

Bethwell Allan Ogot's contribution to the development of African historiography (1964–2013)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot's contributions to African historiography between 1964 and 2013. It fills a pressing historical gap in African historiography: namely, the scanty attention given to the impact of Ogot, both academically and more broadly in the intellectual life and culture of post-colonial Africa. In the study, the intention is to trace Ogot's career, analyse his contributions to African historiography, and understand how he established African-centred history accounts within Kenya and the rest of the world. This study is grounded in the interpretive research paradigm and employs historical methods of data collection, analysis, and presentation. Primary sources include research materials from the Kenya National Archives, records of institutions, and interviews with scholars and coworkers who knew Ogot well. The secondary data are utilized in scholarly books, articles, and historical records. The study design combines purposive and snowball sampling techniques to target key respondents. The theoretical approach will connect critical policy historiography to development theory, examining the intersection of Ogot's intellectual interventions with national policy in education and historiography. The results indicate that the pro-Africanized historiography advocated by Ogot, his role in university management, or his mentorship were influential concepts that transformed African historical studies. His contributions answered the question of how scholars could support the goals of national development through their scholarly work, which explains why he will continue to be remembered as a scholar and builder of nations. The study concludes with an emphasis on the significance of African intellectuals in the post-colonial transformation of history, highlighting the need to investigate their achievements worldwide in terms of educational and historiographical growth.

Keywords: African Historiography, African-Centered Narratives, Bethwell Allan Ogot, Historical Research, Intellectual Transformation, Post-Colonial History

I. INTRODUCTION

African historiography as a discipline has undergone immense changes over the last century. Although most of the history of the colonial era was dictated by European accounts, there has been a trend towards reappropriation of history by Africans and a concerted effort to rewrite history in a way that puts Africans in the central position. Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot is one of the most conspicuous names in this intellectual revolution. Ogot, as a prominent historian, pedagogue, and public intellectual, made significant contributions to the transformation of African history, especially the history of post-independence Kenya and the East African region (Bernard, 2019).

Ogot was born in 1929 and, as such, lived during the social, political, and educational changes that accompanied the decline of colonialism and the emergence of resistance movements for independence across Africa. He wrote not only about the historiography of Africa but also contributed to its institutionalization, in Kenya and in other educational systems. The impact Ogot had on African history was not solely represented in his scholarship, but also in his roles of curriculum reform, university governance, and mentorship, where he had a generational impact on other scholars, researchers, and teachers. Ogot advanced the cause of African-centred historiography through his leadership positions in institutions such as the University of Nairobi, Makerere University, and Maseno University, which influenced academic trends for decades to come.

Such preoccupation with contrasting colonial historical understandings, which tended to render the continent as inferior and stagnant, has contributed significantly to the historiography of Africa. Historians such as Ogot and other African historians attempted to redress this balance by addressing African agency, indigenous knowledge, and the African contribution in making their own history. This intellectual intervention played a pivotal role in reimagining the view of Africa as well as its role in world history.

This paper aims to address the topic of Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot's contribution to African historiography from 1964 to 2013. The first objective will be to examine the significance of Ogot's work and intellectual leadership to the further development of African history, particularly within post-colonial African historiography. Although important studies exist regarding the general development of African historiography, little research has been conducted on the specific contributions Ogot made. This paper attempts to bridge this gap by discussing the contributions Ogot made to African-centred histories and how these contributions have continued to shape the academic institutions he worked at, as well as the historiographical practices that defined the field during his time (Bernard, 2019).

The article will provide an examination of how Ogot's work serves as a microcosm of the trends within post-colonial African history by tracing his intellectual development and life. The study will also explore the institutionalization of these concepts within Kenyan higher learning institutions and how they have influenced the way history in Kenya and the East African region in general is taught and practiced.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the contributions that Professor Ogot made to the world of African historiography, his contributions to the given sphere have also remained quite understudied, particularly in the context of African-based history and its role in the post-colonial restructuring of education. Most of the available literature highlights Ogot's works in the context of his historical research or administration in various academic institutions. However, there is a scarce number of investigations into how Ogot as an intellectual leader coincided with larger historical, political, and educational changes in Kenya and East Africa in the second half of the 20th century. There exists a lack of clarity regarding how his work not only transformed the way history was written but also institutionalized African-focused historiography in the education systems of post-colonial Africa. This study aims to fill that gap by focusing on the contributions that Ogot made to the development of African historiography. It attempts to examine how the scholarly work of Ogot, his curriculum development, and his role as a mentor and leader in the institutions he worked with facilitated the broader project of decolonising African history and education. This study positions his life and work within the intellectual movements that occurred after independence in Kenya to indicate the extent to which Ogot's contributions have made a lasting impact on the study of African history.

1.2 Research Objective

To analyse the contribution of Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot to the development of African historiography from 1964 to 2013, and pay attention to his role in the promotion of African-centred historical narratives.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study relies on two main theoretical approaches to understanding the contributions made by Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot to African historiography: Critical Policy Historiography and Development Theory. These constructs provide an organised way of conceptualising the work done by Ogot in shaping the history of post-colonial Kenya.

2.1.1 Critical Policy Historiography

Critical policy historiography establishes the essential position that policy historiography is applied to observe how policy decisions shape and are formed by historical narratives. The framework addresses the presence of power structures, political ideologies, and historical knowledge, which have an impact on the writing and interpretation of history. It is vital in this perspective as we study how the scholarship of Ogot touched upon and, at times, challenged the dominant histories imposed by colonial regimes. Berman and Lonsdale (1992) note that colonial history had become a political instrument in practice, and the work of Ogot changes these attitudes by adding native African voices to the historical narrative. His works to institutionalise African-centred historiography can be described in terms of intellectual resistance to colonial historiography and as an effort to produce history that articulates African experiences.

2.1.2 Development Theory

In African historiography, development theory examines the role of education and history study in contributing to national development. In this theory, education is viewed as a vital resource for social and intellectual development, particularly in post-colonial contexts. To define Kenyan historiography, in the sense that Ogot has it, is not purely an academic exercise, nor is it solely political; rather, it is a developmental assignment as well. His efforts in bringing changes to curricula and the role he played in establishing the historical education system were in line with national developmental initiatives. In the Kenyan context, Sifuna (1990) notes that education played a crucial role in

achieving a post-independence national identity, and Ogot's involvement within the education system was part of the broader project of intellectual modernization in Kenya.

2.2 Empirical Review

The empirical review is thematically arranged, revolving around three major subjects: Ogot's scholarly contributions, his institutional contributions, and his contributions to the transformation of historiography in Africa.

2.2.1 Ogot's Scholarly Contributions

The impact that Professor Ogot had on African historiography is well recognized as revolutionary. In his seminal work, *History of the Southern Luo* (1967) (Ogot, 1967), he not only critiques colonialist depictions of African societies, but he also offers a critical explanation of the history of the Luo people. This, along with his other works, such as *Kenya: Politics and Nationalism* (1972) (Ogot, 1972) and *Building on the Indigenous: Selected Essays*, 1981, 1998 (1999), demonstrates his involvement in decolonizing African history. According to Spear (2004), Ogot wrote his book at a time when African historiography was gaining a foothold outside the colonial construct and into a more complex and African-centric understanding of history. His scholarship presented challenges to the traditional Eurocentric narrative of African history, which often portrayed Africa as a passive target of foreign influences. Moreover, African oral traditions and native knowledge systems were also part of Ogot's historical approach, to which Diop (1974) gave much emphasis in his work. Ogot made African or oral narratives as valid as the written ones by incorporating oral history into his studies. This approach also finds support in research by Vansina (1965), who states that oral traditions offer the key to African history, particularly when other sources, such as colonial archives, are unavailable. The way Ogot utilized oral sources in the recovery of African history represented a step forward, as colonial historians had previously failed to reflect the indigenous modalities of knowledge (Comenius, 1910).

2.2.2 Ogot's Role in Educational Reforms and Institutional Leadership

Ogot further extended his influence in the scholarly realm to the educational and institutional setting. His leadership responsibilities at the University of Nairobi and Makerere University enabled him to shape the establishment of African historiography within the higher education sector. According to Sifuna (1995), Ogot played a key role in many curriculum reforms that introduced African-centred history into university courses. The change in institutions was one of the larger processes of rebuilding national educational systems that existed after independence, as authors such as Ogot worked towards creating a curriculum that reflected African values and historical experiences instead of colonialist ideology. Along with the reform of the curriculum, the mentorship and scholar activism of Ogot were also crucial to the intellectual climate that Ogot and his followers created in Kenya. According to Ochieng (1989), Ogot's mentoring of the early generation of historians contributed to the creation of a new generation of scholars focused on African-centered historiography. His efforts as a teacher were not merely to impart theoretical knowledge, but also to help students organise their intellectual framework so that they could critically engage with African history on its terms.

2.2.3 African Historiography in the Post-colonial Context

The role of Ogot in African historiography also highlights the broader topic within the context of post-colonial intellectual production. His work aligned with the decolonisation of the mind, as propagated by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in 1986, in which history plays a central role in the reconstruction of a national consciousness. According to Zeleza (2003), African historians have sought in the past to reclaim African history as represented by colonialists. The work by Ogot is one of the most significant intellectual contributions to this process, calling for the teaching and practice of African historiography to align more closely with African realities than with the legacies of colonial systems (Sheffield, 1967). In this connection, Mamdani (1996) notes that Ogot, along with other African intellectuals, assumed a central position in the discourse on the role education played in post-colonial state-building. Their writing was not merely a way of relearning history; it also became a doubly important tool of social and political change in Africa. The work of Ogot in Kenyan historiography thus has significance beyond the entirely academic, because Kenyan historiography supplied the intellectual underpinning to post-colonial nation-building.

2.2.4 Ogot's Legacy in African Intellectual Development

The intellectual legacy of Ogot is not restricted to his works in the academy and institutional life, but to the wider intellectual tradition of Africa as well. His influence on historians was not felt only by others that occupied the social sciences including other scholars found in the humanities, but overall, a greater depth of knowledge about African societies were also benefitted. According to Mkandawire (2005), the intellectual contributions made by Ogot have played a central role in influencing post-colonial African thought in the relevance that African history has on developing the growth of a country as well as the founding of the national identity of a country. Ogot's African-

centred approach is an emphatic illustration of how to make sure that intellectual work gives back to the greater processes of nation building and social transformation (Sheffield, 1967).

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design of the present study was qualitative historical research design as it is regarded as the most appropriate to study intellectual course and institutional change over time. The qualitative approach was selected because of the intentions of the proposed study to give meaning and annotations of the accomplishments of Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot to higher education and African historiography in the period 1964 to 2013. Qualitative studies promoted the closer involvement in the works published by Ogot, oral history interviewees and institutional archives that allowed me to reconstruct the context and the relevance of his intellectual and administrative work. This design is interpretive and it contributed to the study generating meanings, perceptions, and experiences that informed how Ogot was influential to decolonization of knowledge, curriculum reform, and governance of higher education. Within this framework of historical research of Gottschalk, historical methodology was used by employing the concepts of internal and external criticism to determine the authenticity and credibility of archives sources.

3.2 Study Area and Target Population

The research was done in Kenya; the archival research was done in Kenya national archives in Nairobi and University of Nairobi archives. These archives gave access to crucial files of primary documents policy papers, Senate and Council minutes, curriculum blueprints, personal correspondences, as well as reports that shed some light on roles of Ogot at the institute of African Studies and Maseno University. The target population included those people who had a direct or indirect involvement in the intellectual or administrative work of Ogot. This was a group of university faculty and administrators to whom he had been affiliated at the University of Nairobi or the Maseno University, historians and education scholars that had been confronted by his writings and contributions to education and policymakers who held responsibilities in educational change associated with his authority, and former students under his tutelage. This mixture produced a pronounced variety of views on the intellectual and institutional legacy of Ogot.

3.3 Sample Size and Selection Criteria

The research involved 18 participants with sampling size common to qualitative research in which adequacy is measured by depth and richness rather than numerical representation (Dworkin, 2012). Pervasive findings are guiding principles in the selection of this sample mean that they were selected when no new insights were reached when more interviews were conducted (Charmaz, 2006). Purposive sampling was used to identify the respondents who took part in the study by belonging to the academic, administrative, or intellectual circles of Ogot. Additional criteria were direct cooperation with Ogot, involvement in curriculum reforms or historical studies that were influenced by his ideas, and mentor relations. Snowball sampling was thereby adopted in order to expand the scope of knowledge and involve less observable participants including informants like former research assistants or even departmental counterparts, wherein they were suggested to recommend other appropriate respondents.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Data triangulation and validity were facilitated through a variety of data used in the research. Archival research and semi-structured interviews were able to collect primary data. Institutional records, curriculum documents, and personal correspondences were also accessed as archival sources at the Kenya National Archives and University of Nairobi, and recorded Ogot contributions to institutions of academic governance and knowledge production. The 18 selected participants were interviewed using semi structured interview questions that were based on an interview guide to garner stories about Ogot as a leader, coach and intellectual visionary. Participants were interviewed (audio-taped with their consent), and the interviews were transcribed with no change in words, and coded. The secondary data entailed published books by Ogot, including *History of the Southern Luo* (1967), *Kenya: Politics and Nationalism* (1972), and *Building on the Indigenous* (1999), scholarly criticisms and commentary of other historians like Ochieng (1989), Sifuna (1990), and Spear (2004), who placed the ideas of Ogot in wider perspectives of historiography and educational reforms.

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis strategy was used on the basis of six-stages approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) which includes familiarization with data, code generation, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and handing over the final report. The transcripts of interviews and archival notes were re-read several times to reveal the repetitive concepts dealing with curriculum reform, institutional leadership and Africanization of

historiography. These codes were classified into larger themes, i.e.: Decolonization of Higher Education, Curriculum Africanization, Institutional Leadership and Policy Influence, and Intellectual Legacy and Mentorship. These themes were evaluated using two theoretical perspectives: Critical Policy Historiography which helped shed light onto how the initiatives of Ogot confronted colonial system of education, and Development Theory which attached his intellectual endeavors to nation building in the post-colonial Kenya. In this way the descriptive reconstruction of historical developments and interpretative insights into their long-term meanings were possible.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The research followed ethical guidelines on historical or qualitative studies. Informed consent: ethical clearance was retrieved before data was extracted, and each participant signed the informed consent regarding objectives, procedures, and their rights after briefing. Confidentiality and anonymity would be guaranteed unless the participants themselves gave prior permission to be named. The archival sources were retrieved using the authorization of the state, and the principles of external criticism and internal criticism were used to prove their authenticity and credibility. Intellectual property rights were respected by giving due credit to all the primary and secondary sources. Through transparency, accuracy and desired respect of the participants and the past records, the research has provided high sophistication of research integrity during the research process.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The section introduces the most important aspects of the study that lie in the contributions of Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot to the African historiography during the period between 1964 and 2013. The results are presented in the discussion of the role of Ogot in the evolution of the African-centered historiography, his support of the curriculum reform, and his greater contribution to the academic and intellectual sphere in postcolonial Kenya. These additions will be considered with respect to the theoretical approaches of critical policy historiography and development theory, and will illustrate that Ogot made contributions to much broader political, educational, and intellectual movements.

4.1 Contributions to African Historiography

One of the major findings of this study is that the author Ogot has completely changed the face of African historiography especially concerning his attempts to deconstruct colonial prejudices. His pioneering book titled *History of the Southern Luo* (1967) was the first account of history of the Luos that deviated the colonial versions of writing of history, which usually presented African civilizations as backward and of no history (Gale, 2001). Spear (2004) states that Ogot was instrumental in transforming African historiography and spurring it out of the colonial pattern to promote and take advantage of local knowledge becoming part of African knowledge and worldviews. This is in agreement with Diop (1974) by stating that African history should be African with the context on how African societies are not impoverished and it should not be defined by outsiders (colonial). Moreover, this effort in finding the African history could also be traced in other works, such as *Kenya: Politics and Nationalism* (1972) and *Building on the Indigenous: Selected Essays 1981-1998* (1999). These pieces integrated cultures of oral Africa, emphasizing necessity of oral history as valid and genuine process in reconstruction of African history. The usage of oral history as one of the most important sources compliments the work by Vansina (1965) that contended that oral traditions should never be discarded when documenting African history.

4.2 Influence on Curriculum Reform and Education Systems

The second important finding is that Ogot played an important role in the activism of curriculum reform in higher education in Kenya. According to Ogot (1990), the study of African-centred historiography in universities was an important issue that Ogot advocated for, influencing the academic orientation of the study of history in Kenya after independence. As a leader of the universities in Nairobi and Makerere, he helped shape the creation of the African history course, which was attentive to African interpretations rather than colonial ones. Curriculum reform practice by Ogot can also be viewed within the context of his overall view of national development, wherein the state of education was regarded as a strategic weapon in intellectual emancipation, as well as nation-building in post-colonial Kenya (Freund, 1998). Moreover, Ogot's work in designing the university-level history curriculum was not an isolated act, but a movement towards the decolonisation of the Kenyan education arena. As Sifuna (1995) emphasises, the reformation projects of the curriculum led by Ogot attempted to dislodge the colonial period's histories with those that feature African agency, nationhood, as well as the multidimensionality of African society. It is indicative of the general post-colonial struggle for intellectual independence, where African historians sought to reclaim their history, as opposed to the distorted version in colonial hands, and present a narrative that was conscious of African realities.

4.3 Ogot's Institutional Leadership and Mentorship

The other major finding is the role Ogot played in the institutions where he taught and worked, especially his guidance of young historians, as well as his leadership at the University of Nairobi and Makerere University (Mutula, 2002). Also, according to Liyai (1998), the following generation of Kenyan historians was greatly influenced by Ogot during his mentorship. Many of Kenya's major historians passed under his tutelage and built on his dedication to African-centred historiography. According to Sifuna (1990), Ogot was able to influence the history department of the university to its advantage, as his efforts enabled African history to be taught in a manner that not only incorporates African perspectives but also critiques colonial legacies. In addition, the intellectual helm that was provided by Ogot assisted in the establishment of an environment out of which the African historians could discuss the issues of national development. Ogot being not only a scholar, but an academic leader par excellence as claimed by Ochieng (1989), as he exploited his status to involve the entire country in research in history thus forming part of post-colonial identity in Kenya and paving the way of development of the country. The model of intellectual leadership that is applied by him in the case of uniting academic efforts with general social and political interests, the use of history as a tool of national consolidation and development (Freire, 2000).

4.4 Ogot's Legacy and Continued Impact

Additionally, this study demonstrates that the intellectual legacy displayed by Ogot is extremely prevalent in African historiography. Mkandawire (2005) argues that the work of Ogot can be considered as formative to the emergence of historiography within an African context. His influence could not be restricted to Kenya and can still be traced in the global world of education. Other historians, social scientists and humanists have also paid attention to his work, both globally and in the post-colonial African countries themselves, in his contribution to the intellectual development of the post-colonial African states. Zeleza (2006) argues that scholars of Africa are important to international intellectual arena and have made important contributions in helping to redefine historical facts about Africa so that the world can be aware of the historical realities in Africa, a clarification embodied in the work of Ogot. The work of Ogot in the Kenyan case has already paved the way on how African historical studies would take place to mean that African history shall be studied in an African way. His intellectual contribution is currently being reconsidered by thinkers and historians alike, as he was concerned with the decolonisation of knowledge and the promotion of African-centred alternatives to dominant discursive structures, and by now his legacy has found its way into the ongoing discussion on the role of African intellectuals in creating their historical present (Freire, 1970).

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study highlights the outstanding contributions of Professor Bethwell Allan Ogot on African historiography between 1964 and 2013. Ogot is a pioneer in the process of destroying and rebuilding the African history in his writings, molding of personalities and through the heads of institutions, and he has disintegrated colonial versions of historical discourses and persuaded others to think and even write African thoughts about the past. His prominent works, including *The History of the Southern Luo* (1967), *Kenya: Politics and Nationalism* (1972), were major contributions to decolonise African historiography by considering more fully African agency and the importance of African knowledge system in explaining African past. Moreover, Ogot did not make a contribution in the academic domain only. His contributions in curriculum development and administration in most institutions like University of Nairobi and Makerere University ensured that the African history became entrenched in the post-colonial education systems and has given an intellectual rooting framework to succeeding generations of historians. The legacy of Ogot can be traced to the fact that African-centred historiography has continued to develop over time, becoming an important component of academic discourse in Kenya and Africa at large. This study establishes that the works of Ogot were not only academic, but more to the point, focused on the political and social transformation of Kenya in post-colonial moments. His intellectual leadership played a very pivotal role in developing the national project of decolonization and nation-building, and hence his work is acknowledged by both academics and politicians in post-colonial Africa.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are essential to the development of African historiography and the further role of Professor Ogot's works. To begin with, we need to increase the scholarship of African-centered historiography in the academy and the popular culture. One way that scholars and educators can follow in the footsteps of Ogot is to incorporate a broader range of indigenous views, oral history, and non-colonial materials into African history. By doing so, not only will the knowledge level regarding African historical experiences be enriched, but also kept correctly in terms of representation and commemoration.

Second, incorporating African-centred historiography into academic systems needs to be on the agenda. Policymakers and higher institutions should advance African history education curricula at the lower, middle, and high school levels. This will also contribute to the fortification of national identity, foster pride in African heritage, and enhance the general perception of Africa's past. They also require teachers and educators to be trained on how to teach African history in a manner that challenges colonial accounts and highlights the diversity and prosperity of African societies.

The third recommendation is to adopt the example of mentorship as established by Ogot in the educational institutions. Elder historians are called to guide junior historians, teach them their scholarly process, and encourage them to consider African-centred historical studies. Such a mentorship will help develop the next cadre of African historians who can perpetuate the effort of decolonising history and reestablishing indigenous knowledge. Departments in universities should also focus on training historians who are experts in African history, so that new scholars can find themselves well-prepared to make a significant contribution to the discipline.

It is also advisable to do further study on the work of other African thinkers. A comparative analysis of Ogot's work with that of other intellectuals, such as Ali Mazrui, Jomo Kenyatta, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, would offer a more nuanced understanding of the historical context that informed African historiography. Such studies might also be extended beyond Kenya into the effects of East African and more general African contributions to African history.

Ultimately, the broader community needs to be educated about African history. There is a need to fortify public history efforts so that African historiography becomes integrated into academic practices and accessible to the general population. Museums, cultural centers, and media can be very helpful in encouraging African history and African heritage. Such efforts can help overcome stereotypes and misunderstandings, contributing to a greater appreciation of African history and the work of scholars like Ogot.

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