

**NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY IN KENYA: A LOOK AT THE
CHANGING DISPOSITION OF B.A. OGOT'S WORKS SINCE 1961.**

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**PAPER PRESENTED AT THE CODESRIA'S THIRTIETH
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS, DECEMBER 10-12 2003, DAKAR,
SENEGAL.**

ABSTRACT

In this paper we analyse the post independence production of history by a nationalist scholar whose life has spanned the entire period from Kenyas independence to date. This is an effort to analyse some of his past and current dispositions by looking at a number of the scholarly books and articles he has produced overtime. His latest book is quite significant in this analysis establishing whether he has maintained the academic fervor and disposition that went through stiff challenges in the 1970s and 1980's. This paper tackles this in four subsections: First, it analyses his "Footprints on the Sands of Time" and his reflections on the trends of African historiography; It also analyses his essays that reconstruct various historical processes from pre-colonial state formation to the evolution of the colonial administration in Kenya and the organisation, composition and impact of the Mau Mau; And finally it analyses his commentaries on the contemporary issues and events including the nature and dynamics of African politics, leadership, identities, culture, development, universities and globalization

Introduction: The Decolonisation of History

The struggle for political independence and subsequent nationalist ideological triumph over colonialism in the late 1950s and early 1960s was accompanied by a concerted effort to decolonise African historiography. This was the impetus for the development of a forceful nationalist historiography, the Nationalist conception of the African past. A new African historiography arose increasingly attentive to the African sources and African actors (Cohen,2001:50).This decolonisation was accomplished through the alliance of white liberal and African nationalist historians.

It was an alliance that was not without its stresses and strains. Nonetheless, it was an alliance that endured and has to its credit the great achievements of the last four decades in the realm of African historiography. The bedrock of this new historiography was what amounted to a methodological revolution – the critical and scientific use of oral evidence for historical reconstruction and the tapping of the ancillary disciplines of archaeology and historical linguistics to lend historical investigation time depth and reliability.

As Cohen says "the project of writing Africa's history from oral accounts would parallel the political emancipation of Africa occurring in other spheres (2002:51).

The major centres of this new historiography are all too well-known. In the Anglophone world, the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London and the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the United States stand out prominently. The exploits and travails in that process have been recounted recently in considerable detail by the two respective pioneers, Roland Oliver and Jan Vansina.

In Africa itself, the Ibadan School – as it came to be known – became the paradigm for the new nationalist historiography. Pioneered by the two doyens, K.O. Dike and Jacob Ajayi, the Ibadan saga has been immortalized in the Ibadan History Series and the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*. This nationalist historiography remained in ascendancy until it

was challenged by an offshoot in northern Nigeria, based at the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. The latter introduced into historical analysis an Islamic and class perspective. In Francophone West Africa, the new banner was carried by, among others, Cheikh Anta Diop and Joseph Ki Zerbo. The former's thesis of the black African genesis of Egyptian civilization continues to reverberate in the African-American perception of the black heritage.

In East Africa the struggle emerged in Makerere's department of history, where the African component of the syllabus was very weak but the colonialists were not ready to reverse this. One of the early historians, B.A. Ogot claims that he migrated to Nairobi due to this resistance but only after making headways in the transformation of history at Makerere (2003). In Kenya, the doyen of Kenyan historians, Bethwell Ogot, pioneered what came to be known as the history of peoples through his magisterial study of the Luo. It was within this nationalist rebellion that Ogot opened the way for rigorous teaching of Africanist history together with its research. His initiatives gave leadership and direction to a movement to reconstruct the past—precolonial and twentieth century— through the sponsorship of oral research (Cohen, 2001:51).

Thus the historical knowledge produced in the decade of the 1960's was conceived basically as a liberating social force as well as a means of strengthening self-government. Indeed this explains why Africanists discussed African past as, "African Activity, "African adaptation", "African choice" and "African initiative". There was the need to rediscover the African cultural heroes. Political independence of African countries for that matter, created propitious conditions for the production of nationalist history teaching and research which acquired a particularly prominent place in the East African universities. African history was interpreted in aggressive nationalist terms characterized by refutations of racist prejudices which had hitherto highlighted African passivity.

The prevailing nationhood and the enthusiasm to rewrite African History were playing an important national function. Studies in African history in the 1960s were meant to repair the damage caused by years of colonial subjugation. African leaders in power were portrayed as heroes and architects of a grand plan for Africa. These efforts were used to demonstrate continuity in national history, knitting it with the pre-colonial African past. In essence, the nationalist interpretation of African history, provided African nationalists and the newly independent states with a legitimizing ideology. The ideology sought to consolidate the just won independence and inspire the collective response to the need to build the nascent African nations. The Nationalist school of thought also aimed at confirming that Africans were organized in some form of institutions which could be compared with modern European systems of Government. The school of thought was pre-occupied with the restoration of Africa's lost dignity and therefore took particular exception to European stereotypes about global race relations (Ochwada 1993:193).

Looking back at the 3 decades of production of historical knowledge in East Africa with nostalgia – B.A. Ogot narrates his experience thus:

We demonstrated that African societies had well organized states engaged in long distance trade with properly organized markets. They proved that Africans had religion, philosophies, military organizations, legal systems, medicines and technologies ...Africa had a rich and significant history (Ochwada 1993:193).

Upon arrival his in Nairobi in 1964 in the light of the nationalist politics, the Department was immersed in, (and influenced) the production of knowledge according to the dominant political ideology of the moment, nationalism. But this Nationalist historiography was not aggressive.

In the 1960s when Ogot represented the starting point that "African History is part of World History", he was opening spaces for new programmes for research and writing on the African continent. Now more than a generation has passed and universities and colleges are hiring the students of Ogot's students in Nairobi and it is possible to see more clearly the history or histories of the development of African historical studies in the second half of the 20th century (Cohen 2001: 54).

Ogot was also asserting that this past had to be studied on its own merits and methods of study were similar to those of the histories of other societies. It has been stated that his approach to historical studies was largely liberal emphasizing the need for facts to speak, the need to produce objective history based on authentic African historical sources. Thus the empiricist approach dominated his discourse and that at Nairobi. What is his current discourse? (Ochwada, 1993:255) This explains why perhaps in the process of producing knowledge, Africanist historians laid more emphasis on examining how various sources of African history had been utilized (Ogot 1974, Phillipson 1975, Ochieng 1975, Mwanzi 1976). They marshaled evidence to confirm the \Africa initiative in Kenyan history.

Ogot and his generation exploded colonial myths and distortions about Africa by producing works that withstood rigorous historical scrutiny and thereby achieved a great measure of recognition for African history (Liyai 2002:332). These Scholars assembled, accumulated and analysed historical data thus setting models which many have since profited from. The solid intellectual foundation they laid was no small contribution to the independence of Africa. They continued to serve in Africa's quest for cultural independence through autonomous thinking, and historical philosophy in the wider realm, and the frontiers of knowledge. In a nutshell, nationalist historiography regardless of the degree of aggressiveness characterizing the knowledge produced (Makerere, Daresalaam, Nairobi) celebrated the triumph of African nationalism. The bottom line was the primacy of African "activity", "initiative" and "adaptation" in the continent's history. (Ochwada 1993:259-260)

This historiography recalled the past glories to consolidate the young nations independence. That is why the historical knowledge produced in the 1960s was in the main conceived in African nationalist terms, an approach which was in various school curricula. This curriculum played a significant role in mobilizing African masses towards a common cause. It also played a fundamental role in shaping the self-image of postcolonial Africa.

Towards late 1960s, this nationalist historiography was heavily attacked. It was accused of conjuring up an image of paradise lost which needed to be regained. This was because the literature abounded in populist imagery. They held the common claim that African societies were classless which led to the emergence of the myth of African socialism. They felt that this perspective ignored pertinent economic and social questions relating to African historical realities. Their interpretation did not offer comprehensive and penetrating analyses of imperialism and neo-colonialism. The nationalist historiography had epistemological weaknesses in normative terms and Ochwada says that its "theoretical underpinnings were fragile and infantile"(1993:260.) But as Ochieng argues (1985) did Africans have to sit back and recount the savage past and failures? By early 1970s the African nationalists school of thought waned, replaced by Marxist perspectives of dependency and underdevelopment and later by modes of production.

In this paper we analyse the post independence production of history by such a nationalist scholar whose life has spanned the entire period. This is an effort to analyse some of his past and current dispositions by looking at a number of the scholarly books and articles he has produced overtime. His latest book is quite significant in this analysis establishing whether he has maintained the academic fervor and disposition that went through stiff challenges in the 1970s and 1980's.

This paper tackles this in four subsections: First, it analyses his "Footprints on the Sands of Time" and his reflections on the trends of African historiography; It also analyses his essays that reconstruct various historical processes from pre-colonial state formation to the evolution of the colonial administration in Kenya and the organisation, composition and impact of the Mau Mau; And finally it analyses his commentaries on the contemporary issues and events including the nature and dynamics of African politics, leadership, identities, culture, development, universities and globalisation.

Ogot and his "Footprints on the Sands of Time"

The life and works of B.A. Ogot are so well outlined by Atieno Odhiambo (2001), Liyai(2001) and Zeleza(2003) that to do a similar job would be mere repetition. This has also been extensively recaptured in his autobiography "*My Footprints on the Sands of Time*" (2003). In this book he intertwines his academic and other achievements with his private experience and tells the tales of his early childhood in a captivating manner. He works with human experience to reconstruct his life story which includes bereavement, illness, oppressions, weddings, persecution and other societal obligations. He analyses his encounters with the grand narratives of Kenyan, and African colonial and neocolonial societies. In this autobiography, it is evident that his life from early childhood has been confined to the academic community, specifically history, and that the circumstances of his life have exposed him to an unusually rich variety of cultural and political settings. Certainly "he has been profoundly shaped by his experiences" (Ogot. Prolegomenon 2003).

His expertise as a history is reflected in that all issues, places and individuals referred to in the autobiography have historical background. This is reflected in his discussion of his

person, Alara his place of nurture, Ambira, Maseno, Makerere, Alliance, St. Andrews, London School of Oriental and African Studies; Nairobi University College, Kenya National Museums and The International Louis Leakey Memorial and the East African Community, which are all captured in amazing detail exuding extensive research.

The scholarly manner in which these are captured is obvious in the manner in which he interlinks his life story and locates his village within the history of the Luo of Kenya. Alara's story is traced back to the 17th Century with the Owiny group in Uganda and ends in Gem Luo Nyanza where they begin interaction with the local groups and then with the colonial system when sections of it became exuberant Christian centres – the “Christian Dala”.

He gives a vivid narration of the character of old Alara which is transformed into the new between 1906 and 1920, with common identity of a group of the chosen, with new lifestyles in terms of diet, mannerisms, attire and life styles. From the new Alara village emerges key figures of transformation like Odera Akang'o and his own father Opiche (village headman and teacher respectively), and the African priests who are never recognized but leave indelible marks in the village and the neighbouring localities. But the population increases to bursting and unmanageable points so that force them to move to a distance. His father is the last to move but retains and maintains the Alara Christian village concept.

His discussion of his early education brings up numerous factors and forces into play, the educated Africans, the missionaries, the local (bush and later sector) schools, “Maranda” (A Luo practice rampant in his time), Ambira and Maseno School intertwining these with bereavement and subsequent family negligence and oppression. After successes in the early education, he moves to Makerere where he studies Maths and History. The type of history syllabus is basically colonial and services the colonial ideology of subjugation but they (with other colleagues) go out of the way to begin writing on the culture and history of the African people. He for instance writes an award winning paper, entitled “Social History of the Luo of Kenya 1870-1890” based on oral research. This is anascent evidence of his marked interest in history and culture. His stay in Makerere already marks him out as a scholar but he also gives avid descriptions of his colleagues' achievements.

It was during this time that Ogot's academic pursuits underwent a profound transformation. The question that frequently confronted African students of history during the 1950s and before was whether Africans had a history or not. Almost rhetorically, they knew that their people and societies had history, social structures and so on. As Ogot put it, history formed the core in the overall socialization of the individual in society

It was evident to us that historical consciousness and historical study are as old in Africa as man himself. In nearly all societies, historical details were carefully preserved in one form or another and were transmitted from one generation to another. The past was seen as forming a continuous strand with the present and the future-There was the all-pervading awareness that history had a purpose, which had to be thoroughly understood and grasped by all members of the society (Ogot, 1987: 275).

The onset of colonialism had led to outright dismissal of the existence of African history prior to the African encounter with the Western world. The colonial environment was conditioned by racial attitudes and prejudice. Sir Phillip Mitchell, a British administrator in East and Central Africa, who was the governor of Kenya between 1944 and 1952, even considered himself a living witness to the "beginning" of African history. As he once said,

The forty-two years I have spent in Africa cover a large part of Sub-Saharan Africa, for it can hardly be said to extend much back than about 1870 (Mitchell, 1955:3).

And as late as 1963 when colonialism was fast disintegrating all over the continent, Hugh Trevor-Roper, the Regius professor of modern history at Oxford could fervently assert,

Undergraduates, seduced, as always, by changing breath of journalistic fashion, demand that they should be taught the history of black Africa. Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: There is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness-and darkness is not a subject for history (Trevor Ropes: 1963:9).

Although some institutions of higher learning did incorporate African studies in their curricula, what is called African history was at best no more than a footnote to imperial history. But such history was neither about Africa nor about Africans. It was, as Trevor-Roper would have it, about Europeans in Africa. Teachers of colonial history saw nothing worth studying in Africa's past (Kiwanuka 1972:70). At Makerere University College, for example, African history was not introduced in the syllabus until 1951 during the time Ogot was an undergraduate.

Even then, the "History of Tropical Africa" as the single paper was called, comprised of topics on Arab and American slave trades and their abolition, African explorers, chartered companies, missionaries, partition and colonialism, and the First World War in Africa. It was not until the 1960s that the initiatives and direction of African scholars brought about revolutionary changes in the syllabi and serious study of African history. Elsewhere on the continent the situation was not different.

The colonial environment thus posed a special challenge to budding African scholars like Ogot and his contemporaries. Studying Scottish clan history at St. Andrews made Ogot reflect more seriously on the position of African history. Here was history based on oral tradition offered as a university course, while the African history was considered non-existent partly because it was not based on written accounts. How could such contradictions be resolved?

From Makerere, Ogot joined Alliance High School as a teacher and in the autobiography he discusses this in relations to his students. He also captures Kenya's political state at this time, the state of emergency. From Alliance he goes to study Maths, History and Philosophy at St. Andrews University in Scotland where he has to make the difficult

decision to drop Maths and Philosophy and specialize in History (Ogot 2003: 83). He believed that African history formed an integral part of the study of mankind, and its study contributed to universal history. In pursuit of his academic career, therefore, Ogot was still determined to study and to demonstrate that African history could be reconstructed from oral sources.

He declined the offer to study British History at Oxford and opted to enroll in the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London to study African History for his doctoral degree. (Liyai, 2001:336). Professor Robert July of the City University of New York has documented in detail the problems Ogot had before both his research topic and research methodology could be accepted. His research topic on the history of the Luo of Kenya was reconstructed almost entirely from oral evidence. He had to contact Makerere on the issue of his choice of history as a specialist area and he was asked “which history”? Of course African History and his argument was,

The study of African history like the study of other histories, was of great intrinsic interest. It was also relevant to understanding and solution of present day problems. East African history was still largely unexplored and the research on the period between the stone age and the present was just beginning. To bridge this historical gap an integrated approach to the study of African history was imperative archaeologists, linguists, paleontologists and anthropologists were needed. (2003:94)

He further argued that to get a complete picture of the precolonial period of East African history it was essential that oral traditions be incorporated. His aim was to also examine the validity of the traditional sources. At this time there was fierce debate among historians about the validity of oral tradition and the viability of producing history based on such sources. It was therefore important that these traditions, which were often invoked by the Africans to account for their histories should be subject of a scientific inquiry if they were to assess their significance.

He says:

All this sound familiar today, but in the last 1950s it was hearsay in the ears of many historians, as I was later to discover when my Research proposal went before the History Board of London University (2003: 95).

In deed his proposal put him at the centre of a major historical controversy, but finally he got the support of his supervisor, Professor Roland Oliver to work entirely on oral evidence concerning the migration and settlement of the Luo. However, he faced the problem of being taken seriously after using oral sources to write a Ph.D. without dependence on written sources. This field of inquiry involved new methods. He had to grapple with

problems associated with oral tradition research, including methodology, defining units of analysis, interviewing techniques, dating and chronology.

Jan Vansina had already begun work on Oral Tradition but the English translation of his major work was not published until 1965. Robert July contends that Ogot's sketchy knowledge of Vansina's work was a fortunate omission, since the latter's techniques proved ill-suited to the types of societies under Ogot's investigation. (July 1987: 149). He had to do a lot of research. In 1960 he came into contact with Jan Vansina's works *Recording Oral History of the Bakuba I – Methods* and *Recording Oral History of the Bakuba II – Results* which he realized would not be applicable to his study.

He had to develop his own methodology. He explored and examined the techniques of studying history in preliterate societies in Africa and elsewhere. He read available literature on precolonial history of East Africa and did exploratory work on the southern Luo. He also took some classes in linguistics to get knowledge of phonetics, grammars and orthographies of some African languages and involved in the weekly seminars on African history. He was called upon to write a paper for a conference in Dakar in 1961 on "Ethno History in Africa" where he met many distinguished historians. Apart from these he gives an avid description of this interconnectedness with Kenyan politics.

From 1961 Ogot did oral research in East Africa for his fieldwork, and for two years he carried out investigations in the Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and Northern Tanzania. He worked among the Luo and Padhola, recording the oral history of the Luo of Kenya (the Southern Luo). He collected (by notes and tape recording) genealogies, migration stories, clan songs and histories, tribal cults and histories of social organization.

Both in Makerere and Nairobi, he engaged in the struggle for African history which he won. No one questioned that Africans had a history or histories. The challenge they were left with was to "extend the temporal and spatial scales of these histories, their methodological and thematic dimensions, and to integrate them into other regional and global histories, as well as to expand the production and consumption (Zezeza, 2003: 297). During Ogot's chairmanship of the department of history, African historical studies at the University of Nairobi continued to flourish.

This was achieved by establishing a number of research programs and projects staffed by members of the faculty and involving students as well. The results of such original research projects were published in several series. The "Nairobi Historical Series" comprised studies in all fields of social sciences and humanities. Authoritative works on the East African history, including regional studies, archaeology, and historical biographies, were published during this time.

The "African Voice Series" under the general editorship of Ogot and Professor T. O. Ranger, produced proto-nationalist books, presenting what Africans were thinking and saying about such issues as "primary resistance to colonial rule, and the emergence of modern nationalist movements". To this end several books were published covering countries in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Another important series under Ogot's editorship was the "Peoples of East Africa," which also consisted of definitive historical studies of the peoples inhabiting the region. Most of these studies, which were undertaken by eminent scholars, drew heavily on oral sources and skilled analysis of the evidence gathered. They were not only important for the areas covered, but were also sources of new insights into the historical methodology. They showed the value and limitations of oral sources in the study of African history.

Ogot's generation laid the foundations of African history as is currently known, practised and evidenced by his detailed account of struggle for African history. They established curricular contours, conceptual concerns and research conventions. They founded history departments and graduate programmes that trained subsequent generations of historians, associations and publishing houses that produced and promulgated historical knowledge about African history to various audiences (Ogot, 2003: 117-191). They struggled with ways and means of popularising history and the dissemination of historical knowledge.

In fact for Ogot the efforts to promote historical studies in Kenya and East Africa as a whole did not remain within the confines of the academy. It culminated in the establishment of the Historical Association of Kenya in 1966 whose membership was open to the Kenyan public. Among its aims was to enhance the study and teaching of history, and to encourage research and publishing in all aspects of historical interest. The association, which Ogot headed for two decades, made an impact on the intellectual and academic growth of many young scholars and professionals. It organized regular seminars and annual conferences.

The proceedings of the annual conferences were published in the series, *Hadith*, meaning history. In 1972 the *Journal of the Historical Association of Kenya*, later renamed *Kenya Historical Review*, was launched. Over the years the journal remained an important publishing outlet. The Historical Association also encouraged research and publication of the results by non-academicians. On the history of Kenya's nationalist movements, for example, the association encouraged and assisted people like Makhan Singh, Bildad Kaggia and Waruhiu Itote to write and publish their experiences for posterity.

After heading the department of history at the University of Nairobi for over a decade, Ogot decided to move into other areas outside the University of Nairobi, to broaden African historical studies. He worked as a consultant on Unesco's "General History of Africa" project. The project had been conceived in the 1960s and he was among those who had been involved all along in its planning stages. In 1964 the General Conference of UNESCO decided to prepare and to publish a *General History of Africa*, as a contribution to the mutual understanding of the peoples and nations.

As he says in the presidential address describing the project, the challenging task was to
 produce a continental history of Africa, covering the last three million years,
 using the highest canons of scholarship, and involving scholars drawn from
 diverse countries, cultures, ideologies and historical traditions.

The approach to the project was a continental perspective of African history, the history of ideas, civilizations, societies and institutions. It attempted to "place the contributions of

Blacks in Africa and elsewhere within the totality of human endeavor". (UNESCO1981: xxiii-xxv).

In his assigned capacity, therefore, Ogot coordinated the eight-volume project, in liaison with the editors of each volume, who included such eminent scholars as Joseph KiZerbo, Gamal Mokhtar, Mohammed El Fasi, D. T. Niane, J. F. Ade Ajayi, A. Adu Boahen, and Ali A. Mazrui. Ogot himself edited the fifth volume.

Ogot has served in various capacities on editorial boards of professional journals and learned institutions. Some of these include *Africa Zamani* (Yaounde), *Bulletin of the Association of African Universities*, East African Academy, Kenya National Academy of Sciences, *Journal of African Studies* (Los Angeles), *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (New Delhi), *Journal of African History* (London), Mawazo (Kampala), Tarikh (Ibadan) and *Transafrican Journal of History*. Perhaps the most important editorial contribution is from Ogot's long association with the *East Africa Journal*, both as editor and contributor. The journal was published by the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs, of which Ogot was secretary-general.

This pioneering generation seemed energetic, creative and extremely conscious of its intellectual and ideological mission which was to rehabilitate the African past and to reclaim the dignity of Africa, and to produce usable history for the new African nations. As Zeleza (2003:297) says "they were nationalists by context and conviction". Since they were produced by African nationalism and nurtured in the nascent African universities, there was need to create visions and programmes to develop the nations. This mission and vision has been held and maintained by Ogot.

The autobiography outlines his leading role in the struggle for the development and institutionalization of African history be it in Makerere, Nairobi, Kenyatta, Maseno and internationally (see Ogot, 2003: 117-191). His influence on the Kenyan historiography and his work on the UNESCO's "General History of Africa" and other international projects has been immense. He captures his involvement with UNESCO extensively starting from 1964 to the period of the writing of the general history which enhanced his interaction with the international community of scholars and leaders. Outside the university he engaged in a wide range of organizations captured precisely in Zeleza (2003:299) and in his work (Ogot, 2003:193-237). He captures in great detail his involvement in the regional non-governmental organization, the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs (*Ibid.*, 2003:193-237), his appointment to participate in the East African Community 1975-1977 (*Ibid.*, p.263-301), his stint with the National Museums of Kenya and its appendage the International Louis Leakey Memorial Institute for African Prehistory (*Ibid.*, p303-380), and the Community Technical College (*Ibid.*, 295-262).

He clearly captures his remarkable career that goes beyond his area of expertise. It is clear that for him African nationalism went beyond the burdens of the nation to the region. This enabled him to produce knowledge and build institutions that were complementary

endeavours. Perhaps Zeleza's description of him as "a cosmopolitan PanAfricanist" suffices (2003:299).

In their time, African intellectuals seemed to be organic to the nationalist project because the nationalist elite was small, education was prized and universities were valued as symbols of nation building and development. It is clear from the book that Ogot has been a very influential figure in Kenya, East African region and the continent of Africa as a teacher, researcher, administrator and public servant. He has trained and supervised many students which he avidly captures in the book. In summary, the book pictures Ogot in terms of the complex decisions he has had to make, and the levels of participation as a scholar, decisive, firm and indeed an inspiration.

What is amazing is his captivating narration of very painful events like in Chapter 9 where he describes the wife's ill health and subsequent cure. What would I say about "His footprints on the sand of time"? The footprints are many and have covered massive features. The narrations even of the most painful events (Like in Chapter 9) are amazingly captivating. Because of the size of the book, I cannot claim a fairness in these few pages to have adequately analysed this scholar's work. This work reflects majorly on his being a historian above everything else. There is clear evidence, however, that he "has sustained his incredible level of service and scholarship through shifting and challenging conditions within Kenya and Africa, navigating changing economic and political circumstances.

His steady hand and persistent commitment to the highest ideals of scholarly engagement and community provide remarkable model for all who are and will dedicate themselves to Africanist scholarship (Cohen 2003). Indeed the scholarly contribution was recognized and appreciated in Maseno but also in 2001 by the USA based Association of African Studies when he was nominated as the winner for the 2001 Distinguished Africanist Award.

The citation was impressively describing him as having contributed immensely to the enhancement of the world's knowledge of Africa and to the strengthening of research and higher education on the African content. Cohen went on to say:

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 on Africa... a scholar of exceptional productivity, authoring hundreds of articles and books covering an extraordinary range of topics, most of them original contribution" P. 536.

Cohen says what any of his students would say, and because of the private influence, the moments of encouragement and the stimulation he maintained when he could have easily given up.

His Struggle with Challenges of Historical Discourse and Methods

During the past four decades, African history has moved from the status of possibility to uncontested centrality in any metanarrative of world history.

As already intimated in the late 1950s and through the 1960s as a new field of African historical studies was coming to be under the leadership of a small host of pioneers established at universities in Africa, Europe and North America, there was a strong sense of extreme urgency in the project(s) of producing a strong and useable record of the African past. A new generation of historians was to be trained, new journals and publication series were to be established, old textbooks were to be discarded and replaced by new ones, and course and degree syllabi were to be reconstituted. New records were to be won from new approaches and new methodologies, while Africans who commanded knowledge of the past were to be interviewed and recorded before their knowledge died with them.

Bethwell Allan Ogot's classic *History of Southern Luo*, published in 1967 and presented as a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of London in 1965, not only established as a scholarly framework for the study of the precolonial past of the Luo of Eastern Africa but also opened the possibilities of a new African historiography which would reach beyond the early studies of well-documented precolonial kingdoms in different regions of Africa.

Among a small group of academic pioneers, Ogot was not only producing a new literature but also crafting a new approach to the writing of history. This approach would emphasize the possibility of reconstructing the past from oral testimonies and tradition, and from other evidence and material drawn through interviews from the knowledge and memory of the vast array of people who were the twentieth century inheritors of a precolonial past.

Importantly, not only was this new field of African historical studies to produce literature accessible to students across the continent, it was also to search for space in academies strongly resistant to the notion that "the oral" could be a means to reconstruct the past beyond memoirs of eyewitnesses. Moreover, the early writings of Ogot and others challenged strongly held views in the broad historical profession that people without writing could in no way have histories, nor even a sense of history.

From his earliest published work, but still more so as to work came to address the experiences of Kenyan peoples in the twentieth century. Ogot, with others, saw the sources that he and others studied not only as subject to tests of validity but also welcoming of an understanding of how the arguments and ideas that these sources conveyed sometimes themselves played critical roles in the African past. Ogot's thesis, "Migration and Settlement among the Southern Luo Peoples, 1500-1900: A Case History of Oral Tradition as a Historical Source", was submitted and the doctorate awarded in 1965.

It was later revised and published as a book under the title, "History of the Southern Luo: Vol. 1, Migration and Settlement (1967)", which was hailed as a serious attempt to reconstruct the history of East Africa, and "the beginning of a long story". It was more than a history of the Southern Luo for it also "traced the movements of many other peoples with whom the Luo came into contact," including the Luyia, Iteso, Gusii, Kuria, Soga, Padhola and the Luo of Uganda. In the long introduction, Ogot demonstrated the inadequacies of

written accounts on Africa, oral traditions as history, the question of chronology in historical accounts, African historiography and the methodology he used in the study.

The tradition had thus been established, and many followed suit in the study of various societies in Africa. Vansina was to remark later that,

No one can imagine any longer a history of Africa reconstructed without any recourse to oral traditions. They have proved too valuable. Much of what they have to say no other voice can tell. (Vansina 1971:464)

Critics have pointed out the inadequacies in some of the original approaches and methodology. Some even see them as irrelevant to current trends in African scholarship. But whatever the critic's choice, Professor T. O. Ranger put the matter in perspective:

The first African academic historians-the Dikes, the Ajayis, the Ogots-were even more essential; if they had not existed they would have had to have been invented...it was fortunate that they did exist with all their energies and abilities. Still, it was not to be expected that they would be challenged by the sort of criticism valuable for growth; the very considerable growing they have done has come from the demands they made upon themselves.¹¹ (Ranger 1976:19)

For Ogot the search for Africa's past is not over. It is the duty of African historians to produce histories of humanity which accord their continent its proper place. Such works of synthesis dealing with the world history will facilitate meaningful history of mankind (Ogot: 1987:306). Thus, the search for historical relevance is the search for a philosophy of African history in terms of African needs and aspirations independent of foreign systems of thought. Cultural and intellectual independence must follow and support political freedom. Then the present will be clarified and Africans will recapture a usable past. (July, 1987:156)

Conclusively, one of Ogot's key contributions to African historiography was methodological, the use of oral traditions to reconstruct history including historical linguistics, historical anthropology, and of course archaeology – to take on the challenging task of mapping the historical contours of various African societies. These sources, especially oral sources, eventually gained acceptance and were employed to enrich other histories, including Western and feminist histories.(Zezeza 2003:301).

From the beginning Ogot was aware of the methodological and analytical challenges that faced African history. Ogot's "Selected Essays 1961-1998(Volumes I & II)" contains essays that reflect on various aspects of African historiography. Two of the essays provide fascinating overviews on the institutional development of history as a discipline in East Africa and intellectual trends in African historiography in general over the last century. Another three offer programmatic interventions, one for social history, another for environmental history, and the third for reconceptualizing the social sciences and have demonstrated Ogot's ability to respond creatively to changing research agenda. The rest make specific critiques against various dogmas, predominantly Eurocentric, that have bedeviled African historical studies. Let us begin with the latter.

In “Historians and East Africa” he offers a masterful survey of European writings on East African history, demonstrating that the work of European professional historians from the 1950s was greatly enormously influenced by records from administrative officials, missionaries, and settlers. These traditions were full of misconceptions about, and contempt for, African societies and obsessed with propagating the civilizing impact of colonization. As result East African history was reduced to an appendage of European history. In the 1950s and 1960s, European historians continued to conceive East African history in terms of invaders or outsiders, as an aspect of the expansion of Europe, although they increasingly paid attention to African responses.

These biases are evident in Volume 1 of the Oxford History of East Africa (1963), African first historians, Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew. Although the volume sought to provide the first comprehensive overview of pre-colonial East African history, even here Ogot shows that eight out of the twelve chapters deal with the impact of the outside world on the indigenous people of East Africa glibly arguing that colonialism provided the stimulus for social, economic, and political advance in the region.

In “The Limitations of Textual History”, Ogot critiques East African and the Orient. He notes wryly that none of the participants was from East Africa or from the Indian Ocean rim countries. He attacks the book for its Eurocentric biases, shoddy scholarship, repetitiveness, spurious racial classifications, negligence of important topics such as the slave trade, and its over-reliance on problematic textual sources and anthropological evidence. The picture that emerges is one of East African coastal peoples as passive recipients of civilizing cultures and commodities, ranging from genes, words and beliefs to crops, crafts, and trade goods. He shows how pervasive the notion of the civilizing outsider is in African historiography in “The Concept of the Outsider in African History”. He singles out the “Hamatic myth”, the tendency to equate all “civilizations” in Africa with centralized states established by outsiders, usually assumed to have Caucasoid features, a sin he finds rampant also among some African historians too.

That the Eurocentric ailment survived the nationalist onslaught is evident from Ogot’s sharp review of two books by J. D. Fage and Roland Oliver, British Africanists published in 1978 and 1991, respectively. Fage’s A History of Africa is taken to task in “The Dilemmas of Research in Early African History” for resurrecting the Hamitic myth by dividing the continent into the Caucasoid and the Negroid peoples. The activities of European invaders from the fifteenth century are thereby stripped of their historic violence as they are reconstituted as the continuation of the Caucasoid factor in African history. The upshot of this racialized history, Ogot argues, is that the African, seen as the Negro, has contributed very little to the history of his own continent, let alone to human history.

Ogot finds similar shortcomings in Oliver’s The African Experience, which traces the history of the continent from the emergency of hominids to the release of Nelson Mandela and is reviewed in “Reflections on an African Experience.” According to Ogot, the book paints too linear a picture of human evolution and assigns crucial developments in Africa’s history to the allegedly Afro-Asiatic Ancient Egyptians, although like the Egyptologists he

is reluctant to portray Pharaonic Egypt as an African country and its civilization as an African civilization.

On the slave trade, he repeats the canard of eighteenth century British slave traders that since slavery and the slave trade were allegedly an integral feature of African societies, the European slave trade merely provided new destinations and caused little harm. Similarly, he is apologetic on the impact “colonialism by depicting and sanitizing brutal conquest and stiff resistance as “colonial infiltration” and by drawing a positive “balance sheet” of empire. Predictably, since he portrays colonialism as a harbinger of progress and civilization, he sees postcolonial Africa as a tragic story of disaster, economic decline, and political tyranny, which he largely attributes to internal failures, from misguided socialist policies, one-party rule, and population growth to rural-urban migration and the urban biases of African governments.

Ogot is quite critical of the tendency among Western academics and politicians to draw a racist distinction between Africa north of the Sahara-which they regard as geographically Mediterranean, culturally Arab, and historically an offshoot of Western civilization – and Africa south of the Sahara- regarded as the “real” Africa. This is the subject of “Towards a History of Relations Between African Systems,” in which he urges African historians to treat the continent as a unit characterized by complex interactions between different societies and systems, and to map out the nature of their relations at different moments and at various regional scales.

In these essays Ogot is insistent that African historians must challenge Eurocentric historiography and its rhetoric of Afrocontempt and Afropessimism by eschewing racial or ethnic explanations and not leaving the writing of regional, continental, and global histories solely to the Europeans and others. From time to time, he advises that we must raise our heads from detailed quarrying and see the large landscape of African history and Africa’s contribution to world history.

Ogot has not trained his critical gaze exclusively on Eurocentric scholars from Europe. He has also attacked African scholars prone to Afro centric fantasies and radical sloganeering. In “Intellectual Smugglers in Africa” he questions Okot Bitek’s sloppy dismissal of modern scholars who have apparently “smuggled” Greek metaphysical conceptions into Africa religious thought. p'Bitek asserts that no Africa people believe in High God and that African Scholars asserting otherwise are “intellectual smugglers” His whole argument seem to rest on the spurious assumption that Africans do not think metaphysically and that High God must of necessity be a Christian God.

Ogot expresses even greater concern about what he saw at the turn of the 1980’s as “a dangerous tendency towards intellectual absolutism” among Kenyan intellectuals. In “History Ideology and Contemporary Kenya”, he singles out historians who portray those who disagree with their interpretation of Mau Mau as a heroic nationalist movement as enemies of the people. He contends that the so-called radicals idealization “of the people” is based more on fidelity to Marxist ideology than Marxist methodology and produces bad history. Certainly these historians have oversimplified the history of the Kenyan peasantry. He concludes with the sympathetic reading of works by political scientists inspired by a

clear understanding of Marxists who have demonstrated the complex of contradictory development of the Kenya peasantry in different parts of the country.

Ogot's acute understanding of the shifting institutional and intellectual terrains in the production and content of African History and historiography is quite apparent in the following two essays "Three decades of historical studies in East Africa, 1949-1977" and "Africa: The agenda of historical research and writing". In the first essay he outlines the struggles that were fought to institutionalize African history at Makerere University and later at the University of Nairobi. He lucidly weaves an institution and disciplinary, respectability, receptive audiences intellectual and ideological relevance and for the africanization of African history and its incorporation into truly global history.

In the second essay, he succinctly traces the main interpretative traditions that have dominated African history, beginning with the imperialist school, followed by the rise and decline of the nationalist school in the 1960s and 1970s, and the search for new direction from the 1980s. He notes the emergence of new areas and themes of historical research, from environment and health to ethnicity. He believes the growing interest in ethnicity as a historical dynamic constantly negotiated and renegotiated, defined and redefined identity in every day discourse, has been inspired by poststructuralism and postmodernism. For bringing questions of ethnicity and identity and the production of knowledge and discourse to the fore, Ogot applauds the "posts" but like many African historians he is troubled by post modernism.

Specifically while disavowing universalism it is in his view itself a grand theory wedded to Eurocentric liberalism that offer no radical critique of capitalism. Moreover its celebration of difference seems suspect for the historian of peoples whose difference was constructed as a maker of their primitivity and backwardness. Also, the emphasis on the particularity, locality, and contingency of identities dissolves the cohesion of Africa as a historical unit and flies in the face of global forces that transcend individual agency.

Finally postmodernism threatens well-established historical methods of studying societies, for it denies the very existence or authenticity of the domain of the social reality called history.

Ogot sees postmodernism as one of the main problems confronting African Historical scholarship as we enter the twenty first century. Other problems relate to developing appropriate mode of critique. Historical sources as the old methodologies of the historical anthropology, oral tradition, archeology, and historical linguistics have come under attack.

Many historians including Ogot now question the ability of oral tradition to provide reliable chronologies since they are synthetic product of communal and individual composition that change constantly throughout time. However they still offer crucial insights into the evolution of historical consciousness, as Ogot demonstrates in "The Construction of Luo Identity and History" a probing survey of the constructions of popular and academic traditions of the Luo history during the twentieth century. He investigates the modes of

transmission and interaction between the oral and written histories and the complex ways they are woven into tapestry of modern Luo ethnic identity.

Underlying these challenges is how to redefine the relation between the scholar and the audience if African academic history is to transcend its fundamental conundrum. The fact is that since its inception it has been modeled or oriented towards, and sought legitimization from the historiographies of Europe and the Americas. All the major paradigms in African history- the imperialist and nationalist, dependency and Marxist, poststructuralist and postmodernist- were manufactured in the West and imported to Africa. “Is the autonomy of African history possible?” Ogot asks. He provides no answer to this question that has vexed generations of African historians and intellectuals. Are we condemned to eternal mimicry? Or are we asking the wrong question, uncritically accepting that the historical concepts we use and the very idea of history belongs to the West, thus inadvertently surrendering our histories and intellectual souls to the west? Is the search for authenticity a disguised cry of capitulation for a globalized intelligentsia? Shouldn't the West itself be dismembered, stripped of its universalism and provincialized as Dipesh Chakrabarty (1996) implores us to?

It is encouraging that a historian of Ogot's generation and stature is still asking fundamental questions about African History. It is a statement to the boundless curiosity and creativity of his historical imagination and his readiness to stretch the boundaries of African historical scholarship. In the 1970s he pushed for social and environmental history, as stated in the essays on “History, Anthropology and Social change” and “ African Ecology in Two Research Agendas in their East African Historiographical Context”, critiquing old approaches before outlining new ones.

In the 1990s, he turned to the issue of interdisciplinary scholarship and the social sciences. In "Social Sciences in the 21st Century: From Rhetoric to Reality", he presents a compelling analysis of the emergence and evaluation of the social sciences as modes of institutionally reproduced discourse in the contest of changing the structures of state power, accumulation and social organization and control. First, he maps out the development of the social science in the Europe and North America from the era during the last two decades of the century.

As for Kenya, he is critical of the tendency of Africa social scientists to accept uncritical concepts, theories and methodological procedures manufactured in the west and calls for scientific creativity, through the development of innovative interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches and programs that are better equipped to analyze and understand Kenyan realities than the fragmented disciplines or approaches that currently tend to privilege development economics.

His Reconstruction of African History

Ogot's historical work has centered on reconstructing the histories of specific societies, processes and events. As expected from an individual committed to demonstrating the historicity of African societies, precolonial history featured prominently in his writings. In this regard his major publication was *History of the Southern Luo, Vol 1. Migration and Settlement 1500-1900*, (1967). He also edited Volume V of UNESCO's *General History of*

Africa, Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century(1992). Altogether the record of his publications on a wide range of topics and subjects in Kenyan, East African and African histories is truly staggering.

In his latest bibliography of Ogot's works (2001), Hudson Liyai (2001) categorizes them into broad subject areas reflecting Ogot's research interests and exertions. The bibliography is subdivided into nine sections but he admits that some of them defy such categorization. He lists books and monographs, chapters and contributions in books, papers, lectures and reports, unpublished manuscripts, articles, review articles, commentaries and letters, and critical reviews of his work as follows:

- a) Research and methodology (17 as books or articles in journals),
- b) Migrations (7 publications),
- c) Political studies (32 publications),
- d) Economic and social development (14 publications),
- e) Cultural studies (9),
- f) Ethnicity, kinship and race (13),
- g) Religion and beliefs (11),
- h) Education (16),
- i) Literary criticism (9),
- j) Biographical studies (6),
- k) Bio-bibliographic sources (9),
- l) Critical reviews of his work (57).

In this collection there are a number of essays which deal with various aspects of precolonial history and the colonial era. "The Concept of Jok" (1961), is one of his earliest essays and clearly articulates what become his lifelong intellectual mission: defense of the humanity, historicity, durability, diversity, complexity and richness of African societies and cultures (Zezeza 2003:307). He starts off by accusing Africanist scholarship of what was as true then as it is now: "So far, most Africanists have avoided African philosophy." Indeed any defense of African history had to start at that inestimable intellectual plane. He criticizes studies of African customary practices and institutions that failed to link these with African ideas of the universe, existence and destiny. In this essay he tries to decipher the meanings of the term *jok* or *juok*, found in various forms of Nilotic languages usually meaning "God," "spirit," "witch-craft," "ghost" or some form of spiritual power. He gives an exegesis on the ontological principles embedded in the concept of *jok* that underlie major aspects of Nilotic cultures and societies.

However, Atieno Odhiambo(2001) says;

I embraced this concoction of Ogot as an emancipating positioning, even as I was internally ambivalent about the philosophical efficacy of the construct. My ambivalence arose primarily out of my being ill at ease with the elevation of *juogi*-spirit possession-to the status of "God Himself". Back in Alego-Ugenya, the phenomenon of *juogi*-spirit possession-had part and parcel of my cognitive unconscious

from the mid 1950s, with the daily screamings of the spiritually possessed *Jo-Sepe*.

But the same Ogot article had said the last word on this at its conclusion. He prescribed:

In this article, I have concentrated primarily on ontology. I have suggested that if interpreted as a theory of the universe, the contradictions generally accepted with the concept of *jok* will disappear. I have pleaded for a philosophical approach, and I have tried to indicate how its fundamental concept underlies practically all aspects of Nilotic life. I have not attempted to work out in detail its implications on the political, ethical, psychological and epistemological fields, for that is a task, which can only be undertaken after intensive field investigations. Finally, I have not attempted to evaluate this philosophy, for I believe such appraisal should be preceded by an agreement of its nature and content (Ogot 1961, 130).

Clearly Ogot was here preempting a discussion of the opening principle regarding ontology. He opened a line of inquiry, and then declared that we should after him argue the nature and content of this. Such is the nature of scholarship: it both opened up and closed certain lines of inquiry.

Ogot's interest in the history of African thought and institutional practices, especially religion, is captured in three essays. First, in "On making of a Sanctuary" he examines Padhola religion, and contends that it is monotheistic and rooted in the concept of *Jok* and cannot be understood outside the Nilotic vision of reality. He also traces the changes in Padhola religion as a consequence of their southward migration between 1500 and 1850, the infiltration of new people among the Padhola during the second half of the nineteenth century and the establishment of the Bura shrine as a central place of worship and unifying force among the Padhola, and the disruptive influences of Christianity and denominational rivalries during the first half of the twentieth century.

Ogot also looked at the religious contradictions in Nyanza caused by the effects of European religiosity on Luo life. Consequently he presents a short biography of a leading Christian evangelist in western Kenya "Reverend Alfayo Odongo Mango 1870-1934". Ogot gives us an intriguing portrait of the complex processes of conversion among the first African Christians, their motivations, sacrifices, compromises, training, evangelical activities, intricate involvement in African struggles, and their troubled relationships with African chiefs, European missionaries and the colonial government, which in this case led Mango to break with the Anglican church. He subsequently founded his own-the Holy Ghost Church-which sought to promote the spiritual and secular aspirations of people in the region. In the end Mango was consumed by the contradictions and conflicts surrounding him, and he was murdered in January 1934 during an attack on his village.

Finally, in "A Community of their Own" Ogot investigates the rise and impact of the Maria Legion of Africa Church which began as a reform movement in the Roman Catholic Church in the South Nyanza District of Kenya in 1960. Its emergence is attributed to intensifying economic, political, and social insecurities among the poor who found religious and cultural comfort in the prophetic charisma and teachings of the founders, which invoked and resonated with indigenous religious beliefs, visions, rituals and practices.

By analyzing these religions on their own terms, as authentic expressions of African religious experience, Ogot is reclaiming and normalizing African cultural systems, activities, initiatives, choices and adaptations. Along with these he also published an article on the Church of Christian Africans and the Nomiya Luo Church. These arose as form of resistance against colonial rule.

The same nationalist impulse informs his essay on "Kingship and Statelessness among the Nilotes," in which he challenges the racist hypothesis that assumes a positive correlation between the amount of Hamitic blood in a people's veins and the degree of their political evolution. Instead he suggests, referring to two cases, that the establishment of the Bunyoro and Shilluk kingdoms was facilitated by specific conjunctures of economic, political and military factors. Centralized kingdoms constituted only one form of political system among the Western Nilotes.

The other three systems Ogot identifies included the "segmentary states" that resembled, but were less advanced than the Bunyoro kingdom; The "Ruothships" of the Acholi and the Luo, in which royal clans ruled over common clans with no supreme head; and the "stateless societies" proper, such as the Dinka and Nuer.

Ogot expands his geographical canvas of political history in "The Great Lakes Region," a Chapter first published in 1984 in the Volume IV of UNESCO's General History of Africa. The essay underscores the problem of sources for some regions and periods of African history. The period covered (1200 to 1500CE) is one in which there is scant oral tradition, linguistic and archaeological data. This makes it difficult to determine the chronology of individual states or the region as a whole. Most of the available sources are based on court traditions that tell us little about the social, economic and political conditions of the society at large. Also, the region is riddled with myths about the nature of the relations between pastoralists and agriculturalists, the common assumption being that the former were the "civilizing conquerors" of the latter.

Ogot examines in considerable detail each of the four political complexes; the Kitara, Kintu, Ruhinda and Rwanda. He dispels many myths and shows that different groups of people and historical contexts were involved in the complex processes of state formation. One cannot, however, escape the tentative feel of the narrative in many places, the excessive focus on leaders and heroic individuals, and the virtual absence of information about economic and social conditions and processes.

The essay's vastness of scale in temporal and spatial terms throws into sharp relief the inadequacy and inconclusiveness of oral tradition, a sentiment Ogot has come to share in recent years.

The essays on the colonial era reflect the relative abundance of both written and oral sources. Only one essay, "British Administration in the Central Nyanza District of Kenya, 1900-1960," deals with the colonial state itself, while the rest focus on anti-colonial resistance as manifested in Mau Mau, Kenya's liberation movement, thus underscoring the nationalist historian's preoccupation with African agency than the intricacies of imperial dominion. The contradictory nature of the colonial administration is clear in the essay. The colonial state was both authoritarian and weak because as a conquest state it lacked legitimacy.

He describes the efforts of the ill-educated and incompetent officials to merge the existing segmentary system with colonial style of administration and the periodic administrative reorganization and reforms, the role the missionaries played as colonial ideologues and functionaries, the impact of the First and Second World Wars, and the rise of African protest initially articulated through religious movements and later through reformist political associations formed by the educated elite.

He briefly discusses connections between the local and national manifestations of nationalism are discussed briefly towards the end of the essay. He tries to explain the relative failure of the nationalist party, the Kenya African Union, to establish itself in Nyanza. He attributes this to the Kikuyu leadership in KAU whose focus was Kikuyu land grievances, which lacked the same resonance in Nyanza. Both the intensity of the nationalist struggle and fissures within the centrifugal nationalist movement increased with the outbreak of Mau Mau.

Ogot's reflections on Mau Mau are cogent and nuanced and he has not underestimated the historical significance of Mau Mau in the decolonisation of Kenya, but he points out that while its goals were nationalist, it was not a national movement because it was confined to Central Kenya. In his writings on the subject he tries to analyze the social composition and ideology of Mau Mau and its construction in the colonial and African imagination, as is evident in the three essays included in this volume. In the first one, "Revolt of the Elders: An anatomy of the Loyalist Crowd in the Mau Mau Uprising, 1952-1956," he examines the composition of the "people" who supported and opposed Mau Mau among the Kikuyu. He shows that the diversity between the "fighters" and "loyalists" corresponded to class and ideological divisions in Kikuyu society based on relative access to land and other assets, affinities to "traditional" culture and Christianity, and attitudes towards violence and constitutionalism, all of which were articulated with the differentiations of age, the political ecologies of location, and memories of struggle and dreams of the future.

In the next essay, "Politics, Culture and Music in Central Kenya: A Study of Mau Mau Hymns, 1951-1956," he analyses songs as critical cultural texts as the embodiment and expression of deep-seated social values, visions, problems and possibilities. He shows that hymns and popular songs effectively articulated and popularized the demands of the Mau

Mau struggle, mobilizing people for it, and re-enforcing the solidarity and spirits of the militants and their supporters. He concludes that the songs evidenced that Mau Mau was an anticolonial movement, but the fact that they were sang in Kikuyu and used Kikuyu symbols, legends and history limited their national appeal and accessibility. This raises an important question: What makes a movement nationalist in multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual societies, as is the case in most African colonies?

The Africans in Kenya had no national languages and the European languages spoken by the elite was not national in any meaningful sense of the term. Definitely the ordinary people inevitably spoke in the cultural languages and addressed the grievances with which they were familiar to express the anticolonialism. Did that make them any less nationalist than the elites speaking in the borrowed idioms of Europe? What was nationalism in their conception? Was Kenya a nation or was Kikuyu just sufficient? Perhaps, although language was sufficient in political discourse, as Zeleza says is "the content of that discourse", was major input because after all.

From songs as a historical source, Ogot discusses the reconstruction of Mau Mau from the existing press in "Mau Mau and the Fourth Estate, 1952-1956". Although he is aware of the inherent biases and propagandistic uses of the Kenyan press especially during times of conflict and of the settler-controlled press in Kenya in particular, Ogot still gauges useful information about the conduct of the war, specifically the military aspects of the emergency, the terror and brutality meted out to the Kikuyu and all those who supported Mau Mau, who were sent to detention and forced to work camps and repatriated en masse from Uganda and Tanzania, all of which had several unintended consequences.

Confronting Contemporary Challenges

As a good historian, Ogot has also engaged in the pressing conditions, concerns and challenges of his times. He has addressed many of the critical issues that confront African societies since independence. In several essays in these volumes he battles with works of some of Africa's leading thinkers and writers and tackles the complex question of African politics, leadership, identities, culture, development, the role of universities, and the impact on Africa of international developments and globalisation This is a mark of a versatile and truly gifted scholar who has fully lived through tumultuous last forty years of African history.

In the 1960s, African intellectual discourse was dominated by debates about the appropriate ideologies of development and governance and the regeneration and future of African societies. In the essay "Nkrumah Revisits Marx", Ogot reviews Nkrumah's book *Consciencism*. He calls it the boldest and most comprehensive attempt so far made by an African to reconcile Marxism with the African Revolution, an honest and serious work that is destined to represent a major landmark in the history of Marxian thought in Africa. He commends the ease with which Nkrumah surveys the whole spectrum of western philosophy before Marx and his splendid defense of materialism.

He is intrigued by the idea that contemporary Africa has a triple heritage-the traditional African, Islamic and the Euro-Christian-that needs to be reconciled. However, Nkrumah does not give much attention to the "traditional" and Islamic legacies like he does the Western one. Part of Ogot's unease with Nkrumah's work is based on doubts that there exists an exclusive and distinctive African traditional culture or a homogenous African culture universe, a subject that he elaborates on in "Reintroducing Man into the African World," where he examines the problematic connections between "traditional communalism" and European socialism in African politics.

Since the 1960s, creative writers have provided a unique gaze into the promises, possibilities, pitfalls and performances of independence. They have been critical and angry of the betrayal of the dreams of the masses by the ruling elite. While sympathetic to many of these critiques, Ogot calls on writers to be less idealistic and probe deeper into the social realities that have produced the current crop of leaders and to treat the African normal human beings capable of evil. Ogot's plea is favourable, but his analysis seems selective on the definition and differences between facts and values. Ogot remarks ironically that the portrayal of the modern African elite as corrupt and vain was presentiment in the colonial fiction of writers like Elspeth Huxley, who distrusted and despised the "over-educated" African.

In the rest of the essay he discusses Peter Abrahams' warning in a *Wreath for Udomo* that tribalism would pave the way for dictatorship and Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* on the activities and wiles of the new "members of the establishment" parading as "men of the people." He concludes with a quote from Wole Soyinka's essay "The Writer and the Modern African State," where the writer states bitterly that African dictators have proved as capable of dehumanizing and degrading their victims which shatters the romantic nationalist myth that Africans are natural humanists.

Why are African leaders so dictatorial? Ogot tries to answer this question in the essay "From Chief to President." He contends that colonialism undermined the old institutions of power and destroyed the checks and balances on chieftainship that made it difficult, for rulers to be despots. The chiefs turned into colonial administrative functionaries, the religious and spiritual basis of their power was also broken. African nationalists used Western political slogans and not traditional African values, in their struggles against colonialism. These rulers inherited states that were disorganised and undemocratic because colonialism destroyed old forms of democracy and replaced them with paternalistic authoritarian rule. The new presidents positions became ambivalent maintaining the cultural trappings of traditional chiefly authority but with no moral sanctions and the uncontested powers of the colonial governors.

The tradition persists with the dictators who emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s and who were embraced by a world anxious for a new generation of African leadership. Among them is Yoweri Museveni, whose autobiography, *Sowing of the Mustard Seed*, Ogot reviews. His appraisal is scathing for he depicts Museveni as a tyrant. Ogot accuses Museveni of distorting and fabricating the historical record, of ignoring the role of external factors in the

events he discusses, and of imposing a nonparty political system on Uganda that is no different from the one-party dictatorships in the past.

In an address to students to commemorate Jamhuri (Independence) in December 1980, reproduced in Ogot's *Selected Essays* "Informal Education and the Kenya We Want" he states that the attainment of political independence in Kenya needed to be accompanied by economic independence, as well as by cultural and intellectual independence, and the democratization of culture. More substantively, in "The Siege of Ramogi: From Nationalist Coalitions to Ethnic Coalitions, 1960-1998," Ogot casts critical gaze on Kenya's failure to produce a workable democratic, multiparty and multiethnic political order since independence. He attributes this to the problematic relationship between the state building project and civil society. He concludes that the state failed to construct a nation, because of its inability to institutionalize itself and promote social integration by curtailing the centrifugal tendencies of regional, ethnic, linguistic, religious and communal identities. The management of ethnicity was already proving particularly difficult.

He discusses the breakdown of the original two national party coalitions soon after independence as power became centralized in presidency increasingly associated with one ethnic group, the emergence of a moribund one-party system under President Kenyatta, the attempted coup of 1982, the revitalization of the one-party state under president Moi, the deployment under both presidents of legal and administrative mechanisms as well as murder to control the political process and eliminate opponents, and the return of contentious and ethnically polarized multiparty politics in the 1990s. Since they lack contending ideological visions and strong national civil constituencies, Ogot suggests, Kenya's political elite relies on ethnic mobilization for access to state power, a critical asset in the distribution of resources and development. The result is that competition for power has been fought between ethnic coalitions around powerful individuals.

The question of identities and their political role seems fascinating to Ogot. He discusses this in two essays. The first essay, "Racial Consciousness Among Africans," deals with the subject of African racial attitudes. The preoccupation with racial identity among African leaders and scholars, he ascribes to European and American colonists' and writers' denigration of Africans as racially inferior and the compensatory need for Africans to reassert their full humanity. This is at the background of what he calls "the Africanisation obsession," the attempt to Africanize institutions and concepts such as democracy and socialism, and even to develop a mythical "African personality." Ogot believes that the inverted racialism of the African scholar is likely to be transitory as African societies develop and grow in confidence and as the imperative to erect complex philosophical superstructures in defense of new or modified institutions become less and less.

In a later essay written in 1995, "National Identity and Nationalism: Concepts and Ideologies," Ogot abandoned the notion that development or modernization would lead to the lessening of identities, in this case ethnic identities. He observes that in reality there has been a resurgence of ethnic consciousness, chauvinisms and conflicts all over the world, not just in Africa, thanks to the fact that modernization often reinforces unequal development that stokes the fires of ethnic identity, further fueled by the ravages of globalization as

people seek refuge in the comfortable enclosures of ethnicity. The possibility of achieving national cohesion through conquest, absorption and forced political centralization may no longer be feasible.

The rest of the essay offers a concise analysis of the various theories of nations and nationalism. Some regard nationalism as a primordial phenomenon, others see it as an imagined political community either invented by the intelligentsia or spawned by the modernization of communications. There are also those who view nationalism as an expression of politicized ethnicity –an instrument in the struggle for power-and the Marxists who used to dismiss it as a manifestation of bourgeois ideology, of false consciousness, that was bound to disappear as the splendid solidarities of class and socialism evolved.

A related theme that has preoccupied Ogot is that of the role of culture in national development. He argues forcefully in "The Construction of a National Culture" that development should not be equated simply with raising the gross national product but also with questions of social justice; equity and human rights. In short, development is as much an economic as it is a cultural process. The essay then examines the development of the social sector in Kenya, beginning with the heated debates in the 1960s and 1970s about cultural policy and what constitutes development in the sociocultural field.

There are traditionalists who argued for the preservation of the received cultural heritage and others who take a more dynamic view of culture and see sociocultural development in terms of supporting contemporary creative innovations. But they all agreed that culture is critical for developing a national identity. In due course a number of cultural agencies and institutions were set up by the state and the universities to promote cultural research, development and preservation. The study of oral literature or orature was introduced in schools and there was a vigorous controversy over the use of African and European languages spearheaded by the renowned writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

Since the 1980s the World Bank, in particular, has weighed in on African higher education with uncompromising but misguided neoclassical zeal. In a lengthy critique, "Lessons of Experience: Higher Education Policy of the World Bank in Africa," Ogot takes on the bank and systematically dismembers the policy prescriptions outlined in the bank's book entitled *Higher Education: The Lessons Learned*. The World Bank's policy on higher education emphasizes differentiation, privatization, diversification of funding, efficiency, relevance and equity.

Ogot maintains that both the diagnosis and the prognosis are not new but his analysis lacks specificity, and the recommendations are overgeneralised; the regional comparisons are misleading. The bank ignores the fact that higher education in Many African countries is already differentiated and diversified, that public universities cannot be fully substituted for private ones, that in Asian countries, held up as models, private universities are subsidized by governments, and that diversification of funding sources through higher user charges, fund raising, and income generating activities cannot provide an adequate and sustainable alternative support.

The question of globalization, its conceptualization, trajectory, and impact on Africa, is tackled in a series of four captivating essays. Ogot puts the processes associated with globalization in their proper historical perspective. He begins with a broad survey of the relations between the rich and the poor countries over the last four decades in "The Struggle for the Third World," where he tracks the emergence of the idea and geopolitical presence of the Third World and the division of the world into two hostile camps led by the United States and the former Soviet Union.

While superpower rivalries formed the backdrop of international relations during this era, the essay largely focuses on the struggle for the resources and markets of Third World countries among Western countries, primarily the United States, the European Economic Community and Japan. Skillfully, Ogot unravels the way these struggles were played out with contradictory effects in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Some client states, like South Korea, were able to industrialize in the process, while others like Zaire sunk deeper into economic decay. With remarkable prescience—the essay was written in 1990—he forecasts the collapse of the soviet trading bloc, COMECON, and the USSR itself, as well as the unification of Germany and wonders about the likely impact of these developments on a Third World dissolving under the weight of uneven development and differentiation and a world drifting towards preferential trade areas.

The end of a Cold War engendered Western triumphalism and expectations of a new world order. Scholars and the media scrambled to find a metaphor that would capture this brave new world. Francis Fukuyama stumbled into instant fame with his end of history hypothesis, which Ogot interrogates in "After the End of History." Fukuyama's message in his book entitled *The End of History and the Last Man* is that with the implosion of the Soviet empire Marxism no longer provided a credible guide to political and economic construction, only liberal democracy and capitalism remained.

The era of competing ideological systems had come to an end, so that while events would continue to occur, there would be no history as the purposeful movement of contending systemic ideas and visions. The belief that history as a process embracing the whole of human life could come to an end, Ogot demonstrates, goes back to Judeo-Christian ideology, and he finds secular echoes in the work of the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel and later that of Karl Marx himself, who substituted Hegel's idealistic conception of history with a materialist one.

Conclusion

What Ogot's career shows is that we can do both; we can immerse ourselves into the long duree, unraveling the ebbs and flows of African history over the millennia and comment perceptively on contemporary developments. The struggle for African history, begun so energetically and brilliantly by Ogot's generation, continues. Even as we devise new theories, topics and methodologies, we would be well served to retain the mission that inspired Ogot's generation, to write histories that continue to affirm the humanity of African peoples and to illuminate Africa's contributions to and changing place in the world, for our challenges and fate have not changed much over the last half century.

Several years ago, a group of scholars decided to publish a book in honor of Ogot "as the father of Kenyan history, not only because of his personal research but also because of the number of scholars and teachers he trained." *A Modern History of Kenya* (London: Evans Brothers) is a scholarly resource textbook that covers the history of Kenya from stone Age to present. It is edited by Professor William Ochieng and carries contributions from leading scholars on African affairs and history. In 1989, when W.R. Ochieng edited this book in honour of B.A. Ogot during his 60th birthday, he stated they were honouring a remarkable man and a great historian. This sentiment has also been expressed by Atieno Odhiambo and other Scholars who again wrote in his honour during his seventieth birthday. He stated that such a book would not tackle all of Ogot's interests or do justice to all the fields in which he had published. He said "to have attempted to do so would have required a series, not just a single volume." I concur with him for in a mere paper how much would one tackle much?

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