

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

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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.

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