collection, *Building on the Indigenous: Selected Essays 1981–1998* (1999); *The Challenges of History and Leadership in Africa: The Essays of Bethwell Allan Ogot*, edited by Toyin Falola and E. S. Atieno Odhiambo (2002); and *History as Destiny and History as Knowledge: Being Reflections on the Problems of Historicity and Historiography*, published in 2005.

Ogot's *My Footprints in the Sands of Time: An Autobiography* is perhaps one of the best autobiographies I have read by a Kenyan scholar, besides that of Ben Kipkorir titled *Descent from Cherangany Hills: Memoirs of a Reluctant Academic* (2009). In some ways, the autobiography reads like volume II of the *History of the Southern Luo* because in it he continues the narrative and description of how Luo clans settled around

the Lake Region even after independence. The book provides the reader the opportunity to come face to face with Prof. Ogot's writing prowess as a true scholar with a pen. It is a great treatise on the social history of a pioneer scholar, which brings to light some of the challenges that young Ogot encountered while growing up in rural Kenya and some of those he had to overcome to become the great scholar that he was. It exposes the reader to many genres that traverse Prof. Ogot's academic journey and versatility. My own autobiography titled *My Walk Through Valleys and Hills of Life* was largely inspired by Prof. Ogot's account of his life.

Another book Prof. Ogot wrote, *Liberty or Death: Southern Sudan's March to Independence* (2010), confronts the dilemma of African states, the oppositional binaries and tensions they face as soon as they become independent. The Salva Kirr vs Riak Machar binary, which becomes a Dinka and Nuer issue, is mapped in a trajectory similar to that of Jomo Kenyatta and Oginga Odinga at Kenya's independence, making it a fascinating read. Prof. Ogot also wrote *Who, if Anyone Owns the Past? Reflections on the Meaning of 'Public History'*. I admired the relationship between Prof. Ogot and his student, Prof. William Robert Ochieng. The two enjoyed a close friendship and working relationship and co-edited many books, such as *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya, 1940–93* (1995) which has become one of the best books on understanding the origins of some of the tensions in the history of Kenya, such as the land question. To be sure, the UNESCO *General History of Africa*, on which he worked, is one of his greatest contributions to scholarship and new knowledge. The series is one of his greatest legacies, placing African history on the world stage and cementing the role of oral sources in the creation of history.

Prof. B. A. Ogot was a great family man. While I served as Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic and Students' Affairs at Kisii University, his son, Prof. Madara Michael Ogot, served in a similar capacity at Maseno University. Grace Ogot, the wife of Prof. Ogot, was the first female author published in Eastern Africa. We will miss Prof. Ogot's mentorship and pioneer spirit. May God rest his soul in eternal peace.

* **Professor Maurice Nyamanga Amutabi** is Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Student Affairs, and Professor of Leadership and Governance at the Technical University of Kenya.

Bethwell A. Ogot, 1929–2025: A Pillar of Nationalist Historiography

I went in search of Professor Ogot, as I looked for professors Jacob Ade Ajayi and Adu Boahen. I travelled to Kenya and Ghana to meet these great men, and published their collected essays with Africa World Press. With Atieno Odhiambo, I co-edited *The Challenges of History and Leadership in Africa: The Essays of Bethwell Allan Ogot* (2002). Prof. Ogot and I met several times—in France, the United States, Kenya and Tanzania—and in many unforgettable moments. I respected his elderly status, and I let him do the talking. In Houston, he was hosted by Rice University, and I drove down to have a moment with him. He was a great library, a storehouse of knowledge of immense depth and breath. Never would I be with Professor Maurice Amutabi without us talking about Professor Ogot and members of his generation. He survived them all. They are all gone, but the history of the moment remains with us.

Life's deepest lessons often reveal themselves with time; we grow in knowledge and understanding as we age. One of these enduring truths is the inevitability of endings—no matter how deeply we cherish an idea, an individual or an experience, everything must eventually draw to a close. But instead of worrying ourselves sick over the inevitability of death, we should take a lesson from the deeper philosophy that underpins this inevitable phenomenon: our time in this world is finite, and within that limited span, we must strive to leave a lasting impact. Life continually reminds us that no matter how virtuous or accomplished we are, nature does not grant special exemptions. Mortality is an unyielding constant; we are all subject to its call. It is in this light that we reflect on the passing of Professor Bethwell Ogot, a renowned Kenyan and pioneer historian of Africa, who has now gone to join the ancestors. Looking back on the life of this now fallen iconic figure, it is safe to say that he left irreplaceable marks in the history book.

I commiserate with the African intellectuals who sorely feel the vacuum created by the exit of this outstanding individual in the African intellectual space. I ex-

Toyin Falola*

University of Texas at Austin
USA

tend my deepest sympathies to this body of scholars and thinkers who bear the weight of his absence. Our grief is not merely personal but collective—borne not just of sorrow but of the awareness that the loss of such a major figure leaves a void in our

shared pursuit of knowledge and progress, which will continue to be felt by us the living.

Generally, scholars of African origin born during the heydays of colonialism were destined to make unique contributions—ones that many might not have fully grasped the consequences of. They belonged to a generation that witnessed and endured the systematic dehumanisation of both their identity and intellect. It was a time when they were forced to internalise foreign ideologies that stood in stark contradiction to their Indigenous ways of knowing. As a result, they were exposed to dangerous and detrimental learning content, which in many cases stripped them of the capacity for broad, independent reasoning. This reality or awareness reinforces a critical truth: colonised Africans could not expand their intellectual horizons solely through Western educational frameworks. The colonial system conditioned them to engage with knowledge from a singular, imposed perspective, limiting their ability to conceive ideas beyond that rigid structure.

Professor Ogot was born into this dehumanising reality: when colonisers were actively expanding their reign in Africa, consolidating their imperial status by taking charge of many African countries' political and economic systems. Even when he had no idea that he would be a historian of international stature, he adapted and learned in different ways. Although the Western education system was enforced in the academic environment, those of his time had the opportunity to learn from their parents and absorb knowledge preserved through generations by oral medium. This became the foundation of their clear resolve against external aggressors. Armed with intellectual depth and historical awareness, they stood as the defenders of African identity and autonomy against these external forces that sought to exploit them for material gain.

Professor Ogot was not just a member of an African intellectual family but a revolutionary force. One of the first points of his campaign and advocacy for epistemic democracy was that African knowledge centres and Indigenous epistemologies should not be sacrificed on the altar of epistemic oppression because they were assumed to be inferior. He was an individual who mastered the art of knowledge transfer bequeathed to him through his lineage and other social agencies of socialisation and knowledge exchange. Professor Ogot's reality and background meant that he was not easily swayed by arguments that sought to delegitimise African ways of knowing.

Bethwell Ogot was one of the prominent African historians who amplified African historiography by stating that the universal Western pattern of handing down historical information contradicts and even undermines the histories of the continent. He underscored that the assimilation of Western-derived history poses a very grave danger to the cognitive evolution of the colonised people. If anything, the amplification of European history in Africa and to Africans has the potential to erase all the great things that African forebears have achieved. It cannot be overemphasised that Africans would benefit tremendously if they used their own history to build or develop their younger generations. The projection of African historiography would provide a more nuanced and balanced approach to the history available in Western-based schools. It did not take Ogot and scholars like him long to recognise that the relentless promotion of Western history was not merely an academic preference but a strategic tool for reshaping African minds in ways that served external interests.

After successfully making a case for African historiography, Professor Ogot exposed the underhanded consequences of colonialism and how that experience had contributed to the desecration of the African past and the deceleration of African progress. If anything, Ogot ensured that the adverse problems associated with colonialism were highlighted in such a way that Africans, and potentially citizens of other ex-colonies, could understand the operations of colonial politics and how they could be used in the future. Ogot stressed in many of his works that colonialism was a cancer to African economic development. This conclusion he arrived at following his realisation that the extractive policies imposed on the African people were meant to sabotage the possibility of economic initiatives.

It is well known that when people are deprived of economic power, they often find themselves in a state of disarray, unable to make independent decisions or

shape their destinies within their communities. It cannot be overlooked how the indiscriminate extraction of African natural resources has contributed to reducing Africans' economic opportunities and values, which ordinarily should be under their control. The devastation extended beyond just financial ruin; history has shown that when a people's economic foundations are dismantled, their political systems inevitably become a target—often weakened and manipulated to the point of near irreparability. The colonial erosion of economic autonomy, therefore, was not just an economic setback but a deliberate strategy to undermine Africa's self-determination. In essence, Professor Ogot was excellent at revealing the dangers of imperialism, making a profound mark in the African intellectual community.

No one familiar with Professor Ogot would disagree that he was dedicated and selfless, especially regarding issues that he considered essential. These included African identity and culture, which are a central theme in the writings of this once-in-a-lifetime intellectual. He advocated for a lifestyle for Africans that would principally elevate their original identity. He was a staunch believer in the philosophy that people exist, and will continue to, only when they take the issue of their identity very seriously. Numerous lectures and countless publications credited to this precious mind are available today, in which he projected the fundamentals of the African identity. He consistently argued that promoting this identity would automatically yield Africans the opportunity to make their ideas popular or known in the general scheme of things.

Prof. Ogot's intellectual works revealed African perspectives on general topics. He had a special preference for African culture and made no pretence about getting local practices embraced across the continent. He was not merely an advocate of African heritage—he was a driving force behind its intellectual elevation. In countless ways, he and scholars like him positioned Africa on the global stage, affirming its relevance in the world of ideas and scholarship.

Professor Ogot was a staunch decolonial scholar who promoted the outstanding accomplishments of Africans in the past and the present, to ensure that Africa's legacy was recognised and celebrated. Although other academics prioritised knowledge transfer as a means of intellectual empowerment, Professor Ogot did more than this. He was a mentor to many of us. If anything, he was able to show people ways to navigate the complexities of their

existence and life, equipping them with insights to overcome the towering challenges imposed by history and circumstance.

Across different African countries, a handful of individuals have directly or indirectly benefitted from his mentorship—whether through personal interactions or by engaging with his work and ideas. He can be said to have made a very profound impact in life because he provided opportunities for people to learn, grow and leave their own indelible marks on the world. His life was not merely lived; it was purposefully dedicated to the intellectual and cultural empowerment of an entire continent.

A giant tree has fallen, and we are grieving. History is grieving. African scholarship is grieving. Till we meet again, keep resting in the Luo soil, keep resting, my dear Professor Bethwell Ogot.

* **Professor Toyin Falola** is the Jacob and Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities and a University Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Texas at Austin, specializing in African history.

Bethwell A. Ogot: A Tribute to a Sage

In 2019, Prof. Bethwell A. Ogot welcomed me at his home. He had just turned 90. We spoke about his role as editor of the encyclopaedic UNESCO project that produced the invaluable volumes of the *General History of Africa*. He was the last surviving editor then—now, he too has rested. With a knowing smile, he recounted how Jomo Kenyatta offered him a cabinet position in the early 60s, an offer he declined. ‘Even with independence’, he mused, ‘it was important for professors to remain at the university’. Kenyatta, visibly angry, kicked him out of the state house.

When the political demons of the Moi regime forced Prof. Ogot to retreat to his home, he continued his intellectual work in the company of his wife, Grace Ogot, whom he fondly called ‘Mama’. When President Kibaki appointed him Chancellor of Moi University, the call came at dawn. ‘Kijana’, Kibaki said, ‘I’m handing over to you’. With characteristic wit, Prof. Ogot replied: ‘Kijana, are you handing over the presidency?’

He cared about our history and chuckled at how he had once studied mathematics! He even taught Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o mathematics at Alliance Boys. When Ngũgĩ, Tabata and Anyumba clamoured for the change of name from the Department of English to the Department

Ndirangu Wachanga*

University of Wisconsin,
Wisconsin, USA

of Literature at the University of Nairobi, their mission was partly successful because Prof. Ogot had already argued for the intellectual recognition of oral sources in academic work. He was dean of the School of Arts and Social

Sciences, at the time.

Prof. Ogot understood the West so well and interpreted it for us. He was on the same flight with Prof. Ali Mazrui in 1955 as they both left for England to further their studies. In 2008, I sat with them at a conference in Chicago. As they reminisced about their younger days, their laughter confessed their desire for a better country, a prosperous continent and an egalitarian society.

Prof. Bethwell A. Ogot has now rested. He gave the world so much and asked nothing in return. He was a historian who became an archive of history. His mind was vast. He was a warrior of our memory.

Travel well, Prof., rest well.

* **Professor Ndirangu Wachanga** is a Professor of Media Studies and Information Science at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, a documentarist, archivist, and authorized biographer of prominent African intellectuals.

Tribute for Bethwell A. Ogot

Prof Bethwell Allan Ogot took his final bow on 30 January 2025, at the ripe old age of 95. The news of his demise was met with an outpouring of grief and of good will. Many remember this gentleman, always impeccably groomed, confident and oozing wit and candour.

Bethwell Allan Ogot, always clear about the spelling of his name (Bethwell, not Bethuel), was a historian, teacher, professor and a founding genius—genius, because he was the first Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Nairobi between 1970 and 1973.

At what would become the University of Nairobi, early in his teaching career, he founded the Institute of Development Studies, a division of which later evolved into the Institute of African Studies. This was no mean feat as these institutions, conceived and established in 1965, are actually older than the University of Nairobi.

History, to this scholar, who was a co-writer of *Zamani: A Survey of East African History* (edited with J. A. Kieran), among others, was the basis for decolonising and Africanising Kenya's development history, by understanding traditional values, social beliefs and behaviours as a precursor to planning practices in development.

In a career spanning sixty years, Prof Bethwell Allan Ogot served at Kenyatta University and Makerere University, as well as at UNESCO, where he was the President of the International Scientific Committee for the preparation of UNESCO's nine-volume *General History of Africa*. He was also emeritus professor of history at Maseno University, applying his extensive expertise to research and postgraduate studies.

His students, in the institutions that he served, no doubt benefitted from his works: *History of the Southern Luo, Vol. 1: Migration and Settlement, 1500-1900* (2009); *Who, if anyone, owns the past? Reflections on the Meaning of "Public History"* (2010); *Kenyans, who are we: Reflections on the meaning of national*

Njeri Muhoro*

University of Nairobi,
Kenya

identity and nationalism (2012); *History of African Civilizations in the Nile Valley* (2016) and *History of Nairobi 1899-2012: From a railway supply depot to a world-class African metropolis* (2020). This is separate from the collections of materials that

Prof acquired during a tenure of sixty years teaching in different universities. It is no secret that his home is a treasure trove of information and boasts more than 10,000 books collected over the years.

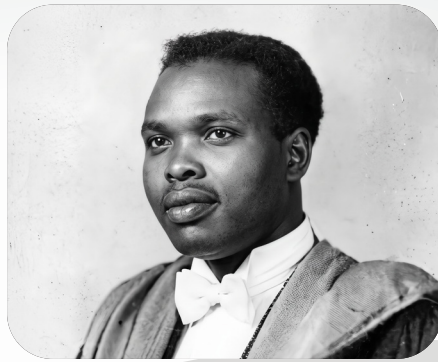
Closer to home, at the University of Nairobi, Bethell Allan Ogot and Madara, his son, researched and published *Fountain of Knowledge: History of the University of Nairobi, 1952-2020*. This seminal volume paved the way for the university's celebration of sixty years, as a technical college that transformed into a world-class university.

The adage is, once a professor, always a professor. The mandate of a professor is to provide foresight and direction in institutions. It was no surprise therefore, when the late President Kibaki introduced the concept of citizen chancellor and Bethwell Allan Ogot was appointed Chancellor of Maseno University, he took up the position with enthusiastic and assured vigour and liveliness. He served the full term in the pursuit of excellence.

As one of the greatest scholars of our history as a nation, Bethwell Allan Ogot's legacy of seminal works and historical treatises exemplify, in the words of Hon. James Orengo, 'a true thinker and intellectual par excellence'.

As we bid farewell to this scholar, eminent citizen, friend, colleague, Mwalimu and father of history in Kenya, we leave him to 'pass to his ancestors of the ages'. Rest in Eternal Peace.

* **Professor Njeri Muhoro** is a communications professional, writer and former Social Sciences Editor at University of Nairobi Press, University of Nairobi, Kenya.



The Great, Revered Historian that Was Bethwell A. Ogot

Oscar Wilde once wrote, 'Anybody can make history, but only a great man can write it'. These words aptly capture the life and legacy of Prof. Bethwell Allan Ogot (1929–2025), who has departed this world to join the ancestors.

A titan of historical scholarship, Ogot was more than Kenya's preeminent historian; he was a teacher, a researcher and a guardian of Africa's past. He consumed history with a voracious appetite and, in turn, nourished generations with the fruits of his intellectual labour.

Though his mortal journey has ended, his legacy will endure, whispering through the pages of history, echoing in the minds of those he taught and inspired.

I never had the privilege of meeting Prof. Ogot in person, just as I have never met Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Plato or Aristotle. Yet, like those luminaries, his influence has shaped my understanding of the world. In the realm of Kenyan history, his stature is akin to that of Herodotus, the father of history. His groundbreaking contributions to African historiography rescued the discipline from the stranglehold of Eurocentrism, elevating it to a position of scholarly legitimacy.

Alongside other pioneering African historians, he laid the foundation for a new historical consciousness, one that placed Africa at the centre of its own narrative. Across the world, scholars have paid homage to Ogot, who died aged 95, acknowledging his towering contributions to history and his unwavering service to the academy.

On 9 February 2025, Prof Toyin Falola of the University of Texas convened a panel discussion in his honour. The tributes were eloquent, each one a demonstration of his indelible mark in history. The late Prof Ali Mazrui, himself an intellectual titan, once described Ogot as a man with few equals in Kenya's academic annals.

Peter Wekesa*
Kenyatta University,
Nairobi, Kenya

Impact at KU

As a historian who never had the fortune of sitting in Ogot's classroom, I find myself at a loss, grasping for words to properly eulogise him. Yet in my mind, he remains an academic patriarch, my intellectual grandfather, whose wisdom reached

me through his written works and through the teachings of his former students, now my mentors. This imagined grandfather-grandson bond compels me to pay my humble tribute with grief.

In the many eulogies I have read, one glaring omission stands out: Prof Ogot's profound impact at Kenyatta University (KU), Kenya's second-largest university.

Between 1984 and 1991, KU was his academic home, yet this chapter of his life remains largely unsung. KU, where I am based, has long been a beacon of teacher education and a bastion of historical scholarship. That Ogot chose to grace its halls after serving as the first African head of the History Department at the University of Nairobi speaks volumes. He worked alongside distinguished historians, such as professors Okete Shiroya, William Ochieng, Tiyaambe Zeleza, Henry Mwanzi, Mosonik Arap Korir, Tabitha Kanogo, Eric Aseka, Theodora Ayot and Mildred Ndeda.

Under their stewardship, KU became a crucible for historical thought, producing a new generation of scholars who have since shaped the course of Kenyan and African history, myself included. When I arrived at KU in 1991 as a young undergraduate, Prof. Ogot had already left. Yet his presence lingered in the department's corridors, in the lectures of his former colleagues and in the reminiscences of my high-school teachers, many of whom had studied under him. His name loomed large in our curriculum, just as that of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o did in literature.

Alongside Prof. Gideon Were, Ogot dominated the intellectual landscape of our formative years. Were's *East Africa Through a Thousand Years* (1968) was our bible, shaping our historical imagination. In every history class, we were reminded that Africa's past is not a void, as some European historians claimed, but a rich heritage worthy of study.

UNESCO role

Ogot's legacy at KU was inextricably tied to his pivotal role in UNESCO's *General History of Africa* project. This ambitious endeavour sought to reconstruct Africa's past, from antiquity to the postcolonial era, a monumental task undertaken at a time when literacy rates were low and scholarly resources scarce. Together with esteemed historians like Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Adu Boahen, Jacob Ade Ajayi, Djibril Tamsir Niane, El Fasi, Ivan Hrbek, Gamal Mokhtar and Ali Mazrui, Ogot challenged the prevailing Eurocentric narratives that denied Africa its history.

The project was an act of intellectual defiance, dismantling the racist assertions of scholars such as Charles Seligman, Friedrich Hegel and Hugh Trevor-Roper, who had ostentatiously dismissed Africa as a land without history. Ogot and his colleagues laboured to correct these distortions, proving that Africa's past was not only rich but integral to the broader story of humanity.

At KU, Ogot's methodological model, honed at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), shaped historical inquiry. He championed oral traditions as a legitimate source of African history, inspiring a wave of research on the origins, migrations and settlements of Kenyan communities. His influence was unmistakable in the works of his protégés: William Ochieng on the Abagusii, Godfrey Muriuki on the Agikuyu, Gideon Were on the Abaluyia, Henry Mwanzi on the Kipsigis and H. S. K. Mwaniki on the Embu and Mbeere.

Intellectual debate

Ogot's migrationist thesis faced rigorous challenge from Prof. Henry Mwanzi, a historian trained in Germany, who favoured an evolutionary framework for understanding African societies. Their scholarly divergence, though tense at times, enriched historical debate, birthing new perspectives that continue to shape the field. As Karl Marx observed, conflict often breeds progress.

The intellectual friction between Ogot and Mwanzi ultimately forged a new generation of historians—scholars who now stand as custodians of Kenya's past. Alongside them, professors Tiyaambe Zeleza and Eric Aseka pioneered new methodologies in economic history and political economy, respectively, further broadening the discipline's scope. Ogot's presence at KU was catalytic, igniting research, innovation and original thought.

As we mourn Prof Ogot, we must remember his legacy in the words of professors Toyin Falola and E. S. Atieno Odhiambo, who praised his contributions to African historiography, interdisciplinary scholarship and the university as a sanctuary of intellectual autonomy. Mwalimu Ogot did not merely study history, he made history, he wrote history and he created historians.

* **Dr Peter Wafula Wekesa** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History, Archaeology and Political Studies at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.

"To tell the story of a past so as to portray an inevitable destiny is, for humankind, a need as universal as tool-making. To that extent, we may say that a human being is, by nature, historicus."

Bethwell A. Ogot

From *Reflections on Historicity and Historiography*,
published in 2005

Bethwell A. Ogot: A Mugumo Has Fallen

It was with deep sorrow and profound sense of loss that I learned of the passing on of Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot. Let it be known to all and sundry that a mighty Mugumo tree has fallen! Beyond the usual platitudes and hyperboles after a hero has fallen, Professor Ogot was a towering intellectual giant, one of Africa's greatest historians and a prolific writer who navigated the spaces and genres of knowledge, from the very local to the most global, with remarkable ease. Like many African students, I read Professor Ogot long before joining the university. His books were part of our readings in high school. But I first met him in 1986, at Kenyatta University, where he taught me as an undergraduate and Master's student. In 1994, while attending a conference of the Kenya Historical Association at Maseno University, by then as a lecturer at Moi University, Prof. Ogot actively lobbied for my appointment as Secretary-General of the Association. His argument was that the future sustainability of the Association would depend on an intergenerational leadership.

Mentoring young scholars was his forte. During many of the evenings that crowned our conferences, I was struck mute by Ogot's great humility and ability to socialise across generations and diversities comfortably despite being a VVIP in the government of the day. He was a great, agile and indefatigable dancer! 'Knowledge is better and enjoyable when socialised', he would quip. I served my chairmanship until I went to the US for further studies in August 1998.

That month, Ogot's great generosity saved my life. When I told him that I had secured the prestigious Fulbright Scholarship to study for my PhD at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ogot invited me to deliver a fare-thee-well lecture at Maseno University, based on a paper I had earlier prepared for the late Professor Atieno Odhiambo, titled 'In My Mother's House: Tom Mboya and Kikuyu Nationalism, 1952–1969'. After the well-attended lecture, he hosted a lavish farewell dinner and booked me at the 'presidential ensuite' at the university for my last night.

Peter Kagwanja*

Africa Policy Institute,
Nairobi, Kenya

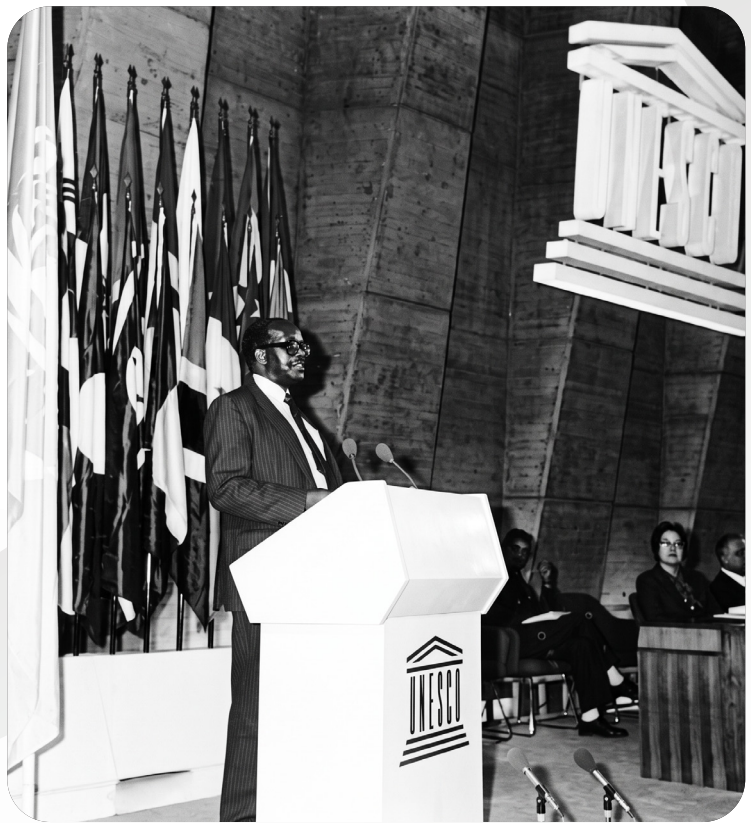
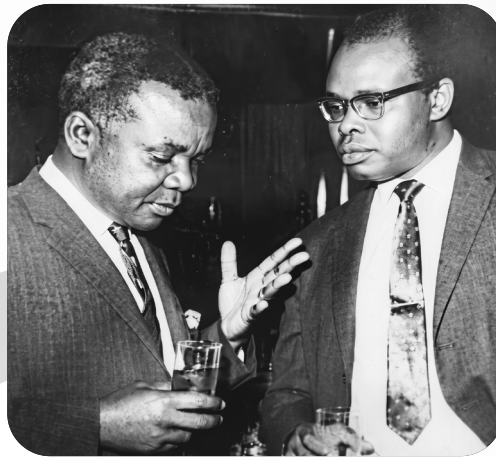
I retired late after a long and enjoyable 'African night' full of humour, stories and good company. When I finally woke up at 8:00 am on 7 August, I knew I might not make it on time to pick up my passport and visa at

the American Embassy in Nairobi. At Kisumu, I took a Peugeot Wepesi taxi, the fastest plying the route, desperate to reach the Embassy before noon. Two hours into the journey, the radio broke the shocking news that terrorists had bombed the Embassy. I was happy that I had woken up late, and I thanked Ogot.

After a long stay in the US and Europe, and as an emigré in South Africa, I was eager to finally reunite with my mentor. My family and I decided to spend the December 2019 holiday season in Kisumu so that we could take our '*matega*' (finest gifts) to my mentor at his Gem home. To our great surprise—and delight—we were welcomed to Ogot's home by top leaders from the region, led by Governor James Orengo and former Prime Minister Raila Odinga. Ogot gave us a tour of the Taj Mahal he had built for his late wife, Mama Grace Ogot. He also took us to his iconic library where he kept all the books we had brought to him as part of the *matega*. As we perused through the manuscript of his new book *History of Nairobi City, 1899–2000*, we were astounded by his energy and intellectual vigour despite his age. Ogot respected, even relished, Kenya's diversity. '*Thubu*', '*thubu*' (soup, soup), he said merrily in Kikuyu, as he got hold of the rope that tied the goat we had brought to him.

Like the many generations of African intellectuals who Ogot nurtured during his long and rewarding life, I have lost a father, a friend and a great mentor. A guiding intellectual light in Africa has gone out. But his towering legacy lives on. Fare thee well, *Japuonj na*.

* **Professor Peter Kagwanja** is President and Chief Executive Officer of the Africa Policy Institute, a leading Kenyan scholar and policy strategist specialising in governance, security, diplomacy, and African affairs.



Bethwell A. Ogot and the Restoration of African Pride

This text emanates from 'A Panel Discussion on Bethwell Ogot: Historian and Service to Africa' on 9 February 2025.

The danger of one-sided historical narratives is usually obscured by the ignorance of those whose past events are handed down. When a people's history is rendered, the consumers of the content often do not understand how the narrative interferes with their original sense of identity, because they sometimes cannot connect how the history told about them is linked to how they conceive of themselves and frame their world. Those who relate history always have an intention in mind. At the most innocuous level, they are concerned with telling the coming generations about the deeds of past individuals so that they may understand or become familiar with the activities and accomplishments of their forebears. In other situations, the revelation of history is meant to achieve something else. Historians often use their professional capacity to tell a reconfigured history to influence their audience's minds in a particular way. Africans have been a victim of such revisionism for a long time.

Until the end of the Second World War exposed the fragility of Europe and dismantled its human and technological resources, the imperialists were the handlers of African history. Pursuing an expansionist agenda, they invested heavily in revisionist history, which obscured the events and activities of past generations of Africans, thereby obviating the contributions these individuals had made. This mission was successful for many reasons. For one, Africans of the period who attended Western education centres to acquire knowledge did not have the instruments to challenge the dominant narratives, which made them incapable of validating or invalidating the foundations of the revisionism that plagued their educational ecosystem. But the end of the Second World War marked a new beginning, as the influx of now-enlightened Africans who had the means and commitment to challenge the

Toyin Falola*

University of Texas at Austin,
USA

establishment set the ground for the repudiation of hegemonic narratives. Thus entered learned Africans, one of them being Professor Bethwell Ogot.

One of the immediate tasks of such individuals was to challenge the crucibles of Western

historical narratives about Africans, which had caused severe damage to the psychology of the African person. Africans who had consumed revisionist history in Western schools before this time had doubted their true identity and the genuineness of their human nature. Low self-esteem was the result for most.

The pioneers of African history in modern times aimed to restore African dignity, and Professor Ogot was among the first of them. How people see themselves matters in the grand scheme. Before Ogot's profound scholarship emerged, Africans had viewed themselves through a European lens, and the refraction was not palatable. However, as this scholar developed his work in the East African region, he redefined how Africans saw themselves. He made sure to establish that, contrary to the mistaken Western assumptions, Africans were indeed incapable of facilitating their intellectual growth.

The history of Africa confirms that its people have enjoyed tremendous success and that they have a past they can draw from as inspiration for creative development, initiatives and inventions that would rival others. One of the most immediate results of this revelation was that Africans began to understand that they were not that different from the Europeans who had a chokehold on the African political and economic systems. More than this, Ogot's teachings changed the way Africans saw themselves.

To become this committed and emboldened to chart a new course for the African people, Professor Ogot had to be extremely determined. Initially, his intellectual expertise was in mathematics and philosophy. However, he realised he had a different spark within

himself. He became interested in professional history and wanted to acquire methodological competence as a thoroughbred historian. Clearly, he eventually accomplished this desire, but it did not come without its challenges. For historians of his age, the conventional source of acceptable academic history was different; it lionised only European standards of extracting information from the past. But Ogot became fixated on something transcendental for coming generations. He wanted the world to understand that the history of Africans, which it had made strenuous attempts to obliterate, was enduring and even more resilient than it could have imagined. He understood that once Africans devised the appropriate mechanisms to extract their history, it would be possible to repudiate hegemonic narratives and highlight the outstanding contributions that Africans have made to human progress.

The mechanism that Ogot introduced was the oral archive as a means of retrieving information. This generated heated controversy in public intellectualism; numerous European scholars challenged the idea that the content of human history could be drawn from oral sources. Ogot considered this objection ironic and strange. He believed, for instance, that the history of everyone and everything in the universe is handed down through orality, that people who committed collective actions in their society transferred them to the generations that succeeded them. Before people discovered writing as a medium for capturing information, they documented events in oral archives, or memory, which they could access at any time. That people worldwide were unfamiliar with a scribal system does not invalidate their sources of information.

Ogot challenged the establishment, situating Africa on the global map through the telling of its history, retrieved from people who had committed the actions of the past to memory. The establishment stood against it; they did not want such a proposition to see the light of the day. But Ogot was undaunted and made it known that information about Africans was preserved in the minds of their people, who were considered existentially valuable for their civilisation.

In any case, Professor Ogot left a deep footprint that others may follow in their quest to advance their general intellectual aspirations. He was known to be fair and transparent, a man of confidence and honour. Ogot channelled his intellectual energy into a powerful instrument that he used to negotiate better and more productive ways for Africans of his generation and those who followed. Although he was not alone in making efforts to reestablish African history in an appropriate context, he provided the pioneering guide for East African intellectual identity. He collaborated with others across regions to ensure that Africans began a better approach to their development and intellectual emancipation. He touched several lives positively, and people today have borne witness to the immeasurable greatness that he brought to their lives by challenging colonial ideals targeted at the exploitation, extermination and eradication of African historical legacies. In that stead, his writings exonerate Africans from all the outrageous calamities that Eurocentric narratives have brought them.

* **Professor Toyin Falola** is the Jacob and Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities and a University Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Texas at Austin, specializing in African history.

*"Nobody, finally, can claim to own any part of the past,
let alone fence out competitors."*

Bethwell A. Ogot

*Reflecting on rigorous historical method, human sympathy,
and the universal right to study any history*

Bethwell A. Ogot: The Colossus of African Historiography and Intellectual Architect of Indigenous Knowledge

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The passing of Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot on 30 January 2025 marked the end of a towering intellectual era that reshaped the contours of African historiography. His contributions to academia, nation-building and historical methodology transcended mere scholarship, engraving his name in the pantheon of intellectual revolutionaries. As a historian, educator and institution-builder, Ogot not only documented African history but actively participated in its reconstruction, ensuring that the voices of the continent's people resounded in the global discourse. At the age of 95, Ogot departed this world having witnessed the transformation he himself had catalysed—from an era when African history was dismissed as non-existent to one where African scholars command authority over their own narratives. His life's work represents nothing less than an epistemological revolution, a systematic dismantling of colonial knowledge systems, and the construction of new intellectual architectures grounded in African agency and Indigenous epistemologies.

Intellectual Genealogy: Situating Ogot in the Arc of African Thought

To comprehend the magnitude of Ogot's contributions, one must situate him within the broader intellectual currents that shaped twentieth-century African scholarship. Ogot emerged during the postcolonial moment when African nations were simultaneously achieving political independence and confronting the intellectual colonisation that had accompanied territorial conquest—what Mahmood Mamdani would later term the 'decolonisation of the university'.

Ogot belonged to a generation of African intellectuals who understood that political independence without intellectual sovereignty remained incomplete liberation.

Okoth Osewe*

Stockholm County,
Sweden

He shared intellectual kinship with Cheikh Anta Diop, Joseph Ki-Zerbo and Kenneth Dike, yet his contribution was distinctive in its systematic methodological rigour and institutional dimension. Where others wrote against colonial historiography, Ogot

built the institutional infrastructure necessary to sustain African-centred historical inquiry across generations.

His intellectual formation at Makerere University and the University of London equipped him to engage with European scholarship on its own terms while simultaneously subverting its foundational assumptions. He mastered Western historiography not to replicate it uncritically but to demonstrate that African history could meet and exceed the evidentiary standards demanded by the discipline. This strategic engagement with European academic traditions while maintaining epistemological independence became a hallmark of Ogot's scholarly approach.

Epistemology as Liberation: The Politics of Historical Knowledge

Central to understanding Ogot's revolutionary impact is recognising his profound insight that historiography is inherently political. The writing of history is never a neutral act; it is always an exercise in power, determining whose experiences are deemed worthy of documentation and whose narratives shape collective memory. Ogot understood that the colonial denial of African history was not an innocent scholarly error but a deliberate political strategy to justify the 'civilising mission' and naturalise European domination.

Ogot's epistemological philosophy rested on several interconnected propositions. First, he argued that all societies produce historical knowledge, though they may

employ different methodological frameworks. The European privileging of written documents as the sole legitimate historical source was itself a culturally specific bias, not a universal standard.

Second, he contended that oral traditions, when subjected to rigorous critical analysis, could yield historical knowledge as reliable as written sources. Third, and most radically, Ogot insisted that African scholars must be the primary narrators of African history—not out of ethnic exclusivity but in recognition that those who understand African languages and social systems from within possess interpretive advantages external observers cannot easily replicate.

This epistemological stance had profound methodological implications. Ogot championed ‘methodological pluralism’—the integration of oral traditions, archaeology, linguistics, anthropology and written sources in historical reconstruction. His approach anticipated interdisciplinarity, though for Ogot it was less a fashionable academic trend than a practical necessity imposed by the nature of African historical sources.

The political dimensions of Ogot’s epistemological commitments extended beyond academic debates. He recognised that the recovery of African history was essential to postcolonial nation-building. How could newly independent African nations construct coherent national identities if their pasts were dismissed as non-existent? Ogot’s historiographical project was thus inseparable from the broader political project of decolonisation. By demonstrating that African societies had complex political systems, sophisticated economic arrangements and rich cultural traditions long before European contact, he provided the historical foundation for African self-determination.

Pioneering Methodological Innovation: Reconstructing the African Past

Ogot’s scholarship emerged when colonial narratives painted Africa as a continent devoid of history. This Eurocentric fallacy was intellectually eviscerated by Ogot, who championed oral traditions, archaeology and interdisciplinary approaches to reconstruct Africa’s past. His seminal work, *History of the Southern Luo* (1967), remains a touchstone in African historiography, demonstrating that stateless societies had complex political, economic and social systems worthy of scholarly rigour.

The methodological innovations in *History of the Southern Luo* represent a watershed moment. Ogot’s study focused on Luo-speaking peoples, who were dismissed

by colonial scholars as lacking political organisation because they did not conform to European models of centralised statehood. Through painstaking collection and analysis of oral traditions, Ogot reconstructed several centuries of Luo migration, settlement and social organisation, demonstrating that decentralised structures reflected alternative forms of social organisation based on kinship networks, age-set systems and decentralised decision-making.

Ogot conducted extensive fieldwork, interviewing elders across multiple Luo communities. He systematically cross-referenced narratives from different lineages, identifying convergence and divergence. Where oral traditions aligned across independent sources, he treated them as historically reliable. This rigorous comparative method demonstrated that oral traditions, properly analysed, could yield a historical knowledge that met academic historiography’s evidentiary standards.

Furthermore, Ogot integrated oral traditions with linguistic analysis, archaeological findings and early European travellers’ accounts (read critically). This methodological pluralism became a model for subsequent African historical scholarship.

His role in co-editing *Zamani: A Survey of East African History* (1968) was transformative, providing an authoritative counterpoint to Eurocentric histories. *Zamani* represented a collaborative effort to synthesise East African history while foregrounding African agency. It demonstrated that African historians could produce comprehensive, rigorous syntheses comparable to those about European or Asian societies and provided African students with textbooks that reflected their own histories rather than relegating them to footnotes in European narratives.

An Architect of Academic Institutions: Building the Infrastructure of Knowledge

Beyond personal scholarship, Ogot’s legacy is deeply intertwined with the institutionalisation of African history as a discipline. As founding chair of the History Department at the University of Nairobi (1967), he nurtured a generation of historians who carried forward Indigenous knowledge production. This represented a landmark moment—the first African university department dedicated specifically to African history, staffed primarily by African scholars, and committed to African-centred methodologies.

Under Ogot’s leadership, the department became a hub of intellectual innovation. He recruited talented scholars, provided research support and mentorship, and

created an institutional culture that valued rigorous scholarship combined with political engagement. The department's seminars became forums for intense debate where established scholars and graduate students engaged critically about methodological approaches and the political implications of historical research.

His commitment to decolonising African academia extended to his editorial stewardship of UNESCO's *General History of Africa*, where he ensured that African scholars dictated their own historical narratives. The project, launched in 1964, represented an unprecedented effort to produce comprehensive African history written primarily by African scholars. Ogot served on the International Scientific Committee, shaping the project's methodological approach. The resulting eight-volume series (1981–1993) became a foundational reference work, translated into multiple languages and used worldwide, demonstrating conclusively that African scholars possessed the expertise and intellectual authority to narrate their own histories.

As Chancellor of Moi University (1990–2002), Ogot expanded access to higher education and promoted Indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate academic fields. He championed the inclusion of African languages, oral literature and Indigenous knowledge in university curricula, arguing that African universities should develop distinctive intellectual traditions rooted in African cultural contexts.

His roles at Makerere, Kenyatta and Maseno universities further cemented his legacy as a builder of knowledge institutions. At each, Ogot strengthened academic standards while challenging Eurocentric biases embedded in conventional academic practices.

The Reproduction of Excellence: Mentorship and Intellectual Networks

Ogot's most enduring legacy lies in the generations of scholars he mentored and the intellectual networks he fostered. As a demanding but supportive teacher, he pushed students towards scholarly excellence while providing necessary guidance. Many of East Africa's most prominent historians were trained under his supervision or influenced by his work, carrying forward his methodological commitments and vision of African-centred historical inquiry.

Ogot's mentorship extended beyond formal supervision. He created platforms for scholarly exchange through conferences, workshops and publications. He founded and edited *Hadith*, which became a premier venue for

East African historical scholarship. The journal's title signalled its commitment to diverse forms of historical knowledge, including oral traditions, providing emerging scholars with opportunities to publish and engage in scholarly debates.

He also led the Historical Association of Kenya, transforming it into a vibrant intellectual community that brought together historians, teachers, archivists and others interested in Kenyan history. Through these activities, Ogot created an institutional ecosystem which sustained historical scholarship beyond individual scholars or single institutions.

Ogot's approach reflected his understanding of knowledge production as collective enterprise. He recognised that the decolonisation of African historiography required intellectual communities, institutional infrastructures and scholarly networks—structures which ensured that his influence would extend far beyond his lifetime.

A Nation-Builder and Political Strategist: Scholarship in the Service of the Public Good

Ogot's intellectual contributions extended beyond academia into political and administrative spheres. He played an integral role in Kenya's independence negotiations, working alongside Jaramogi Oginga Odinga and Tom Mboya during the Lancaster House talks in the 1960s. His historical insights were crucial in framing postindependence governance policies, as he persistently argued that understanding Kenya's precolonial past was essential to constructing cohesive national identity.

At Lancaster House, Ogot provided historical context for discussions about land rights, ethnic relations and governance structures. His research on precolonial political systems informed debates about structuring Kenya's postindependence government. His historical expertise helped negotiators understand that Kenya's ethnic diversity was not an obstacle to national unity but a resource that could be harnessed through appropriate institutional arrangements.

His tenure as Chairman of the Kenya Post and Telecommunications Corporation and his contributions to the East African Community Legislative Assembly illustrated his belief that intellectuals should actively shape public policy. Unlike scholars confined to academic silos, Ogot seamlessly merged intellectual inquiry with pragmatic governance, bringing scholarly rigour to administrative decision-making.

Ogot's philosophy reflected his understanding that scholarship and public service were mutually reinforcing activities. This integration of scholarship and statecraft distinguished him from scholars who viewed academic work as separate from political engagement. He rejected the notion that universities should be ivory towers, arguing instead that universities in postcolonial Africa had a responsibility to contribute to national development and produce knowledge relevant to African challenges.

Intellectual Courage and Controversy: The Scholar Who Refused Orthodoxy

Ogot's scholarship was not without controversy. His essay, 'Revolt of the Elders' (1972), critically reassessing the Mau Mau's role in Kenya's independence struggle, sparked intense debate. Whereas the dominant nationalist narrative lauded the Mau Mau as liberation's vanguard, Ogot introduced a nuanced perspective, arguing that the movement was not monolithic and that other actors played equally pivotal roles. This underscored his commitment to evidence-based history rather than ideological conformity.

In the essay, Ogot argued that the Mau Mau uprising reflected not simply nationalist liberation but also generational tensions within Kikuyu society—conflicts between younger militants and established elders over authority and resources. This interpretation challenged the heroic narrative central to Kenyan nationalism. Many viewed Ogot's argument as diminishing the Mau Mau's contribution, even betraying the liberation struggle. Yet Ogot insisted that historical accuracy required acknowledging complexity, even when it complicated politically convenient narratives. True respect for the liberation struggle, he contended, required honest historical analysis, not hagiography.

The controversy illustrated a recurring tension in postcolonial African historiography: balancing nationalist commitments with scholarly objectivity. Ogot navigated this by insisting that the best service historians could provide was rigorous, evidence-based scholarship, even when it challenged popular beliefs.

His later critiques of the World Bank's influence on African development positioned him as a defender of Indigenous economic models. He argued that Africa's development trajectory should be informed by its own historical experiences rather than externally imposed neoliberal policies. Ogot's critiques reflected his understanding that economic policy, like historiography, was a site of epistemological struggle. The World Bank's

insistence that African economies adopt Western-style market reforms ignored the historical specificities of African economic systems.

Ogot argued that precolonial African economies had developed sophisticated mechanisms for resource distribution, risk management and social welfare—systems well adapted to African environmental and social conditions. He advocated for development approaches that drew on African historical experiences, recognising the value of Indigenous economic practices and allowing African societies to chart their own development paths.

These critiques sometimes isolated Ogot from international development institutions and African governments that embraced neoliberal policies. Yet he remained undeterred, insisting that intellectual integrity required speaking truth even when unpopular. This willingness to stand alone against dominant orthodoxies—whether nationalist myths or neoliberal dogmas—exemplified Ogot's intellectual courage.

Partnership and Intellectual Dynamism: Ogot and Grace Ogot

Ogot's partnership with Grace Ogot, a distinguished writer and politician, symbolised a union of literary and historical excellence. Grace Ogot (1930–2015) was one of East Africa's most celebrated writers, the author of novels and short stories exploring Luo culture, gender relations and tensions between tradition and modernity. She also served in Kenya's Parliament and held various public positions.

The partnership between Bethwell and Grace represented a remarkable convergence of intellectual talents. While Bethwell reconstructed African history through scholarly research, Grace explored African experiences through literary imagination. Their work was complementary: historical scholarship provided factual foundation for understanding African societies, while literature captured the emotional textures and human dimensions of African life. Together, they demonstrated that recovering African agency required both empirical research and creative expression.

Their partnership also modelled an intellectual collaboration that transcended conventional gender divisions. In an era when African women's intellectual contributions were often marginalised, Grace Ogot achieved international recognition. Bethwell consistently supported her work, recognising her literary achievements as of equal value to his historical scholarship. Their mutual respect represented a progressive model of gender relations, which acknowledged women's intellectual authority.

The Ogots' home became a gathering place for Kenya's intellectual and cultural elite, fostering the vibrant intellectual life that characterised Kenya following independence. Grace Ogot's death in 2015 ended a partnership of more than six decades. Yet their joint legacy endures in the institutions they helped build, the scholarship and literature they produced, and the model of intellectual partnership they exemplified.

Continental and Global Recognition: Repositioning African Historiography

Ogot's influence extended far beyond East Africa, shaping African historiography across continents and repositioning African history within global academic discourse. His work with UNESCO's *General History of Africa* represented a continental effort to assert African scholarly authority, bringing together historians from across Africa and the diaspora, creating unprecedented opportunities for collaboration.

The *General History of Africa* had significant global impact. Its publication in multiple languages made African history accessible worldwide. Universities globally incorporated the volumes into curricula, exposing students to African-centred historical narratives. The project demonstrated that African history was not a marginal specialty but a central component of world history.

Ogot's international recognition was reflected in numerous honours—honorary doctorates, election to prestigious academic societies, invitations to lecture worldwide. These honours acknowledged not merely individual achievements but the broader legitimacy of African historical scholarship.

Yet Ogot remained grounded in African contexts. He resisted relocating to better-funded institutions in Europe or North America, choosing instead to build African universities and mentor African students. This commitment reflected his understanding that decolonising knowledge required building institutional capacity on the continent itself.

Ogot's global impact also manifested in his influence on how African history is taught worldwide. His methodological innovations—particularly demonstrating that oral traditions could yield reliable historical knowledge—influenced historians working in other regions where written sources were limited. His emphasis on African agency contributed to broader movements within global historiography towards more inclusive, multicultural approaches.

Enduring Legacy and Institutional Immortality

Ogot's legacy is etched in multiple dimensions of African intellectual history. The Bethwell A. Ogot Book Prize (established 2012), recognising outstanding scholarship in East African studies, honours work that exemplify the scholarly rigour and commitment to African-centred perspectives that characterise Ogot's work.

His leadership in the Historical Association of Kenya and of books such as *Hadith* fostered a vibrant intellectual community dedicated to African-centred historical inquiry. These institutions continue decades after he founded them, providing platforms for new generations of historians. The History Department at the University of Nairobi remains one of Africa's premier centres for historical scholarship, demonstrating that Ogot's legacy is actively productive, generating new knowledge and training new scholars.

Beyond formal institutions, Ogot's legacy lives in the transformed landscape of African historiography itself. The methodological pluralism he championed has become standard practice. The use of oral traditions as legitimate historical sources is now widely accepted. The insistence that African scholars must be the primary narrators of African history is no longer controversial but axiomatic. These transformations represent his most profound legacy—he changed not merely what we know about African history but how we produce historical knowledge, who is authorised to produce it, and what purposes it serves.

The Scholar Who Made History Speak: Intellectual Immortality

Professor Ogot's death at 95 was not merely the passing of an individual; it was the culmination of a historical epoch. Yet his ideas remain immortal. By championing African voices in historiography, fostering institutions that continue shaping intellectual discourse, and fearlessly confronting dominant paradigms, he ensured that Africa's past is neither marginal nor mythologised but central to the human story.

His life exemplified the transformative power of scholarship. Through academia's corridors, in policy-making chambers and within intellectual history's annals, Ogot's voice will continue to resonate, challenging, inspiring and guiding future generations. His scholarship dismantled colonial epistemologies, legitimised Indigenous knowledge and institutionalised African historical methodologies—an intellectual bequest that will endure long after his physical departure.

The magnitude of Ogot's achievement becomes clear when we consider the intellectual landscape he inherited and the one he bequeathed. He began his career when African history was dismissed as non-existent, when African scholars were marginalised in their own universities, and when Eurocentric narratives dominated academic discourse. He leaves behind a transformed intellectual world where African history is recognised as legitimate and vital, where African scholars command authority over their own narratives, and where methodological pluralism and Indigenous knowledge systems are valued components of historical inquiry.

This transformation was not inevitable. It required decades of rigorous scholarship, institutional building, mentorship and intellectual courage—challenging entrenched power structures, confronting comfortable orthodoxies and persisting despite resistance. Ogot's willingness to undertake this difficult work represents an intellectual heroism that deserves recognition and emulation.

As we reflect on Ogot's legacy, we must also consider the unfinished dimensions of his project. The decolonisation of African knowledge remains incomplete. Eurocentric biases persist in academic institutions, curricula and scholarly practices. African universities continue to struggle with limited resources, brain drain and pressures to conform to Western academic models.

Yet Ogot's work provides both inspiration and guidance for continuing these struggles. He demonstrated that intellectual transformation is possible, that determined

scholars can challenge and change dominant paradigms, and that constructing alternative knowledge systems requires both critical scholarship and institutional building. His legacy calls on subsequent generations to continue the work he began, to push further the boundaries of African-centred scholarship, and to ensure that African voices remain central to global intellectual discourse.

In the annals of African history, Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot will not merely be remembered. He will be revered as a founding figure of African historiography, as an intellectual revolutionary who transformed how we understand Africa's past, and as a builder of institutions that continue to shape African scholarship. His ideas, his methodologies and his vision of African intellectual sovereignty will guide scholars for generations to come. Though he has departed, his voice continues to speak through the institutions he built, the scholars he mentored and the transformed intellectual landscape he helped create. In this sense, Ogot has achieved a form of immortality granted only to those whose ideas transcend their individual lives to become permanent features of human knowledge. He made history speak—and in doing so, ensured that his own voice will echo through the ages.

* **Okoth Osewe** is a Kenyan writer, blogger, and journalist. He is the founder and administrator of the Kenya Stockholm Blog and is employed by HCL Technologies in Stockholm, Sweden.

Bethwell A. Ogot: Definition of a World Influencer Attached to His Roots

The passing on of Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot has been met with an outpouring of grief from a diverse array of individuals. This broad range of tributes underscores the multifaceted nature of Prof. Ogot's life, his ability to forge relationships across divergent spaces, the fluidity with which he navigated different sectors, and his profound impact on multiple generations. It is a testament to the inclusivity of his academic vision, his professional ethos and his enduring humanity.

Much has been written about Prof Ogot's monumental academic contributions, his pioneering efforts to decolonise and indigenise African scholarship, and his international recognition. Yet, amidst these commendations, two notable aspects of his life are often understated: the binary of home anchorage in his scholarly journey and his steadfast commitment to shaping the Kenyan academy from within, despite the global academic temptations of his time.

Professor Ogot was rooted in Kenya, never seeking long-term academic pursuits abroad in the manner of many of his contemporaries, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Ali Mazrui or Micere Mugo. Whereas these scholars were pushed out by an unfavourable political environment and found prominence in international academic spheres, Ogot chose, at times at the cost of comfort and compromise, to anchor his scholarship in Kenya. His career unfolded against the backdrop of the evolution of the nation's higher education landscape, with a career spanning from the University of Nairobi to Kenyatta University, from Moi University to Maseno University. It was here, within the walls of these institutions, that he shaped the intellectual contours of modern Kenyan scholarship.

Ogot's academic trajectory offers a distinct contrast to the familiar narrative of the African scholar who achieves prominence on foreign soil and then returns to influence his home country. Rather than pursuing academic prestige in the West, Ogot remained firmly

Kenneth Ombongi*
University of Nairobi,
Kenya

rooted in Kenya, contributing to the intellectual infrastructure of his homeland. This choice did not constrain his scholarship; rather, it became a defining feature of his work, allowing him to anchor his scholarship in the lived realities of his people while simultaneously engaging

in global academic exchanges.

The second pivotal aspect of Ogot's life was his ability to move seamlessly across the full spectrum of Kenya's public universities. Unlike many academics who confined their energies to one institution, Ogot left his indelible mark on the Kenyan academic landscape through his work in several major universities. He began his career at the University of Nairobi, before advancing to Kenyatta University, where he played an instrumental role in shaping its academic profile. He then brought his wisdom and expertise to Moi University, before ultimately returning to Maseno University, near his childhood home. This fluid movement across Kenya's academic institutions attests to his unyielding commitment to the growth of higher education in his homeland.

Beyond the lecture halls, Prof Ogot's influence continued unabated in his later years. After retiring, he transformed his home into a thriving hub of academic activity. His residence became a sanctuary for scholars, a repository of historical knowledge complete with an extensive library and archives. It was here that academics and students from around the world would come to seek his counsel, consult his rich collection of books or observe the meticulous process through which he continued to write and contribute to African historiography.

* **Dr Kenneth S. Ombongi** is Associate Dean, Research and Postgraduate Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Nairobi, and a Senior Lecturer specialising in African history and politics.



The Historian as a Biographer: Remembering Bethwell A. Ogot

In his citation during the African Studies Association Distinguished Africanist Award presentation to Bethwell Ogot in Houston in 2001, renowned Africanist David Cohen said:

I know of no scholar of Africa who has contributed more than he has in the building of new institutional foundations to support the Africanist scholarship and to the continuous generation of lively and challenging scholarship in Africa. (Ogot 2003: 536)

Ogot's autobiography, *My Footprints in the Sands of Time* (2003), unravels this epic journey. Like most African autobiographies, he begins his narrative by situating himself in the history of his community, the Luo. 'My historical roots,' he writes in his opening sentence, 'can be traced back to the settlement of the Luo in the Nyanza province of Kenya' (Ogot 2003: 1). In this sense, the story of this individual becomes the story of the Luo community as it emerges as part of the new nation of Kenya. In other words, while autobiography has been understood as a form of self-writing, a narrative about oneself, what seems to characterise the genre as a form to represent Africa's emergence into modernity is its closeness to the story of the birth of the nation.

Fredrick Jameson's (1986) much-criticised assertion of Third World writing as a national allegory may seem a relevant prism for reading autobiographical texts such as Ogot's. Jameson argues that the story of the Third World private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public Third World culture and society (Jameson 1986). Jameson, however, was concerned more with the novel, which in the nation-building era had to bear the burden of representing 'sweeping social and political projects of building a collective identity', urgent issues 'that loomed large for those writers who sought to provide a cognitive map of the era' (Goyal 2022: 521). Unlike the novelists who, in most cases, represent these situa-

Peter T. Simatei*

Moi University,
Eldoret, Kenya

tions as they unfold and have to grapple with the incoherence of the emerging situations as they construct their fictional worlds, the writers of autobiographies confront the task of reconciling their past experiences into a coherent narrative, navigating the complexities of memory

and identity to construct a cohesive and meaningful account of their lives.

Ogot writes with this kind of awareness in mind, but more so as a historian who interprets his story and turns it into a piece of history. He argues in the prolegomena of his book that in the autobiography '... one is trying to objectify the subjective, to render explicit and visible the multitude of influences to which one has been subjected, and which have helped to shape one's life'. His autobiography then emerges as an academic interpretation of his life and the world that has shaped it, and he sees his life as, to quote Steedman's reading of Goethe, '... an interplay of the self and the world around the self' (Ogot 1992).

Ogot's memoir might as well be termed an academic autobiography, to the extent that the text is conscious of itself as an intellectual project that constructs our access to the past. Academic autobiography, to quote Jaume Aurell as read by Rocia Davis, seeks 'to increase our understanding not only of history but, importantly, of the writing of history' (Davis, 2009: 442), so that in this respect autobiography itself authorises the author as the source of valid information. Historians, argues Aurell, use 'the story of their own intellectual and academic trajectory as the source of historiography' (Aurell 2015: 243). For this reason, he calls such autobiographical writings 'interventional'.

Such perspectives are essential in reading autobiographies of liberation. In the case of Ogot, this is important in the context of the controversial politics of the historiography of not only the Mau Mau but also of Kenya's liberation in general. Although Ogot's autobiography does not directly deal with these debates

and controversies, he writes aware of the embellishments and distortions of history that define earlier autobiographies. His remedy for such hyperbolic accounts of the past is to adopt a systemic presentation of his personal story that turns into a public history of national institutions in Kenya.

This journey begins upon his admission to Makerere College for a Diploma in Education with a subject combination of mathematics and history, ‘a combination that was condemned by my academic advisors as odd or stupid’ (Ogot 2003: 47). He would later abandon mathematics for history, and this autobiography is about his part in the development of African history as a subject of study in East Africa and Africa in general. It is also about his role in building Indigenous institutions, which he saw as a way of restoring an agency to Africans that colonialism had suppressed. He would do this prominently as the editor of the UNESCO General History of Africa project, which he also helped to found.

For Ogot, the need to decolonise African history was justified on the grounds that:

African history was for the most part, seen as the history of Europeans in Africa—a part of the historical progress and development of Western Europe and an appendix of the national history of the metropolis. It was argued at the time that Africa had no history because history begins with writing and thus with the arrival of the Europeans. (Ogot 1992 : 71)

Ogot demonstrates how Western scholarship linked African historiography with the ‘colonial period and its own official historiography, with prejudices, acquired and disseminated as historical knowledge, and with Eurocentric assumptions and arrogant certainty’ (Ogot 2003: 71). Just as literary projects challenged the Western construction of Africa as ‘one long night of savagery’ (Achebe 1974: 59), the challenge to imperial historiographical hegemony was part of the decolonisation process. The General History of Africa project was, according to Casper Andersen, a ‘scholarly undertaking but was at the same time regarded as a frame for the enactment of national and transnational memory political agendas that shifted during the project spanned’ (Andersen 2022: 49). In a sense, ideological factors underpinning the politics of national liberation and nation-building determined the directions of disciplines such as history and literature significantly.

What is interesting is that as early as 1950 Ogot and other students in Makerere were already confronting decolonial issues, even if they did not couch them in contemporary decolonial terms. Questions and complexities of writing African literature in mother tongues, which would preoccupy Ngugi wa Thiong’o and his generation in the late 1970s as part of their decolonisation agenda, were already urgent questions for the Makerere Society of Vernacular Literature, where Ogot was a member and the assistant editor of *African Literature*, the society’s journal. Ogot’s early interest in the history of precolonial Africa was premised on his conviction that, although there were no written records of such pasts, the examination of the validity of traditional sources would be a project worth undertaking as a first step in understanding that past and liberating it from the Africa of Hegel, which lay ‘beyond the day of self-conscious history’ and ‘enveloped in the dark mantle of Night’ (Hegel 1956: 91).

As Ogot explains in his autobiography, he would later be joined by other students of precolonial Africa, like G. S. Were, Ahmed Salim and Godfrey Muriuki, who were interested in countering colonial history in Africa which, to echo Gurinder Bhambra’s reading of Edward Said in a different context, is ‘the product of the West in its actions upon others’ (Bhambra 2014: 116) and which, conceived this way, silences articulation of alternative histories, or as Bhambra puts it, removes ‘the very question of the “other” in History’.

Yet, in relation to the controversial historiography of Kenya’s liberation and the Mau Mau, historians working on precolonial histories did not lack critics. For example, in a rare case of intertextuality, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, in his novel *Petals of Blood* (1977), through Karega, the intellectual character of the novel, refers to four Kenyan historians (Ogot, Muriuki, Were and Ochieng’), whom he then lampoons for being defenders of imperialist historiography. Believing that he will find answers to Kenya’s postcolonial dilemmas among historians, Karega discovers that the knowledge he is looking for cannot be found among them.

... instead of giving him the key he so badly needed, the professors took him to precolonial times and made him wander purposelessly from Egypt, or Ethiopia, or Sudan, only to be checked in his pastoral wanderings by the arrival of Europeans. There, they would make him come to a sudden full stop. To the learned minds of the historians, the history, the history of Kenya before colonialism was one of the wanderlust and pointless warfare between peoples. The learned ones never wanted to confront

the meaning of colonialism and of imperialism. When they touched on it, it was only to describe acts of violent resistance as grisly murders; some even demanded the rehabilitation of those who had sold out to the enemy during the years of struggle. (Thiong'o 1977 : 237)

Without referring to these charges, Ogot alludes to his efforts to deconstruct the very imperialist distortions that Ngugi was accusing him of. In December 1961, invited by the International African Institute in London, he attended an international conference in Dakar, Senegal, which was meant to discuss 'the meaning of African history to contemporary Africans' and the 'legitimate role of "historical imagination"'. He wrote:

... this was the first time African academic historians were meeting other practitioners from all parts of the world at an international conference specifically convened to discuss the history of their continent. For me it was the first time I met other African scholars I was to collaborate with in future such as Jacob Adeniyi Ajayi of Nigeria, Sheikh Anta Diop of Senegal, and Joseph Kizerbo of Burkina Faso. We successfully put up a case against ethno-history that was being championed by anthropologists and some Franco-phone on the basis that Africa had no history that predated the Colonial period except ethno-history. We buried African ethno-history in Dakar, and henceforth, no scholar worth its salt ever again referred to African history as ethno-history. (Ogot 2003 : 115)

As a lecturer at Makerere, he pursued similar decolonial projects, coming together with a small group of scholars who demanded the decolonisation of the history curriculum, to give centrality to research on African history using methods and sources unencumbered by historiography as defined by European historians. This is what Ngugi wa Thiong'o and colleagues would be doing for African literature a decade later, in what has come to be known as the Nairobi revolution—that is, the abolition of the English department and its replacement with the Department of Literature with a heavy Afrocentric focus at the University of Nairobi. In a sense, then, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's categorisation of Ogot as an 'imperialist historian' stems from a disregard for Ogot's alternative perspective, which emphasises the diverse struggles for liberation within Kenyan communities rather than solely foregrounding the conventional narrative of the independence struggle. On this, Ogot notes:

There can be a grand narrative but only if we changed the governing narrative from the struggle for political independence, defined in terms of who took arms

against the colonialists, to the struggle for liberty, justice and equality. Such a narrative would speak to contests and conflicts over power and how such contests reflected the long struggle among various groups for liberty. (Ogot 2003: 157)

In fact, in 1971, Bethwell Ogot, then President of the Historical Association of Kenya, urged for the study of the history of the loyalists. He argued that any serious study of political revolution in Kenya during the colonial period would have to include a discussion of loyalism and its role in Kenyan politics. Ogot went on to demonstrate the complexity of the composition and the motivations of the loyalist crowd, if only to show that their actions could not be dismissed as mere acts of betrayal of the nationalist cause (Ogot 1972). This was a fair response to Ngugi's understanding of Kenya's history as being simply between the oppressed and the oppressor. From this binary perspective, Ngugi delineates two categories of forces at work in the process of national formation in Kenya. On one side, there are the dominant forces allied to neocolonialism and which, to Ngugi's reckoning, are conservative and retrogressive. Opposed to this are workers and peasants, who are revolutionary and progressive. This formation is then translated into a dialectic of class, with the two classes poised against one another: the capitalist exploiters versus the exploited workers. Ngugi profiles each of these in history, showing how each emerged in the decisive moment when the Kenyan people reacted to foreign invasion. In this context then, the Mau Mau were a culmination of all the previous struggles waged by the other resistance heroes.

Conclusion

Ogot's intentionally systematic and historiographical account of his life contrasts sharply with earlier autobiographies, whose narration of the past lacked the depth and analytical rigour evident in his approach and was prone to distortions and embellishments. This is not to argue that one type of autobiography (academic, in the case of Ogot's, and which becomes to the reader a source of intellectual history) is superior to another. Still, if one reads autobiographies because one wants to access the past through life-writing or personal stories, then, ultimately, questions of credibility and validity of evidence come to the fore. No one is asking that we treat autobiographies as sources of history. Some missionary life stories, for example, were meant as evangelistic pedagogies. Other texts, especially the autobiographies that chronicle individual participation in the war of independence and politics of decolonisation are credible sources of histories of liberation.

Notes

1. On his autobiography, Ogot says, 'This then is the life story of an African scholar who has been profoundly shaped by his experiences and who seeks to understand both the world and himself through this process of interaction'.
2. Although in the novel Ngugi uses only the surnames of the three historians, he is certainly referring to Bethwell Ogot, Godfrey Muriuki, Gideon Were and William Ochieng'. The last is Ngugi's fiercest critic, whom he accuses of historical distortion and artistic idealism in relation to his portrayal of Dedan Kimathi, the Mau Mau leader (see Ochieng', 1992). Apart from the satiric references to historians in this novel, Ngugi revisits the onslaught in his later novel, *Matigari* (1989), where he caricatures historians as parrots of the neocolonial regime.
3. For more on this change, and especially the academic contestations and debates surrounding it, see especially Amoko, 2010.
4. For more on this, see Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1983, 1993, 1989.

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* **Professor Peter Simatei** is Professor of Comparative Literature and Director of the Moi University Africa Multiple Research Centre, Moi University, Kenya.

My Interactions with Bethwell A. Ogot at Maseno University

When I learned of Prof. B. A. Ogot's demise on 30 January 2025, I was flabbergasted—not because I considered him to be immortal but because of the immense loss to his family in particular, and to the academe, even as he was 95. I was indeed dumbfounded. Just about two months before his demise, I, together with Prof. I. Simala, Rev. Fr. Dr. Kizito, fellow historians and other colleagues at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), had decided to visit the doyen of Kenyan history at his beautiful Yala residence. But God had His own plan for him. To reach 95 years, it means God loved Prof. Ogot and Prof. Ogot loved God. Nowadays it is not easy to reach even 70 years.

Prof. Ogot will be remembered as a phenomenon in historical studies. He was a consummate historian, a scholar with monumental credentials. He was a generous and humorous human being. Prof. Ogot was always at liberty to share knowledge about virtually everything his fertile intellectual mind would yield. He was inspiring and he was a great mentor.

It was an exceedingly wonderful time I had with Prof. Ogot at Maseno University, both intellectually and socially. He and the late Prof. William Robert Ochieng', his former doctoral student, were instrumental in recruiting me at Maseno University in 1995 where I provided my intellectual labour for eleven years, that is, up to 2006 when I relocated to MMUST. During this hectic period, the three of us and other social science-minded colleagues used to engage in vigorous discourses regarding the nature, methodology, epistemology, ontology, etc., of the discipline of history in particular, in relation to other social science disciplines, and their relevance to society and at the basic, national, regional, African continental and glo-

Pontian Godfrey Okoth*

Masinde Muliro University
of Science and Technology,
Kakamega, Kenya

bal levels. These discourses were always intense, and we could either agree or disagree without any acrimony; they were always punctuated by smiles, laughter and the sharing of pleasantries at a meal.

Prof. Ogot was exceedingly knowledgeable, intellectually stimulating and entertaining and was susceptible to details based on empirical evidence. We nicknamed him 'the mobile archives'.

Prof. Ogot was a pioneer historian not just in Kenya but across Africa. He was a vanguard in championing Afrocentricism (as opposed to Eurocentricism) in historical scholarship, a promoter of oral sources in extending the frontiers of knowledge pertaining to historical research and African historiography. This is evidenced in his seminal book, *History of the Southern Luo*, published in 1967, where he ably demonstrated that it was possible beyond reasonable doubt to construct and reconstruct African history by using oral sources, hitherto an unfamiliar territory in Eurocentric circles.

Prof. Ogot was intellectually provocative. He prodded me on three fronts. First, he challenged me to edit a book with him on a theme of my choice. I took up the gauntlet with intense excitement. With the unwavering support of Prof. Ochieng', the pioneer principal of the then Maseno University College, and the fellow historians in the Department of History and Archaeology, we organised an international interdisciplinary conference at Maseno in 1999 under the auspices of the Historical Association of Kenya, under the theme, 'Conflict in Contemporary Africa'. The proceedings of the conference were edited by myself and Prof. Ogot and published as a book by the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation in 2000. At the end of it all, Prof. Ogot exclaim-

med, 'Wod Twon', meaning 'son of a bull' in Dholuo, or 'this is great'. 'Wod Twon' is what he would fondly call me and I loved it.

The second challenge was for me to give an inaugural lecture after I was promoted to the rank of professor in 1996. He told me, 'Wod Twon, I challenge you to give the first inaugural lecture at this University College'. I accepted and told him I would do so, once Maseno became a fully fledged university. Meanwhile, I went ahead and crafted the lecture and requested his opinion on it. He observed, 'Wod Twon, this is an inaugural lecture material. Congratulations'. Following the granting of the Charter to Maseno University College, which transformed into Maseno University in 2001, I delivered the pioneer inaugural lecture on Wednesday, 17 September 2003 in the Millennium Hall. The title of the inaugural lecture was 'The Dishonest Broker in Africa: A diplomatic historian's tour of US–African relations since 1945'.

Prof. Ogot was there in the packed hall. Once more, he congratulated me and we proceeded to the reception at the Senior Staff Club at Siriba Campus. To reaffirm his generosity, Prof. Ogot partially funded the reception, the larger portion having been funded by the university.

The third challenge was for me to write a history of Jopadhola, my nationality. Those who have read Prof. Ogot's *History of the Southern Luo* will agree that it is largely the Luo of South Nyanza and Jopadhola of Eastern Uganda who constitute the Southern Luo. They were and remain cousins whose migration and settlement Prof. Ogot traced. I did not disappoint. I and my former student, Dr. Yokana Ogola, a PhD holder at Kenyatta University, teamed up, embarked on research and wrote the book, *History of Jopadhola from Early Times to the Present*, published in Kampala in August 2024 and launched by the Vice President of the Republic of Uganda, Major (Rtd) Jessica Alupo on 7 August 2024, during the colourful Silver Jubilee of the coronation of His Royal Highness Kwar Adhola (Ker of Padhola), Moses Stephen Owor at Achilet, in Tororo, Eastern Uganda.

I alerted Prof. Ogot about the book, and he was elated about it. I had promised to give him a *gratis* copy which I will honour when I attend his burial, to be added to his immaculately kept personal library at his home in Yala.

Prof. Ogot was a committed scholar. Imagine—at the age of 95, and as an emeritus professor, he was still intellectually versatile. During the Fourth Piny Luo festival, which took place at Got Ramogi between 29 December 2024 and 2 January 2025, Prof. Ogot was due to deliver a paper, but it was not possible at the last minute.

I could say much more about my interactions with Prof. Ogot at Maseno University. Although he did not formally teach me in the context of a classroom or lecture hall situation, he taught me a lot via his numerous books, journal articles, monographs, public lectures, conference proceedings, and so on. I cannot forget the many meals and drinks he bought for me each time we met at the Senior Staff Club at Siriba and on the Main Campus. Any attempt I made to reciprocate, he always declined, arguing that I was his brother across the border and, therefore, his guest. Truly, Prof. Ogot was my elder brother in both the academic and social sense.

Finally, Prof. Ogot was an illustrious son of Kenya, a vicarious son of Africa and a global citizen par excellence. May the Angels of the Lord receive Prof. Bethwell Allan Ogot's soul with great abundance and grace and may they sing for his soul his favourite church song, 'Kutendereza Yesu'...

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* **Professor Pontian Godfrey Okoth** is Professor of History and International Relations in the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya.

Bethwell A. Ogot, Seen from Britain

Kenyans mourn the late Bethwell Ogot as one of their founding intellectual fathers. They are right to do so and they are not alone. He is remembered with equal respect in the wider world. In 2001, the American African Studies Association (ASA) honoured him as a Distinguished Africanist; they continue to award an annual Ogot Prize, founded in 2012, for the best new book in East African studies. In public, the British have so far been more restrained. More privately, I know I speak for many in recording our admiration, our affection and our debt to Bethwell Ogot.

I have more than once published my thanks for the extraordinary friendliness and collegial generosity of our Kenyan colleagues. You all have comparatively few resources, enormous teaching loads and little sabbatical time. We, on the other hand, have our libraries, our greater bandwidth, research grants and sabbatical terms. We are able to research and then publish our findings on Kenyan history more easily than you. And yet you still welcome us; I have never once met envious resentment. I have always felt among friends. Kenyans have nurtured a wonderfully open academic culture; your collegial cooperation warms the heart.

Such welcoming cultures are not accidental; they are created by people of weight and influence. Bethwell Ogot was such a man. Ogot's intellectually hospitality was rooted in his trust in the disciplinary power of historical method. This, in his view, required of all serious historians, no matter what their origin, the same rational distrust of all evidence. Neither the nationality nor the gender of the historian mattered. It was enough that she or he stuck to the discipline, tempered by the sympathy of which, again, all people are capable. None of us, he believed, could claim any superior understanding of a particular people or situation in the past; all pasts are strange to all who come after. None could re-enter even their ancestors' world; the context would be foreign however familiar it seemed.

John Lonsdale*

Trinity College
Cambridge, UK

Time changes all contexts; no context is ever repeated. Nor are there timeless characteristics. Indeed, the most alien pasts may be those that are supposedly our own; they have more expectations of familiarity to betray.

All in all, therefore, anybody, so Ogot assured us, may study any past. Africans can as well study European history as Europeans study African history, gays may study straights, straights gays; women may characterise kings, men understand queens. Rigorous historical method, the constant awareness that one may have failed to grasp inner meanings, together with human sympathy, should get the better of ignorance, preconception and prejudice. Nobody, finally, can claim to own any part of the past, let alone fence out competitors (Ogot 2010: 20–21).

I have been re-reading Ogot with this, our expatriate debt to him, in mind. I am struck (once again) by three great qualities that, to me, underwrite his intellectual generosity to those who share his sense of discipline. Others will cherish other qualities. For me what stand out are: first, his own sense of indebtedness to others, irrespective of passing opinions and ideologies; second, his firm yet liberating sense that humanity's history is, at bottom, the story of our reactions to changing contexts—reactions that are shaped at least as deeply by our inclusive relationships with others as by the allegedly exclusive cultures taught us by our ancestors. Finally, I am struck by Ogot's morally stern insistence that scholars should question conventional truths, especially those to do with partisan national histories, rather than polish or worship them.

As a member of an imperial nation (and, in the late 1950s, a former practising imperialist when serving as a conscript junior officer in the King's African Rifles), I warm to Ogot's awareness of imperialism's inescapable contradictions. There was always an inherent racism that, for instance, deliberately tried to

humiliate the research student Ogot and his new wife Grace, when they were looking for a flat in London (Ogot 2003a: 106). On the other hand, Ogot repeatedly records the unselfish, tutorial rather than paternalist, devotion with which individual Britons tried to open up future opportunities for their African students.

He first became aware of this responsible aspect of the imperial relationship as a boy, when seeing the work of Olive Owen among Luo women. She is still remembered as *mikayi*, the wife of Archdeacon Owen, who was himself nicknamed the ‘Archdemon of Kavirondo’ by white settlers angered by his championship of African interests (Ogot 2003b: 18). Ogot was most conspicuously grateful to Carey Francis, legendary headmaster of the Alliance High School in the 1940s and 50s. Francis was both big and humble enough to admit in front of the school that his own, now outdated, mathematical method was inferior to the newer method taught by his junior, the recently recruited African maths master (Ogot 2003b: 60–65, 70–73, 93, 86).

In his autobiography, Ogot is similarly appreciative of others who were driven by their proper concern for the uncertain future awaiting an African student or junior colleague. He remembers, in particular, Professor Roland Oliver at London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and Professor Kenneth Ingham at Makerere (Ogot 2003b: 49, 86–87, 95–96, 99–106, 131).

Ogot’s ability to appreciate the liberal humanity of individual Britons, despite his often-insulting encounters with other Europeans more anxious to assert their insecure sense of racial superiority, stemmed from his own humane intelligence. He had a wonderful capacity to appreciate the equal value of both the local and the global, both inherited and acquired knowledges and culture, both oral and literate wisdoms. He saw the need to steer between the twin arrogances of Eurocentrism and Négritude (Ogot 2003b: 538–539). He constantly strove to create a teaching curriculum that imparted respect for both African and global history. Neither, he felt, could be fully understood without the other.

This certainty, that history, properly pluralised, was essential to encourage cultural self-confidence in a rapidly changing world, inspired Ogot’s astonishing, exhausting record of public service, both national and international. He founded and chaired departments, institutes, publishing houses, historical associations and learned journals; he steered

and edited internationally funded collective works, and so on; the list is endless. My Kenyan colleagues will be able to say more about them than I can ever know. So many different interests in Kenya, Africa and the world apparently asked for his fair-minded, rigorous, principled chairmanship.

My reading of his autobiography, *My Footprints in the Sands of Time* (Ogot 2003b) leads me to believe that Ogot’s concern for a creative balance between ancestral wisdoms and those of strangers followed from his youthful enthusiasm for English literature and European history more generally, and his reciprocal determination to see that, while they enlightened him, they would never dominate his thoughts. In 1946 he entered Maseno School at the impressionable age of 17. It was there that he ‘discovered the beauty and wealth of English literature’. He ‘voraciously read’ nineteenth-century novelists and poets; Shakespeare ‘really captured [his] soul’ and entered his ‘everyday vocabulary’. As an aside, and remembering Ogot’s insistence on the historic importance of the centuries of human interconnection across our world, I wonder if he was thinking as much of contemporary Kenya as of eighteenth-century Ireland when, on writing in his seventies about his youthful enthusiasms, he quoted Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village*, with the couplet: ‘Ill fares the land, to hast’ning ills a prey, Where wealth accumulates and men decay’. And what a memory, to be able to quote that schoolboy discovery and many others! Or perhaps, what a wonderful personal library to have built up, whose shelves he could plunder? (Ogot 2003b: 38–40).

Still more importantly, Ogot the teenage scholar was not only bewitched by the literature but remained critically alert enough to realise that his beloved poets and novelists, not least Dickens, portrayed an England that was nothing like as idyllic as the England taught by his history teachers. Ogot already had this historian’s ability to discern underlying, perhaps darker, truths beneath the often-glittering surface of publicly available evidence. The schoolboy questioned the self-interest of his sources long before receiving any professional training in the historical method on which he later placed such importance.

The evidence to which the young man applied his critical mind at Maseno was imperially British. When going on to Makerere and St Andrew’s University in Scotland, Ogot continued to cherish ‘a rich and varied Western intellectual menu, especially the philosophical and historical debates. I soaked myself in Western philosophy from Socratic dialogues to Logical Posi-

tivism' (Ogot 2003b: 539). Upon receiving a Litt.D., *honoris causa*, from Kenyatta University in 1995, he called for the university to be full of the 'intellectual ferment' that in the Poland of the sixteenth century had inspired Nicolaus Copernicus to insist on a heliocentric universe, a blasphemy that scandalised the German Martin Luther. Two centuries earlier, as Ogot went on to say, Dante had published his great *Divine Comedy*, not in Latin, then the language of Western civilisation, but in his native Italian, dismissed at the time by his critics as 'the vulgar tongue, in which even housewives hold converse'. Ogot saw a message there for today: Kenya needed its own 'latter-day' Dantes. His distinguished audience was left to understand that the poets of today should not be too proud to write in one or another of their own many vernaculars. Their voices were needed to guide their compatriots through 'the present spiritual wastelands inhabited by hollow men and women'—an echo of the twentieth-century Anglo-American poet T. S. Eliot, which, again, he clearly expected his audience to spot and reflect upon.

Ogot continued in this globally ecumenical vein to exhort Kenya's scholars to share the spirit of adventure shown by the seventeenth-century English scientist Isaac Newton, who had imagined himself as a boy playing with pebbles on the seashore 'while the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered before me'. Ogot thought there was still time, if only Africa's intellectual communities would form 'a grand alliance' with the world, for an African Renaissance (Ogot 2003b: 478–479).

After this recital of Ogot's wide-ranging, passionate erudition it is not frivolous so much as revealing to say that when I stayed with him at his home in Yala in March 2004, the last time I saw him, we watched the cycle race, the Tour de France, while sitting together in front of his wide-screen television. Was he also a Gor Mahia football fan? There seemed to be nothing in the world in which he did not take interest. That is the point. Only a broad perspective could make it thinkable for African history to be world history and world history African. Ogot was entirely consistent. When, in 1957, at the age of 28, he received a colonial government bursary for the fourth year at St Andrews, which enabled him to take a BA Honours degree, he was 'determined, in the words of the University motto, "Ever to be the best", and not to put to shame the lineage of which I came' (Ogot 2003b: 85). The two ambitions, widely global and intimately local, reinforced each other; they did not clash.

After years spent poring over printed texts in university libraries, Ogot went on to justify the use of oral tradition in his SOAS doctoral research into the precolonial history of the Kenya Luo. Like virtually all other Kenyans, for centuries they had lived nowhere near Kenya. He asked why anyone should think oral history strange or second-rate: after all, the historians of early medieval England also had to rely on the oral traditions set down in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (Ogot 1966: 140–148; 1967: 17–18). The methods of African history were not suspiciously untried but reassuringly proven by age—if, again, African history was also world history. In Ogot's view, the world was full of equivalents, some clearly significant, some not so obviously so. The Anglo-Saxons were almost certainly of less importance to early medieval Europe than the Luo peoples were to the changing history of precolonial East Africa. But this did not diminish the Saxons' significance for African historical method.

Ogot was similarly insistent that only widespread, all-inclusive history was good enough for teaching the history of their migrant nation to Kenya's young. Some of its stories, as with all new nations, and some not so new, have been thought to be more significant, more heroic, more exemplary, more demanding of respect than others. Some of the most important pages in the autobiography in which Ogot traced his footsteps in the sands of time tell how he and his equally iconoclastic colleagues struggled to create a confidently inclusive history to teach young Kenya. It had to be one that not only did the obvious, in stressing African as much as European achievement, precolonial as much as colonial history; less obviously but every bit as importantly it also had to be about every Kenyan, not just the most powerful or articulate (Ogot 2003: 145–159). If some Kenyans, less wealthy, less well educated, more politically marginal than others, likely to be pastoralists rather than farmers, were forgotten by this new history, would they still be Kenyans? Would they still want to be?

In more recent years Ogot became ever more insistent that what he called 'the national project' simply had to treat all Kenyans as equals, all as culturally interesting and political creative as each other (Ogot 2012). This insistence was most provocative of constructive debate when, at Atieno Odhiambo's and my invitation, Bethwell contributed his thoughts on what constituted Kenya's nationalism and nationhood to our collection in 2003 on *Mau Mau and Nationhood* (Ogot 2003). Ogot was clear that those who took to the forests of

Nyandarua and Mount Kenya were never the only heroes of freedom; nor was their memory alone sufficient to build what would always be a multicultural nation of immigrants. The 'national project' had to be capacious, with plenty of respectful room for all of Kenya's many culturally creative nationalisms, all of them seeking some mastery of global, no less than colonial, modernity. Among these political artists were South Asian Kenyan trade unionists, journalists and lawyers, products of global history, just as most of Kenya's migrants had colonised their trails across wide swathes of African history, eastwards around the continent's equatorial forests and southwards up the River Nile.

To insist on the teaching of African and world history in the school and university curriculum, as well as that of Kenya's many-stranded national story, marks Ogot as not so much a nationalist, his natural inclination, but as a citizen, a more demanding consciousness. As an enquiring man of the world, his familiarity with its many histories of struggles for freedom made him more than a nationalist—he was a convinced, sternly critical patriot, demanding that Kenya prove itself worthy of its international sovereignty.

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* **Professor John Lonsdale** is Emeritus Professor of Modern African History at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Trinity College. He is widely recognized for his influential scholarship on Kenya, nationalism, ethnicity, and colonialism.

Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow: Humanist

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Amy Niang*

Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow passed away at the age of 103, leaving behind a legacy defined by his desire for a just and equitable world. He will be remembered for his commitments to knowledge and multilateralism, and to diplomacy as both a condition of freedom and a necessary instrument of a better future. First as Minister of Education in Senegal and then as Director-General of UNESCO, M'Bow championed causes and laid agendas for the twentieth century. These included the necessity for human connection through access to the means of information and related technologies; the relatability of the universal to the collective human heritage; and the restitution to Africa of its history and its recognition as an essential component of the human trajectory. Underneath it all, M'Bow had an unwavering attachment to a humanistic ethos of solicitousness, engagement, inclusion and respect for the other.

Today, the term 'visionary leadership' is often overused. However, few twentieth-century figures embody it as fully as A-M M'Bow. His life followed an extraordinary trajectory, shaped by an early understanding that he was part of something far greater than himself. He came of age in an era when idealism was not the object of scorn it often is today. The world had emerged from two successive world wars, instigated by those who professed to possess the means for human salvation. These so-called saviors were subjugating vast colonial populations, all while proclaiming themselves champions of freedom. The two world wars revealed the irony of the pre-

tence that the world contained knowing masters and unknowing subjects. To extricate themselves from the associated dilemmas, individuals, peoples, and both established and emer-

ging states – especially those who had long wielded power pledged themselves to a new world order: one that aspired to universality, justice, and equity.

For some former 'masters of the world', this professed commitment was often an exercise in cynicism, designed to maintain their ascendancy over others in new guises. But for the likes of M'Bow, the new world offered new possibilities to be defended, protected and nurtured. His lifelong mission became to ensure that the voices, knowledge and contributions of marginalised and developing nations were recognised, preserved and allowed to flourish on the global stage. This was grounded in the belief that human potential and creativity are universally distributed and no single nation or group holds a monopoly on knowledge. His ethos was deeply humanistic.

A Prolific Career

Many wonder how a figure like M'Bow could emerge in the context of colonial and postcolonial Africa. What informed his encyclopedic knowledge, his worldliness and his incisive understanding of historical stakes? M'Bow was not only a scholar and teacher but also a civil servant, a war veteran and a trainee pilot. He fought in World War II in France and North Africa and served in the French air force, where he was involved with the Free French Forces.

M'Bow was a political actor who was active in anticolonial movements and in the postcolonial history of Senegal. He held several positions in Senegal, including serving twice as minister of education. He also served as President of the Pan-African

Archaeological Association from 1967 to 1971. M'bow was the founder of the famous Federation of African Students in France, which was very active in the anticolonial struggle. M'Bow was the last standing pillar of the triumvirate that co-founded the PRA (Parti du regroupement africain), which included his lifelong companions Abdoulaye Ly and Assane Seck. He resisted political intoxication and cooptation and he did not succumb to the allure of power.

M'Bow's last public engagement was to chair the Assises nationales du Senegal – Senegal's national dialogue – as well as the Commission on the reform of Senegal's institutions. In 2008, at the age of eighty-seven, he agreed to preside over the initiative led by the Siggil Senegal Front, which for nearly a year brought together the main parties in opposition to President Abdoulaye Wade's government and dozens of various organisations across the whole country. M'Bow commanded the moral authority and the wisdom to mediate a strained process that was meant to generate propositions for an alternative and inclusive model of governance. He did not live to see the fulfillment of the Consensus Charter he managed to spearhead by bringing together politicians, civil society and people of good will from all walks of life.

The UNESCO Years (1953–1987): Challenging the Global Order

M'Bow's tenure as Director-General of UNESCO (1974–1987) stands out as one of the most transformative in the organisation's history. He was the first Black and African person to lead a United Nations agency, and during his time M'Bow shook the established order by challenging Eurocentric dominance in knowledge and cultural exchange on behalf of the Global South. His advocacy for the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) aimed to counter the dominance of Western media and communication systems and ensure a more equitable global flow of information. This initiative exemplified his broader effort to redefine global knowledge production, emphasising cultural diversity and inclusivity.¹

M'Bow advocated for reform in educational systems worldwide, ensuring that curricula reflected the global diversity of human experience. He spearheaded efforts to reconstruct and systematise African histories and cultural contributions and to free them from the colonial library, the anthropological account and racist gaze. The General History of Africa (GHA) project is a testament to this mission

– comprising eight volumes that reflect Africa's rich and complex history. In the 1960s, 90 per cent of the history that was taught in Western universities was disproportionately centred on five countries – Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the United States. African history was reduced to accounts about European activities in Africa, the trials and triumphs of explorers, missionaries and colonial administrators in the 'civilising mission'. The General History of Africa project helped uncover masterpieces and artifacts of creative genius that reflect millennia of rich history across significant polities such as Kush, Aksum, Mali, Songhai, Great Zimbabwe and the Kingdom of Kongo, as well as lesser-known political formations. M'Bow recognised a fundamental truth: knowledge is a means to emancipation.

His last will included the establishment of a Foundation of Endogenous Knowledges. Throughout his life, he tirelessly advocated for Africans and people of the Global South to reclaim and rely on their history and their own narratives. M'Bow's insights and vision remain foundational principles guiding the work of institutions like CODESRIA, shaping both their methodology and ethical framework.

The Fight for Equity

Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow's vision extended beyond cultural representation to a broader fight for equitable access to technology and knowledge. His stance on the transfer of technology was clear: it was not about aid or assistance but about *equitable access* to the tools that shape and transform societies. He recognised early on that whoever controlled technology controlled the future and he sought to ensure that the Global South was not left behind in this race:

Technology is not the privilege of a few nations, nor should it be a tool of domination. It must be shared equitably, so that all peoples can partake in the shaping of their futures.²

It is important to note that the 1970s was a time when Henry Kissinger was busy commissioning reports aimed at reducing African populations and controlling the continent's resources. M'Bow identified the deeper risks posed by unchecked technological expansion – its potential to undermine the spiritual and cultural values that form the bedrock of societies. He was wary of Western monopoly over technology and its use as a tool to reinforce existing power structures. His advocacy was about not just technical knowledge but ensuring that technology could be used to enhance human dignity, rather than erode it.

M'Bow believed that the histories and contributions of non-Western nations, particularly Africa, had been systematically suppressed. His call for the repatriation of cultural artifacts looted during colonialism was groundbreaking. In a historic speech in 1978,³ he argued that these objects were not just art but essential elements of identity and historical consciousness for the nations from which they were taken:

The restitution of cultural property to the countries from which it was taken is not simply a matter of restoring material objects; it is about returning history and identity to peoples who have been deprived of their past.

M'Bow's Political Thought

How did M'Bow perceive the challenges that Africa faced in the wake of colonisation? What he shared in common with other prominent figures of the time, such as Cheikh Anta Diop and Kwame Nkrumah, was the belief that there was something fundamental that connected all of us in our diversity.

The intellectual traditions of Africa are rich and diverse, deeply rooted in the philosophies of interconnectedness, humanism and balance. These are not simply ideas from the past but powerful frameworks for addressing today's challenges of development, governance and peace.⁴

These intellectuals understood that the postcolonial era necessitated a re-evaluation of African identity, that they emphasised the continent's rich history and cultural heritage while rejecting the lingering stereotypes imposed by colonial narratives. Their vision for Africa encompassed the idea of unity amidst diversity, advocating for a collective identity that celebrated the myriad cultures and traditions of the continent. Both M'Bow and Diop critiqued the neocolonial structures that continued to impede Africa's progress; they insisted on the need for autonomy, economic self-sufficiency and educational empowerment. They envisioned an Africa that could reclaim its agency, fostering a sense of solidarity and collaboration among its nations to build a prosperous future free from external domination.

M'Bow broke a significant taboo at a time when Africans still operated within a configuration of time that was devolved, despite having been 'admitted' into institutions and spaces of multilateral governance following independence. Across the imperial space, the utterance of an African could only be seen as subversive, as the very assumption of reciprocity

itself was suspended. M'Bow's critique was profound; he illuminated the ongoing continuities in the extraction of cultural and physical resources from Africa and the Global South. He argued that colonialism not only facilitated the extraction of labour but also enabled the appropriation of cultural and immaterial resources, thereby perpetuating narratives of European and Western civilisational superiority. This extraction is evident in the archives, artifacts and cultural heritage that remain withheld in European knowledge and cultural institutions.

Few have lived a life as long, as exhilarating and as impactful as M'Bow's, encompassing significant historical events. He possessed an insatiable thirst for knowledge, heightened by his early exposure to Sufi intellectual traditions and the belief that African history was a treasure trove waiting to be explored. M'Bow's commitment to uncovering and sharing this wealth of knowledge shaped his profound contributions to the world, making him a pivotal figure in the discourse surrounding African multidimensional heritage.

According to his son-in-law, Amadou Kane, one of M'Bow's last wishes was for his mortuary prayer to be held at the Umarian Mosque in Dakar, where he was baptised in 1921. If this was not possible, he wanted his body at least to be taken past it. M'Bow's connection to Sufi traditions ran deep, rooted in his family history. He was the intellectual heir to a rich tapestry of thought, spanning centuries and continents, linking Africa to the Arab world, Europe, Asia and the Americas, with influences ranging from Cheikh Ahmed Tidjani to Umar Tal, from Ibn Rushd to Montesquieu. His upbringing instilled in him deeply held values, shaped by education and culture.

M'Bow's stance was unequivocal: culture was neither a luxury nor mere entertainment and Africans had never existed outside of the world or in a 'world-outside' (*Außenwelt*, in the Schmittian sense). His critique of the imbalanced framework of access to information and technology – and thus to knowledge – raised deeper questions about a universalism predicated on a hierarchy of cultures and civilisations. He believed that the human ability to create and think is evenly distributed, hence the importance of equitable access for all. For M'Bow, the realisation of the universal ideal required cultural exchange, which could be achieved only by rebalancing access to knowledge and information. Yet Africa was being denied its rightful contribution

to this endeavour. Consequently, African actors keenly understood the nature of the impetus driving them to challenge their social conditions by reshaping the terms of engagement with the West.

M'Bow engaged with the global discourse on technology, notably in UN debates on technology transfer. He was in support of strengthening the work and mission of UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), an intergovernmental organisation dedicated to defending the trade interests of the developing world. He was critical of a system that concentrated technological control in the hands of a few and allowed them to engineer life and shape meaning for everybody. His concerns centred on questions that remain relevant today: Who controls technology? What would the world order look like if Africa were excluded?

The idea that the contribution of African intellectuals like M'Bow have been marginalised or invisibilised stems largely from how we have often thought about the nature of knowledge coming out of Africa. The lack of engagement with such contributions speaks to a broader issue of limiting perspectives on African thought. M'Bow grew up and was educated at the intersection of diverse cultures and intellectual traditions at the dawn of the world that was coming out of the colonial script. His intellectual breadth demonstrates the creativity and adaptability with which Africans have always responded to the challenges of their time. In short, M'Bow was an intellectual in the fullest sense of the word.

With the passing of M'Bow, we have lost one of the most influential thinkers and political actors of the twentieth century. His immense intellectual curiosity, aspirational spirit and deep humanism are reflected in his [prolific body of work](#).⁵

By intervening in global debates at a time when African voices were often excluded, thinkers like M'Bow asserted a principle of intellectual parity. For the very presence of African thought in the public domain was seen as inherently disruptive. M'Bow's unwavering commitment and integrity allowed him to challenge and reverse entrenched structures of oppression, revealing possibilities that had long been obscured.

In summary, M'Bow's intellectual contributions were profoundly shaped by his multilayered identity – as a Senegalese, an African, a Muslim and a global citizen. His insatiable curiosity and moral resilience guided his involvement in global governance and

African politics. He stood firm in his principles, unyielding in the face of challenges. M'Bow was, indeed, the bow that was never bent.

A-M M'Bow was a living legend. We have lost a reassuring figure who bridged the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Yet, as he transitions to the realm of ancestorhood, we are enriched by his legacy of wisdom, courage and moral fortitude. At a time when Africa seems to have lost sovereign initiative and geopolitical vision, when every major actor but Africa itself seems to have a vision for the continent, may his memory guide us back to self-determination, unity and a renewed sense of purpose.

Notes

1. See the MacBride Report, a popular name for 'Many Voices, One World: Towards a New More Just and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order', commissioned by UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372754>
2. Speech on Technology and Global Development, 1982.
3. A-M M'Bow, 1978, 'A Plea For The Return Of An Irreplaceable Cultural Heritage To Those Who Created It: An Appeal by Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, Director-General of UNESCO', in [The UNESCO Courier: a window open on the world, XXXI, 7, p. 4-5, illus.](#)
4. UNESCO General Conference, 1974.
5. A sample of his writings:
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 - 1976, *Le monde en devenir (réflexions sur le nouvel ordre économique international)*, Paris : UNESCO.
 - 1977, *L'UNESCO et la solidarité des nations—L'esprit de Nairobi*. Paris : UNESCO.
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* **Professor Amy Niang** is Associate Professor of Political Science at the Africa Institute, Global Studies University, Sharjah, United Arab Emirate.

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Publications Team

Godwin R. Murunga
Ibrahim Oanda
Chifaou Amzat
Yves Eric Elouga
Diana Bèye
Radwa Hesham Saad
Mireille Kouyo

For contributions and enquiries, please write to:

Council for the Development of Social Science
Research in Africa
Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop X Canal IV
P.O. Box 3304, Dakar
CP 18524, Senegal
Tel: +221 33 825 98 22 / 23

Email: publications@codesria.org
Web Site: www.codesria.org

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