

∞ A TEACHER FOR ALL TIME: A BIOGRAPHY OF MARY OKELO<sup>1</sup>

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**MARY ELIZABETH OSINYA OKELO**

**A TEACHER FOR ALL GENERATIONS**

## DECLARATION

This project is my original work and it has not been submitted for the award of a degree in another university:

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## ABSTRACT

This study focused on the writing of the life story of Mary Okelo. Mary Okelo is a global corporate executive, a career banker, and a determined educationist. She hails from the renowned Awori family which constitutes the former Vice President of Kenya Moody Awori, accomplished lawyers, medical doctors, sportsmen, social workers and gifted managers.

Chapter one introduces the biographical subject and the genre of biography and its place in literature. It also encompasses the statement of the problem, objectives, hypotheses, justification, literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, and scope and limitations.

The chapters that follow narrate the life of Mary Okelo. This narrative was created after a research on the facts surrounding her life. The writing was guided by biographical theory and narratology.

The essence of writing the story was to create a monument of a Kenyan woman who has significantly contributed to the welfare of the society and display to the reader lifelong lessons. This task also demonstrates that the stories of women should be told, and that biography is a genre that squarely belongs to literature.

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I also thank the coordinator of Postgraduate Studies in the Department of Literature Professor DH Kiiru for identifying me to undertake a FORD FOUNDATION sponsored project of writing biographies of women in the Kenyan public spaces. My sincere gratitude too goes to the initiators of the project: Dr. George Gona from the Department of History and his colleagues from the School of Journalism and Department of Literature who combined efforts and approached the biography as an interdisciplinary genre. The mentorship of these experienced biographers and scholars of biography was beneficial and enlightening during the research and writing of this work. Special thanks to FORD FOUNDATION for sponsoring this worthwhile project.

Above all, I am grateful to the Almighty God for guiding me through this journey of scholarship.



## INTRODUCTION

Flowers do blossom, and a time comes when they wither. Yet when they wither, they leave behind fruits; fruits that contain seeds which germinate and develop into plants. Mary Okelo is one such flower, a flower that has grown on the African soil. It is people who see and admire a flower which grows in the field. On very rare circumstances does a flower stand aside to look at itself and see how beautiful it may be.

Laura Marcus correctly observes that “It is... in the mirrors of our friends that we chiefly live” (91). Every human being has a reflection in the society where he or she operates. In every mirror of different people in the society, a biographical subject holds different reflections. The things that human beings do in the course of their lives linger long even after their departure. The memories they implant in the minds of those who knew them become very significant in the creation of stories about them. Through a biographer, a new image of a subject is created. The daughter of the Late Cannon Jeremiah Awori is my subject in this work. I laboured to write the story of her life as she has lived it through actual circumstances.

At this point, I find it necessary to state that there is a difference between a biographer and a chronicler. The former is an artist, the latter is a historian. The artist takes time to interpret the life of his subject; the chronicler concentrates on documenting the facts concerning his subject according to how they occurred. Historians also distance themselves from chroniclers arguing that they too interpret life. However, the historian is known to put much emphasis on the facts of the time than the individual life. The biographer has the duty to create harmony of the life he/she narrates. A literary biography is therefore not majorly on the issue of what happened in the life of

the biographical subject, but how what happened in the life of the subject has been narrated. The reader should always find pleasure in reading the story of the real person whose life a biographer chooses or is commissioned to write.

Nicolson Harold in The Development of English Biography defines biography as “the history of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature” (7). In this definition, women are excluded as subjects of a biography. Women in the Victorian Age were not rated as persons of magnitude, and therefore they did not pass the biographical fitness test. Again, Harold might have used the term “men” to refer to humankind. What is important in Harold’s definition is the fact that he presents three essential elements of a biography: history, the individual, and literature.

He continues to ascertain that a “biography must be a truthful record of an individual and composed as a work of art” (7). Harold’s definition helps us understand that a biography is composed basing on the real life experiences of a real person, and its composition embraces a conscious artistic purpose. In this work, I attempted a history of Mary Okelo in an artistic way. Marcus’s assertion that we chiefly live in the mirrors of our friends also brings in the issue of life in a biography—a biography recreates life, it immortalizes the subject. The mirror gives the outward but not the inner appearance of the object. As much as I attempted to narrate Mary’s desires, inner struggles with life, and even her secret ambitions, she is the only person who can precisely interpret her perception of life. Her interpretation of things that affect her life may be different from what the society sees and believes.

Biography expands the life of the subject as well as the genre; it is written to give a true portraiture of the subject. The life of an individual is revisited with the intention to accurately show where the subject performed excellently, and also where he/she failed. In many circumstances, the society seeks to know the life of an individual, and it normally seeks for the great successes and the worst failures. Apart from that, it is obvious that even the champions of the world lived ordinary lives. The ordinary lives of such champions are what intrigue the society more because the public life is well known to them. Giving a true account of such individuals is very important.

The facts outlined in the narrative need to be historically verifiable. The historical truth of a biography is of great significance. If a biography is to be used to honour the great people in the society, so much will be fabricated to present myths to readers instead of truthful interpretations of humankind. And if the history of mankind is the history of great men who in the biography must be created to be perfect at all costs, then the genre will be completely ruined by fables. When fables take precedence, historical truth will be at stake.

This research was aimed at giving a true account of Mary Okelo. There was no intention whatsoever to fabricate a fable of her life. Many biographies are about presidents of nations, conquerors, great scientists, and great writers. My work did not focus on such personalities, it sought to interpret the life of a woman who has significantly contributed to the Kenyan society through her determination, resilience, and dedication to excellence in the lives of her people. The history of the world does not only constitute the great men and women of the world, it is in most cases moved round by the little men and women who work behind the curtains; men and women

who are nameless and whose beginnings are difficult to locate. The stories of historical giants like Alexander the Great have been written countless times, but the stories of the soldiers who made it possible for him to conquer 'the world' remain buried with those soldiers' bones.

But are the obscure worth writing about? Scholars such as Sidney Lee are obsessed with the great as the only viable subjects of biographies. But Virginia Woolf asserts that a biographer should create new heroes for the reader. Her argument is as follows:

Is not anyone who has lived a life and left a record of that life, worthy of biography-- the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the illustrious? And what is greatness? And what is smallness? He must revise our standards of merit and set up new heroes for our admiration" (97).

Virginia's argument demonstrates that greatness is relative and as I have already pointed out, the images of an individual are varied depending on the type and size of the mirror. Physicists can demonstrate to us that the concave, convex, and plain mirrors can indeed bring out adversely varied images of the same object.

To many people, Mary Okelo may not have done much for the society. Yet unless such a task as writing her life is embarked on, her contribution to society may be left lying beneath the sea. I have therefore chosen to expand her life in the story that I have written after carrying out research on her life. Mary is already a hero in Kenya. This has been manifested in the awards that she has received both locally and internationally. Thus my work did not aim at creating a new hero for the reader's admiration as suggested by Virginia Woolf but to tell the tale of one woman whose tale has not been told exhaustively. However, having studied the genre of

biography, my task is not to clean the dirt off her and place her on her right pedestal but to labour to give a work of truth and pleasure.

The lives of people encompass the history of nations; when written and given to the society they bring about change in the lives of those who read. Some biographers aim at promoting certain causes which their subjects lived for. Autobiographies and biographies invoke varied philosophies of life. Apart from satisfying the human curiosity, the auto/biography also outlines a pathway to destiny; one who reads of an individual who rose from dust to glory gets the motivation to pursue the best in life no matter what. Life stories are created to inspire, to challenge, to provoke, and to edify.

Furthermore, a biography is a narrative that can be read in literature classes and the aesthetic value examined. Mary's story will put on the table a biography for study in the literature classes.

It is also important in history since a biography effectively captures the history of a nation; it traces the social conditions that shaped the life of an individual; it analyzes the forces behind the actions of that individual who may represent the people of that particular time and that particular geographical and social space. Writing the story of Mary Okelo in this respect captured the experiences the women of her time have gone through and how they have managed to surmount all the challenges.

A biography presents a critical interpretation of the person being written about. Thus, depending on the biographer's knowledge and appreciation of the person he/she writes about, and his/her convictions, a historical figure can be presented in various lights. This means that several

biographies of one individual can be written at the same time by different biographers, and as much as the facts will remain similar, the interpretation of the biographical subject in regard to facts will significantly vary. The role of a biographer is not to sing praises of the person he/she writes about, but to chart a true account of that person, to show where the individual failed and where he/she scored highly in terms of governance, fame, integrity, intelligence, charity, sacrifice for a better world, etc. A good biographer always makes concession; he/she is neither ambivalent nor vague.

Writing the biography of Mary Okelo proved to be of indispensable value in evaluating the Kenyan society. It was an attempt to show the society that great heights in life can be attained by any individual regardless of gender or political orientation. It also served to show that a person can be successful in many aspects of life throughout the course of life. More so, this work intended to inspire women to understand that a woman can be very good as a corporate executive as well as a family person. The readers of the story will also find out that it is possible to be founders of successful schools, banks, and other enterprises.

Women around the world find themselves on the periphery of organizational leadership--unrepresented in positions of power and authority because of structural, cultural, and social barriers that create a glass ceiling that they can barely break. African women are surrounded by cultural, social, economic, and political barriers to ascending to positions of leadership. In spite of multiple challenges, African women can be found in various leadership roles in both private organizations and public institutions. Mary Okelo is such a woman who chose leadership for

herself through her learning and commitment to the cause of women's liberation. There are other women who choose to make a difference in the society by entering the political arena.

By the fact that Mary chose to resign from her job as the Vice-President to the Women's World Banking in New York so as to invest the best of her skills in the children of the world through her Makini Schools, I saw greatness in her and therefore chose to write her story for the consumption of the public. The Makini Schools she founded with her husband in 1978 with only 8 pupils in kindergarten have set high standards in academic performance in the country; the schools have achieved an enviable position in the society. She is the first woman bank manager in Kenya, she is one of the founders of the Kenya Women's Finance Trust, and she is the first Kenyan representative to the Women's World Banking.

I therefore aim at drawing a broader picture of Mary Okelo. This is an inquiry to understand her holistic life; it is driven by the curiosity to know her fears and aspirations, her achievements and disappointments; and above all, her philosophy of life as a woman, as a Kenyan, and as a citizen of the world.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Despite the significant contribution of Kenyan women to the development of the Kenyan society in various spheres, their stories remain largely untold. Studies on life writing in Kenya indicate that while there is a large number of biographies by and biographies on Kenyan men, the biographies of Kenyan women have not been accorded the consideration they deserve. This project aims at recording the biography of Mary Okelo, a Kenyan woman, in a bid to narrate the

experiences of Kenyan women and their contribution to the making of the Kenya nation. The story of the one woman that I have chosen as my biographical subject will be representative of other Kenyan women. By writing the biography of Mary Okelo I seek to contribute the archives of biographies of Kenyan women and to scholarship of the biography as a literary genre.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- I. To document the life of Mary Okelo.
- II. To narrate the story of Kenyan women through the biography of one woman.
- III. To contribute to the growth of biography as a literary genre.

## **HYPOTHESES**

- I. The story of Mary Okelo projects lessons for the society.
- II. There is a dearth of biographies of Kenyan women despite the women's contribution in society.
- III. Biographers employ aesthetic craft when narrating the story.

## **JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

Biography is a literary genre. Even though it is based on facts it entirely depends on the language to make an impact. Biography is literature because it is the composition of a story based on a real person unlike the imagined person in the novel and other literary genres. To a larger extent, the literary act of composition in biography is not recognized. A biographer creates a narrative from the facts of a life well known to him or her. I therefore chose to write a biography of Mary Okelo



because biography is a literary genre that engages the literary act of composition and depends on language to express a life story and the task significantly contribute to the growth of the biography as a literary genre.

The fact that the modern biography resembles the novel cannot be disputed. As much as the biographer strives to present a true account of a lived life, he/she becomes a victim of unconscious fictionalization. And readers go for well written stories about people. The task of the biographer is therefore to create a mosaic of the biographical subject's life. Creating a mosaic of the subject's life is a conscious literary act. The biographer is above all a writer who follows the aspects of narrative creation. This proves that "the how" in biography writing takes precedence over "the what". The how of writing is what constitutes literature. I therefore endeavoured to undertake this task because it is a contribution to literature.

Biography plays a monumental role. The biography helps to immortalize those in our midst who have significantly contributed to the society. This task sought to immortalize a woman who through her achievements has distinguished herself as a great achiever and one whose life will leave a legacy when she finally makes an exit. Mary Okelo's biography has not been written despite the fact that her story is significant in drawing lessons for the society.

According to Virginia Woolf, a biographer 'must revise our standards of merit and set up new heroes for our admiration "(96). In writing the biography of Mary Okelo, I will be setting up a new hero for the admiration of the readers. I call her a new hero because she is a woman and women have not featured prominently as heroes in the Kenyan society and especially as subjects of biography. Most of the heroes that Kenyans know of are the men who fought for

independence and other men who did extraordinarily. Woolf says that everyone who has lived a life is worth a biography. Mary Elizabeth Okelo has lived a life and she is worth writing about even without her prowess. In writing the story of her life, I will also be creating a monument for her in art.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines the works that contributed to the formation of an argument to write Mary Okelo's biography. I first of all examined stories written about Kenyan women and Mary in general. I then studied various biographies, and lastly I evaluated comprehensive works on the nature of life narratives and biographies.

Susan Wakhungu-Githuku in Life Journeys: Seeking Destiny presents the life testimonies of women who have made significant contributions to the Kenyan society. The conversations with over 70 high achieving women presented in the book who "are accomplished leading professionals in their chosen fields and all have an opinion on the journey they have gathered along the way"(1). Mary Okelo is one of the women documented in Life Journeys. This has been important in enlightening me on who Okelo is and her contribution to the society. The narrative focusing on Okelo is not elaborate for it doesn't examine the finer details of her life. My work sought to fill the gap in the sense that it situated Mary in the historical times and gave a wider understanding of her life right from her birth to her present position in the society.

Sally H. Jacobs in The Other Barack: The Bold and Reckless Life of President Obama's Father presents a comprehensive human character of an impatient intellectual whose recklessness contributed to his downfall. Jacobs insightfully reconstructs the life of Senior Barack Obama. Her research on the life of Snr. Barack is driven by the incomplete story of President Barack Obama's father. What was initially known about him was that he lived "a disorganized life, one of fractured pieces that seemed to have little connective tissues"(x). Her research was directed by questions such as: The biography begins with the old man Hussein Onyango and then proceeds to chart the reckless life of Obama senior in the historical context of Kenya.

This biography was a model to my narrative. This being a comprehensive biography of a Kenyan whose history would have died with time was it not for the success of his son Barrack Obama who rose to position of the president of the most powerful country on earth (United States of America), it inspired me to research on a woman whose life could have become insignificant without her story being written. This research therefore sought to fill a gap where significant women are forgotten and their contribution to the society ignored when it comes to biography.

Susan Mwangi's Called to Serve: A Biography of Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi, has been helpful in determining how the biographer's perception of his/her subject dictates the outcome of the biography. The author Susan Mwangi being a member of the Anglican church reveres the archbishop and therefore ends up with a narrative that portrays him as "a humble, pragmatic and principled and above all a man who has continued to champion and holds dearly the family

issues”(15). Mwangi states that the biography is important because “nothing builds strong character like studying the lives of great Christians” (15). The biography reconstructs the life of a Christ-like figure, a man who has given his entire life to the service of humanity.

This biography was helpful to my research in tracing the history of the Anglican Church in Kenya. The history was very helpful in assisting me to accurately locate my biographical subject’s father in its context as he was one of the pioneer priests of the church. The biography however focuses on a man who rose to the office of the bishop, but my work focused on the daughter of an Anglican priest in therefore filled the gap of telling the experience of a woman who grew up in the Anglican church and how the church affected her entire life.

Liza Mundy in Michelle: A Biography, presents Michelle Obama as a remarkable woman who is a descendant of Chicago’s African American “rich and internationally influential culture”(7). Michelle emerges in the biography as a woman who explains Barack Obama: she humanizes and moderates him. Being a descendant of slaves, Michelle’s bitterness against racism is evident. Mundy states that in a speech Michelle made in South Carolina in 2007, she lamented against “that veil of impossibility that keeps us down and keeps our children down....it’s the bitter legacy of racism and discrimination and oppression in this country” (17). This biography was significant to my task in that it helped me to understand the struggles of a woman who rises to the White House despite all odds. My study was different in a way that Mary has different historical experiences due to geographical locations. My study therefore sought to highlight the unique experiences of an African lady who, even though internationally recognized for her

contribution to society, most of her fellow citizens know little about her because she is not on the political front.

George Gona in his MA Thesis on the life of Ronald Ngala remarks that “Life histories of individuals reveal a lot about a society at large. Broad aspects of society are seen in the acts of individuals” (1). This argument made me understand the life of a particular individual in the society can be representative of the experiences of the larger society. He also observes that “a social entity, like Kenya’s, can be fully understood only if we do not limit ourselves to the abstract study of its formal organizations, but instead, analyze the way in which it appears in the personal experience of its various members”(5). The thesis was helpful in this research as it assisted me to understand how to integrate one’s life with the history of the society. However, his work focuses on a prominent Kenyan politician and therefore he does not capture the experiences and lives of women. My work will therefore attempt to fill this gap.

E. M. Forster in Aspects of the Novel states that every writer while writing undergoes a state known as inspiration. Without inspiration, it is difficult for any writer to present a good story. He puts emphasis on the story-telling aspect of the novel, which is also applicable to biography writing. Forster says that a great writer possesses “the primitive power of keeping the reader in suspense and playing on his curiosity” (42). Curiosity is therefore very important in the weaving of the story. The other significant aspect--people, is also applicable to biography. Forster argues that “since the novelist is himself a human being, there is an affinity between him and his subject matter...” (54). The relationship between the biographer and his subject is somehow stronger

owing to the fact that his subject is not fictitious but rather a real person living in the real circumstances. Forster's work focuses on how a novel is written, but my work attempted the writing of a biography which is a genre very close to the novel.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's Reading Autobiography: a Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives was also very helpful in this research. Smith and Watson helped me to understand the difference between life narratives and biography. Borrowing from Spender's metaphor on autobiography where he argued that an autobiographer is like a driver in a car seeing other vehicles coming towards him/her, they states as follows: "the biographer can circle the car with the driver in it to record the history, character, and motivations of the driver, the traffic, the vehicle and the facts of transportation" (5). The biographer therefore misses the inner motivations of the subject, but he/she helps the society see more light than they could have imagined. The text was helpful in my research as it made me understand the scope of a biographer (even though broad, it misses the inner motivations of the subject). This text focuses on autobiography and other life narratives such as memoirs, but my work attempted to bring out a practical work about the subject that I chose.

Peter Abbs's Autobiography in Education was also very significant in my research because it puts much emphasis on an individual's experience in the realm of learning. Abbs states that "education is not primarily concerned with the accumulation of facts and techniques but rather with the expression and clarification of individual experience. The centre of education resides in the individual in the individual" (5). Abbs emphasizes that there is a lot to learn from another

person's experience in life. The biography also focuses on the experiences of individuals. Therefore this work benefited a lot from Abbs's ideas in the text I reviewed. Furthermore, it helped me to understand the usefulness of a life story in education. However, Abbs focused entirely on the contribution of the autobiography, but my research focused on the biography.

Francoise Lionnete's Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self Portraiture was helpful to me in this study. Lionnete argues that "women are so diverse and live in such varied cultural, racial, and economic circumstances that we cannot pretend to speak in a single voice" (xi). Her text helped me understand that women are not a homogeneous entity and the life of one woman cannot fully represent the lives of all women from different diversities. Lionnet emphatically states that women have always voiced their plight, but the society has always ignored them through time and space. She argues: "Always present everywhere but rarely heard, let alone recorded..." (xi). This text helped me to radically see the need express a woman's experience in this historical era.

In Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity, Francoise Lionnet focuses on how women curve their space in the literature that they write. She asserts that when women write their stories, they effectively represent the self that was mutilated by male writers who associated them with the unreasonable and as a result underwrote them in the books of history. Her quest in this book is to show how women have articulated their relationship with history through their own voices. Lionnete makes the reader understand "the specificities of feminine experience and women's relationship to the symbolic frameworks that define them as suffering objects" (21).

Since my work focused on a woman who was young in colonial times and influential in the postcolonial context, this book helped to understand the situation of the woman of colour in this particular context. Lionnet affirms that she is convicted “that writing matters and that narrative has power to transform the reader” (23). Lionnet focuses on the fictional writings of women and how important they are to the society, but my work attempted to create a narrative of one woman who has lived through the times that are postcolonial.

Nicolson Harold in The Development of English Biography attempts to distinguish the “pure” and “impure” biography. He foregrounds the issue of truth in a biography by arguing thus: “the primary essential is that of historical truth, by which is meant not merely the avoidance of misstatements, but the wider veracity of complete and accurate portraiture” (10). Harold disputes Sidney Lee and Carlyle who embraced exaggerated regard for biographical subjects. He quotes Sidney Lee who argues that the inspiration of biography is “an instinctive desire to do honour to the memories of those who, by character and exploits, have distinguished themselves from the mass of their country-men” (12). In the same vein, Harold attributes the lack of truth in biographies to the inflated regards of the great as proposed by Carlyle who he quotes proposing that “the history of mankind is the history of its great men: to find out these, clean the dirt from them and place them on their proper pedestal” (11). Lee and Carlyle have no sense of truth as far as biography is concerned. In other words, such inclinations as of Lee and Carlyle have ruined biographies. Harold assisted me to understand that a biography should not be turned into a forum for hero worship; it should, as Marcus argues “attempt to grasp the life as it was lived” (94). This work was helpful to me in that it made be careful not to attempt an exaggerated account of my



biographical subject. Harold's work is theoretical, but my research attempted a practical exercise.

I also reviewed Carl Rollyson's Essays in Biography. In one of his instrumental essays on biography titled "Biography: A Brief History of a Censored Genre", Rollyson argues that the seminal work of James Boswell, Life of Samuel Johnson which appeared in 1791 "revolutionized the genre and made it the target of suppression and censorship" (1). This is because Boswell departed from the norm of lionizing his biographee and aimed at creating a human being capable of making mistakes. Boswell "sought not only to memorize a great man but to reveal his flaws"(1) as well. Rollyson's work was helpful in this research because it outlines the challenges that every biographer encounters. Rollyson states that "biographers since Boswell have had to confront numerous efforts to discourage, to censor, and even to ban, by legal action, the appearance of their books...their subjects have often destroyed papers and mobilized friends and families to thwart the biographer's investigations" (1). This work was significant during my research because it assisted me to get prepared of such challenges. I went to the field knowing well that informants can withhold important information regarding my subject.

Jennifer Muchiri's Women's Autobiography: Voices From Independent Kenya is insightful in the lives of Kenyan women. She argues that "the process of memory is not a mere retrieval from a memory bank. Rather, the remembering subject actively recreates the meaning of the past in the act of calling to mind...History influences memory, such that how people remember, and who does the remembering are historically specific"(29). With this insight in the reconstruction

of Mary Okelo's life, I was sensitive to the nature of truth that I documented. This is because I attempted to recreate the meaning of my subject's past encounters with people who affected her life in one way or another. I sought to understand the meanings that significant experiences in Mary's life had on her as a Kenyan woman in the postcolonial times. Her scope in the text is the autobiographies of Kenyan women. However, she also offers valuable information on biography when she argues that "biographies offering different interpretations of particular historical figures or other individuals may appear periodically over many centuries" (38). This helped me to understand that the time and timing of biography differs significantly in autobiographies and biographies. My work in this case was to tell the story of a woman who has lived through the colonial and post-colonial times.

Laura Marcus in Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice disputes Leslie Stephen's proposition that the biography is a servant to history. Quoting Sidney Lee, he affirms that the "biography is a genre separated from history, ethics, and science" (60). He compares biography to chemistry, "the science which analyzes substances and resolves them into constituent elements" (60). A biographer submits an individual to minute examination. In determining the worthiness of a biographical subject, Marcus quotes Edmund Gosse who argues that the individual should have possessed "qualities, moved in conditions, assumed characteristics so unlike those of other men as to justify his being raised from their ranks"(60). This means that the biographical subject should be a unique person. The effect that an individual causes in the public life should be relative to the figure created in the narrative. Gosse's proposition is in agreement with Sidney Lee's monumental aspects of biography in which, as quoted by Marcus, he asserts that "the subject of a significant biography should be a personality

of magnitude”(95). In the same aspect of biographical fitness, Marcus notes that for a long time women were not considered to be significant individuals that could stand from the crowd. They were discriminated against “sometimes on historical grounds that there is no female equivalent of a Mozart or a Shakespeare” (65). Marcus quotes Otto Weininger at length who in Sex and Character shows that women and Jews are worthless. Weininger, as Marcus argues, says that “a real woman never becomes conscious of a destiny, of her own destiny” (65). In this case, women are concerned about trivial matters of life while men focus on great happenings in their lives and the society. This is a biased inclination which must have contributed to the minimal biographies on women. With this understanding, I was able to understand why there are few biographies on women in Kenya and the world over. This therefore inspired me to undertake a biography on a Kenyan woman.

Marcus also quotes Andre Maurois who argues that “the biographer’s essential task is a search for the thematic unity and harmony of the life he recounts... this is not imposed, but a natural aesthetic “(92). Virginia Woolf remarks that “the biographer chooses; he synthesizes; in short, he has ceased to be a chronicler; he has become an artist” (92). The arguments that Marcus and Woolf highlight helped me to focus on making the work as artistic as possible.

Ifi Amadiume in Male daughters, female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society argues that “women’s organizations see themselves as non-political and concern themselves primarily with welfare and charity work” (196). This is something that Amadiume condemns; she asserts that ‘male daughters’ should be militant, that they should fight the government to do

charity work for the society so that women may not be enslaved in poverty. Amadiume goes on to argue that “the responsibility of educated elite women and organizations to their rural sisters was identified as providing information, education and leadership” (197). According to Amadiume, women cannot achieve this if they work in harmony with the government in power. This militancy is evident in Mary Okelo’s life as she fought against gender discrimination against women in the banks. This text will be of great value in enabling me understand the interplay of power in the success or failure of women in the society.

Michael Warner in Publics and Counter-publics presents the nature of the public and who a public figure is. He shows that being a public figure is a privilege that makes people to hide their real lives. Warner helps us to understand the public and its expectations. He states that “the holder of a civil post would in most senses be a public figure—paid by the state, working for the common good, accountable to the community, acting in full view”(44). The private conceals much that should not be known by the masses. Warner traces the meaning of the word public to the Latin word *poplicus* which means people. *Publicus* is connected with *pubes*, in the sense of adult men, linking public membership to public maturity. Mary Okelo is a public figure; her life is traceable by the larger society in Kenya. Being a descendant of a great family, and also having contributed significantly to the society during her tenure in the Barclays Bank, the Women’s World Banking, and in the Makini Schools, she fits in Warner’s definition of a public figure. This text helped me to understand who a public figure is, and what the society expects of such an individual. However, Warner’s work focuses generally on prominent personalities. My work therefore attempted to give a practical view of a woman in the public space of the Kenyan society.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I will discuss biographical theory which is divided into psychobiography and interpretative biographical theory, and Narratology. The two theories helped to define a road map to follow while writing this narrative which focuses on the life of Mary Okelo.

Psychobiographical theory has its origin in Freud's Life of Leonardo. Its most recent exponent is Eric Ericson and followers such as Bruce Mazlish and Cynthia Griffin Woolf. As Bruce Nade states in Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form , "the emphasis in this approach is not on the facts but trends, space in a subject's life, not the record but interpretative moments that define the psychological truth of the subject"(186). Bruce argues further that psychobiography examines inner conflicts placed within a historical context. It adds the social and cultural details and seeks exemplary moments instead of exemplary lives "through significant details organized in an original form" (187). The psychology of the subjects is crucial in understanding a life story that a biographer seeks to interpret through the writing of a biography. This theory is significant in writing of a biography since it outlines the qualities that a biographer should seek for during research.

Bruce argues further that the aim of psychobiography "is to match the retrospective, external views of a life with an internal, contemporaneous perspective of the individual' (187). Delving deep into the psychology of the biographical subject helps the biographer to harmonize his or her interpretation with the circumstances that the biographee was going through. Psychobiography emphasizes the need for the biography to pay attention to the subject's relations with the outside

world. The external circumstances shape the life of the biographical subject as well as that of the biographer.

Norman K. Denzin in Interpretive Biography presents interpretive biographical theory which he defines as “the studied use and collection of personal life documents, stories, accounts and narratives which describe turning-point moments in individuals’ lives” (10). He notes that the subject matter in biographical method is the life experience of a person. The tenets of biographical method include: the existence of the others, the influence and importance of gender and class, family beginnings, starting points, known and knowing others and observers, objective life markers, real person with real lives, turning-points experiences and truthful statement distinguished from fiction.

The theory helps a biographer understand that the biographies are grounded in the family history which is regarded as the zero point of origin. The theory also postulates that biographies are “ideological statements, often representing and defending the class or gender of the writer”(18). This shows that however objective the biographer may claim to be, he or she will eventually show his or her standpoint on gender and class. The concept of “the other” monitors the honesty of the biographer. Denzin notes that “the eyes of the other direct the eye of the writer” (18). In the case where a biographer writes the life story of his or her subjects knowing well that God in heaven, people who are very close to the subject, and a specific intellectual community can tell exactly where biographical injustice (false representation of the biographical subjects) has been committed.

However the “real person” tenet of this theory explains that the biographical subject and the actual person are totally different. Denzin shows that to send readers back to a real person “the person is to send them back yet to another version of the fiction that is in the text. There is no ‘real’ person behind the text except as he or she exist in another system” (19). This means that the biographical subject is portrayed as the biographer perceives him/her and may be somehow different from the person existing in actual circumstances.

Narratology is the other theory that also proved to be helpful in this exercise. Narratology, according to Susana Onega and Jose’ Landa in Narratology, “is the science of narrative” (1). They define a narrative as “the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal or causal way” (3). Onega and Landa’s explanation of narratology was helpful in this research because it helped me to understand that a story is not just a series of events but a representation of that series. A story has the syntagmatic axis which is entirely the plot and the hermeneutic axis that represent the depth of each part.

According to Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle a narrative is “a series of events in a specific order—with a beginning, a middle and an end” (53). Generally, Bennett and Royle put emphasis on plot—a story always has a definite plot. They identify the fundamental distinction in narrative theory to be that between story and discourse. They observe that a “story involves the events or actions which the narrator would like us to believe occurred, the events (explicitly or implicitly) represented. Discourse, on the other hand, involves the way in which these events are recounted,

how they get told, the organization of the telling” (55). Despite this distinction, story and discourse can never be separated. In most cases, story and discourse are intertwined. Their argument concerning stories is worth quoting at length:

Stories are everywhere. Not only do we tell stories, but stories tell us: if stories are everywhere, we are also stories. The telling of a story is always bound up with power, with questions of authority, property and domination. Stories are multiple: there is always more than one story. Stories always have something to tell us about stories themselves: they always involve self-reflexive and metafictional dimensions (52).

With this idea in mind, I approached my task knowing that people are stories, and more often than not, they are the untold stories. Journalists often talk about the real story of so and so. The attempt to write the real story of Mary Okelo presupposes the idea that what people know about her is very little.

Time is crucial to narrative. E. M. Forster in Aspects of the Novel, asserts that “the temporal ordering of events is not the whole story”(54). A story must therefore be connected by causality; it is not just a matter of listing events chronologically. The story teller must then be bound up by power, as earlier stated. He or she should be full of questions—radical questioning of events. The desire to unearth something new should be the driving force. Narratology was helpful to me in that after collecting the facts appertaining Mary’s life, I was in a position to construct a story which demonstrate truthfulness to the biography as a genre.



## METHODOLOGY

This narrative was written after examining library and archival materials. The library materials included primary and secondary sources. Primary sources were obtained from the Makini School annual magazines, daily newspapers in the library of Nation Group, and the analysis of Life Journeys which contains a testimony of Mary Okelo, her life and achievements. I also read a number of biographies that have exhaustively interpreted the lives of different personalities. This enabled me to understand the process of writing biographies as well as the challenges that are encountered in writing biographies. I also had to evaluate different works on the history, nature, and functions of biography. This works proved very instrumental in the construction of the narrative according to the modern standards of biography.

Semi structured interviews were the main tools for data collection. The research adopted in-depth conversational interviews. Conversational interviews in research are the most effective. The story telling genre of the interview can be adjusted to a more informal discussion taking the form of a conversation. The interview dialogue becomes a more equal two way process as the interviewer and the interviewee interact in a conversation. The interviewer should be prepared to share life experiences with the interviewees. Conversational interviews were used to elicit dialogue with the interviewees. The study was carried out from an ontological position, which suggests that people's knowledge, views, understanding and interpretations are meaningful for the generation of knowledge. The participants' views and opinions helped to bring out issues that would not have been apparent in a more closed and structured method of data collection. While the research interview adopts a conversational tone, the interviews were guided by some broad

topics or guiding themes. The guiding themes helped to keep the interviews focused on the main topics.

So as to get a comprehensive understanding of my subject Mary Okelo, I traveled extensively to collect data from different people who know her. I traveled to her work place in Riara Estate; to Nambale, Busia and interview her neighbours who knew her when she was growing up and schooling at Nambale Primary School. I also traveled to Kibos, Nyanza where her husband Dr. Pius Alois Okelo was born and where Mary Okelo is planning to retire to after leaving the Makini School she has been running to her son Joseph.

### **SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS**

This work is an effort at writing a life history of Mary Okelo. Thus, it is an account of her background, personality, career, and political convictions. However, it may prove very challenging to establish what really happened in her childhood. Her life history will therefore be written from various viewpoints of her critics, family members, and companions. In this study, I first endeavoured to examine Mrs. Okelo's life, the issues that molded her life, her educational experience and career. In this case I aimed at narrating how her early life and education background influenced her subsequent profession as a proprietor of a very successful school in Kenya, a transformative banker, and a significant founder of Kenya Women Finance Trust. I also aimed at analyzing how Mrs. Okelo came to become a public figure and the challenges she faced in that process.

The narrative is limited to Mary Okelo as a person and what I could gather about her from existing sources such as newspaper articles and interviews of herself and those who have known her for quite some time. It was not possible to narrate the issues concerning her after the end the research. Furthermore, the interpretation of data entirely relied on my understanding and experience.

## CHAPTER 2

### NYANGUMI—THE WHALE

The soulful song “I will Fly Away” by Jim Reeves moved me to tears. The song is soaked with resignation and man’s helplessness when the final call is sounded; that time when alone you depart for the world beyond the bridge. If you listen to the song keenly, you recall some of the people who mattered to you then, those people who died and left you. When the Lord comes you will surely fly away, this is what Jim Reeves assures his listeners. As I meditated on the soulful song, the calm narrow tarmac roads that wind and wind in the posh estates of Nairobi led me on to Lenana Road. Along it there is the Ministry for Defence. Public vehicles hardly use the routes which are close to the State House. So the vehicles that pass on this particular roads are usually cool and of high quality—they don’t make noise. It was on this route that I thought endlessly of Mary Okelo.

When I asked Mary to tell me about her husband, she said to me, “He was a great man...he passed on”. She was in her office in Makini School. The office is situated on the slopes to Kirichwa Kubwa River. I then went my way to find out under what circumstances the engineer die. Dr. Pius Alois Okelo, the late husband of Mary, is one of the fellows who flew away when his time came. November 27<sup>th</sup> 2004 turned out to be a very sad day for Mary and her children. Okelo was driving home at ten pm on that day when destination changed. No one can tell what he was thinking or what he was dreaming about. He might have been thinking of his days at the University of Nairobi as a lecturer in the Electrical Engineering section. Or maybe he was reflecting on his philanthropist life...Okelo was a generous person who dedicated his life in

sponsoring churches in Meru, Kiambaa, and Ukambani. At the Lenana/Nyangumi Road junction, it happened. That was the end of Dr. Pius Alois Okelo...

To Mary, Okelo was her greatest love. There are times when a husband turns into a villain. At such times his wife the most endangered of his villainy antics. There are times when a husband commits all his energies to grasping something elusive, an obsession known and understood only by himself. At such times his wife seems to him like an abandoned old-fashioned book on a dusty corner of a shelf. It was never so with the son of Odiko, a man who was born in Nyakach and grew into a visionary Kenyan who touched the lives of many. Yes, he perished in road carnage. He disappeared like a bubble of water in the sea. 63 years were mangled in the metallic horse. And his soul flew away from the land that had already swallowed his umbilical cord on the day he was born. Yet he lives on, his charming smile brightens up the lives of those who can still recall him. Strangers on earth, yes, everyone is a stranger on earth. At one moment you are smiling, at another you are actually engulfed by the earth that has always nurtured and nourished you...

Those who read the newspaper caption that briefly mention the tragic death of Okelo recalled the long history of road carnage in Kenya. This is part of human nature, when a child is kidnapped, sympathizers bring into memory incidents of kids who were in the same predicament and survived by grace. It will be remembered for a long time the significant role played by the late Hon. John Michuki. When he was appointed the minister for transport in the year 2002, he brought sanity to the Kenyan roads. He insisted that every vehicle must have speed governors

and safety belts. This was to curb over-speeding and overloading of passengers besides ensuring the safety of all road users.

Before Michuki, the Kenyan roads were chaotic. As long as a passenger's head was pushed inside the vehicle, the driver sped off dangerously. One whose neck tires along the way could drop on the tarmac and perish. The traffic police could be left with the task of determining which vehicle had killed the victim. However, they too never had the time of doing such things. They were busy collecting bribes in the open. It was as if the government had legalized bribery. Every week buses killed hundreds of passengers. It came to a point where the Kenyan citizens surrendered the matter to the creator of the universe. Arriving alive after travelling on Kenyan roads was a just but a miracle.

When Michuki insisted that it was not business as usual, there was an outcry from the public service vehicle owners. Despite their opposition to the Michuki traffic reforms, it did not take long before every vehicle owner fitted the speed governors and safety belts on their vehicles. Unfortunately, this was never meant to last. The policies that he put in place soon turned fodder for the corrupt police force which used them to extort bribes from offenders. Even though all precautions had been put in place, Okelo died in that grisly road accident. His expensive Benz did not protect him from the misfortune. Thinking of how he used to drive in moments of emergencies, one could hardly understand how he could have died in a road accident. His wife was left speechless for the future looked bleak.

The law enforcers focused on the public service vehicles and neglected the private owners. It was for the very obvious reason—corrupted money. Ask the corrupt traffic police officers why they think their jobs are lucrative and they will tell you that they make thousands and thousands of money from motorists who bend the law in any way. All said and done, could anything have been done to evade the road accident of Dr. Okelo? His body was pulled from the crashed vehicle. The tears he shed in the ordeal mingled with his blood. After the fated collision, silence engulfed the accident scene and horror of the unknown tormented the soul of his wife. She says she felt that something terrible had actually happened.

The parents of the children schooling in Makini Schools wept with bitterness. The Parents teachers Association of Makini School remembered how Okelo actively mobilized the community in 1994 to join a walk for carpeting the Makindi/Riara roads. The man was to them as close as a kinsman and even more.

On that fateful day he had presided over a successful function ensuring that those who had trained in HIV/AIDS at Makini School, Ngong Road, received their certificates. He had actually been with some of his guests up to as late as 8 pm. He was smartly dressed in a light green suit for the entire day. His smile dominated the activity. He didn't fail to mention his trip to Kibos the previous day and the fact that he only arrived in Nairobi by plane early in the morning. After the function he had to attend to some duties in the city.

He drove away in his Mercedes Benz. Mary Okelo never lived to see him alive again. Yes, she had already lived through the deaths of her dear brother WWW Awori in the early ages of

independence in Kenya. Her mother too had died at the same time. But the death of a brother and the death of a life partner are different. The sting of a lover's death is deadly, and eight years after her husband's death, Mary has not yet come to terms with the tragedy. She wished that Mr. Peter Korir could have given a better explanation. Korir, the driver of the vehicle that collided with Dr. Okelo's car, should have slowed down at the junction... maybe then this could have evaded the tragedy.

When morning came, the then Kilimani Police boss David Kiarie at that time remarked that he only had scanty information on the accident. He should have known more about it. That was why he was in that position. And far away in Kibos, miles away from Kisumu, the news arrived with an unimaginable sorrow. His kinsmen had been with him, they had shared merry moments just a day ago. The fact that Dr. Okelo had died remained despite the disbelief of his kinsmen and dearest friends.

The death of a kinsman in Africa has never been a light matter. In Uganda, Aggrey Awori recalled the day Dr. Pius Okelo whisked him out of the jaws of Idi Amin Dada when he failed to authorize the airing of the tyrant's coup de tat on Ugandan Television. Aggrey was then the local director of Uganda Television. Dada could have tortured him to death had Dr. Okelo not moved with speed to rescue his brother in-law. When he saw the free world after two months of detention, nothing sweeter than exile could have presented itself at the time Okelo arrived. Aggrey wished he too could have whisked Okelo out of the snare that nabbed him at the Nyangumi junction. But death only comes for those on the appointment list. When it comes, despite the signs that hover in the air, despite the remedies that can be put in place, it must



somehow accomplish its mission. Death swallows the great and the good in our midst just like the whale swallows the fish in the sea.

At that time, no one among the Okelos conceded that even the great die miserably, helplessly. Yet deaths on road accidents affect even the royals in developed countries. Princess Diana of Wales died in a road crash in Pont de l'Alma road tunnel in Paris, France. It was on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1997. Investigations pointed out that the chauffeur was reckless and drunk. Henri Paul who was the acting security officer at Ritz Hotel should have been more responsible. There were very many speculations about her death. As usual, there was outrage in the bereaved family. The whole world suddenly became aware that the princess was gone in the most tragic circumstances. This reminded the old people of the soap, *The Rich also Cry*, that remained in their minds for as long as possible. The soap was aired on the Kenyan television in the nineties. When Princess Diana died, it was a time for the world to reckon that even the royal family is mortal. In the very way, when Okelo died, his family accepted the fragility of life. They wept the untimely departure of their beloved one.

For some days, drivers carefully drove on the roads in the city. However, Death comes only for those on the appointment list. Nothing can sway off death at any cost. It is normal for tears to pour uncontrollably under such circumstances. Many options come into the minds of the bereaved. Some wish that the deceased should have postponed the journey. They claim that there were sufficient signals of danger ahead. They forget that the victim was beckoned by Death himself. Some claim that even in a dream a close relative had seen it coming. The underlying factor always remains that death did occur. Just as Princess Diana's death occurred in the Pont

de l'Alma road tunnel, Dr. Okelo's death occurred on the Nyangumi/Lenana Road junction. His death carried the usual sting that sudden death carries.

Sudden death is usually packaged with immense pain, it is usually unbearable. The last moments that the deceased had shared with the friends and relatives come haunting. The last time is known to be very memorable. People say he was very jovial when he was shaking my hand. They say he was this, he was that. And today, Mary Okelo does not wish to recall the evening he left the house in his blue suit. Joseph and Clare have now accepted that it did actually happen. Their loving father who always put on a smile was brought back wrapped for the other world. And before they knew it, the memorial service was being held at Holy Family Basilica in Nairobi on 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec. 2004.

Some names are dressed in mystery. Nyangumi is a Swahili word which means the whale while Oloibon Lenana was the first Maasai leader who has with time been turned into a mythical figure. The junction of the two roads is therefore a meeting point of a great personality in the society with the monstrous whale. Every time Mary Okelo drives on these two roads-- Lenana and Nyangumi-- memories of her beloved husband overwhelm her. She does remember the brilliant Luo man she met in London when she was a banking management trainee.

There were times when Queen Elizabeth I used to lynch any person with Catholic blood in his or her veins. This was in order to establish the Anglican faith. During the times of John Donne the metaphysical poet, one could only be successful in life in England by worshipping in the Church of England. This vehemence against the Catholics seemed to escape Mary, the daughter of an

Anglican clergy. Cannon Musungu never liked the idea of his beloved daughter tying the knot with a Catholic faithful. Mary still remembers up to this day what Okelo meant to her. Joy Ochola, a manager at the Lower School, Makini, and often known as the mother of Makini Schools, says, "They were a very compatible couple. They were excellent dancers. They were always together." They were together always, yes, in life. But death is a lone man's journey. He was alone when he departed. And at the Lee Funeral home where his body lay, many people came. They came to say their final farewell. He may have time and again thought of death. And death is painful. Its sting is quite unbearable. From a distance, it seems normal for people to die. Death seems to be an occurrence to distant people. When it finally visits your house, you struggle to endure its unbearable stench.

In a distant world, there is always a sense of brotherhood among those who come from the same nation. Both of them came from Western Kenya; both of them had first class honours in their areas of specialization; both of them had been at Makerere University. Naturally, they both had a starting point and Catholicism was therefore not a dividing factor to them as it was in England during Queen Elizabeth. And without the knowledge of Jeremiah Awori who was far away in Nambale, a remote area in western Kenya near the Kenya/ Uganda Busia border, the two souls were being joined by an eternal bond. That was then, when marriage had not gone the way of fast food. It is a wonder that such brilliant people kept the fire of their marriage ablaze through and through. "Strong Christian convictions which we acquired in our childhood", Mary said, "was the reason for this." And as much as Mary is an activist for women's rights in every sphere of life, she values marriage. "In most cases," she said in an interview, "it is the woman who determines the lifespan of a marriage."

They both battled for academic prowess in the London of their time. The determination of their areas of specialization was their driving factor. She relied on her fiancé when it came to solving arithmetic as she pursued her advanced diploma in banking. His intelligence in mathematics, his inborn determination, and talent in dancing made Mary love him deeply. One could rightfully argue that Dr. Pius Alois Okelo was a man of scholarships. From St. Mary's Yala, he was sponsored by the government of Kenya to study at Makerere University. After this, he was awarded a scholarship to Sheffield University in the United Kingdom in 1962 from where he emerged with a first class honours degree in Electrical Engineering. He was awarded a scholarship to the University of London's Imperial College of Science and Technology where he attained a doctorate. With a doctorate, he still won a Full-Bright Scholarship to pursue post-doctoral research at the Bell Laboratories in New York. Arguably, Dr. Okelo was a man of books. It is an indisputable fact that he was a genius.

On 27<sup>th</sup> November 2004 at ten pm, his academic and social prowess was reduced to a hyphen. The obituary in the Daily Nation of Tuesday 30 2004 says it briefly: Dr. Pius Alois Okelo 27/09/1941 – 27/11/2004. In this hyphen, there is buried the long journey to the peak of success. The hyphen is pregnant with the vision that Okelo had concerning Kenya and the world at large. 63 years were squeezed into a hyphen at the Lenana/ Nyangumi Road junction. Even the years that he spent disseminating knowledge at the University of Nairobi were altogether smashed in that fated car. The tears that trickled down Mary Okelo's cheeks couldn't appease her in any way. In front of her, there was uncertainty. As it is usual, she hoped that a miracle could happen so that he too resurrects like Lazarus. She wished that it could turn into one long nightmare, so

that when she wakes up, she could never wish to ever sleep again. Yet the evidence was there, glaring at her all the way. He was dead indeed. And when he was lowered into the grave, it was as if he had gone away to study as he used to all his life. Mary hoped that Okelo had gotten yet another scholarship in New York. And his doctoral thesis “Optimization of Communication Data Rate under Fading Conditions” continued gathering dust in their house. It is a reminder of a scholar gone too soon...

Those who had gathered at the funeral in Kibos were many. But days were to come when all of them will be gone. The mourners normally go away, like the birds of passage. They camp at the funeral for some weeks, and then leave. And when they leave, the truth dawns on the children and the widow—they realize that truly, the man is dead. They come face to face with the fact that he will not come back soon. The Luo and Luhya communities are known to carry out extensive funeral ceremonies. The relatives of the deceased pack and leave their homes for months on end. They dwell at the home of the bereaved for as long as possible. The burial day is normally a feast day. And this is what it was on 4<sup>th</sup> Dec 2004. People gathered and celebrated the life that was lived well. In Africa, every life is well lived. The deceased is normally showered with praises. He becomes a hero on the death-bed and in the grave. The dead have no enemies. And every person sees the innocence of the man who has died; everyone sees how unfair death is.

Eng. Prof. Alfred V. Otieno paid tribute to his colleague. He called Dr. Okelo the most respected Electrical Engineer in the country before his demise. He recalled that Okelo was at one time the head of the Electrical Engineering Department for two years. He then became the secretary to the conference on Engineering Education in East Africa. In his tribute, Prof. Otieno also recalled the

year 1975 when Okelo ventured into electrical engineering consultancy. The field was then a bastion of foreign firms that had their roots in well developed countries. The Kaburu Okelo Partners Electrical Engineering firm picked up well. And when Kaburu died, Okelo was the one who took care of the deceased's family. Indeed, Okelo was a true son of Nyakwar Simba Odiko of Nyakach, a man who is remembered for his goodness and generosity. As Otieno eulogized his friend in the Holy family Basilica, Mary remained dumbfounded. When it was her time, she spoke briefly. The grief in her soul was overwhelming and everything that happened that afternoon was more of a nightmare.

Even in Nambale, Busia, people mourned the death of Dr. Okelo. A group of neighbours gathered in the home where the Aworis were born. They expressed their sorrow and sympathy for the family. In the homestead that was once full of noise and laughter in the days of Cannon Jeremiah Awori were only the servants who are employed to take care of Willis Awori's home the last born of Mary's siblings. Many of the villagers did not even know who Dr. Okelo was. They only heard of him and concluded that he was one of the big people in Nairobi. Only a few close relatives in Funyula could make it to Nairobi. They arrived early in the morning. They were sorry of what had happened. They shared in the big loss that the daughter of Nambale had suffered. The Anglican Church that was began by Canon Musungu observed a moment of silence. The daughter who had grown up in that church had received a blow from the enemy.

One of the implications of Dr. Okelo's death was that Mary was immediately rendered a widow. She became a widow in many innumerable ways. She had lost a life partner, she had lost a workmate, she had lost a fellow dancer and a friend. The engineer of corporate success had

finally bowed out of the stage. Definitely, she couldn't help but describe him as a great man. Had she not gone to school, she could have been married in Nambale village. In Nambale, without education, she could never have made an impact. Her worldview was shaped by academic excellence. Her journey through the institutions of learning created in her a soft heart for children. She says she began a school so that she may share her joyful childhood experiences with the rest of the world. Maybe she never knew that the school could in the end have turned into such a great empire. And the parents, teachers, the non-teaching staff, the friends and well-wishers of Makini were her greatest comfort when she was bereaved. Makini School replaced the loss of her extra-ordinarily huge family. Growing up among eighteen siblings, adopted children and many other people can make one become addictive to crowds, or groups. She definitely couldn't live isolated from people. Away from people, she always felt like a fish out of water.

Dr. Okelo is remembered by Mary for being selfless and daring. While working on an engineering firm in Somalia, war broke out. He didn't scamper to safety as many could have done. He drove to the firm at a very high speed. He engaged himself in a rescue mission of the group he was working with. He was also actively involved in the running of Makini Schools. He always spoke to the staff members of Makini Schools on the best ways of governance, the key to success, and self-development.

Dr. Pius Okelo was laid to rest in his home in Kibos. The grave is near a mansion that he put in place in the area. The villagers still stand on the road to look at the great house. Very few people find the grave important. To Mary Okelo, the site of her husband's grave brings to her mind where she will be laid at the end. Opposite the Kibos homestead, Mary has put a Makini School

campus where she plans to retire to after leaving the Ngong Road campus to her eldest son Joseph.



## CHAPTER 3

### DAUGHTER OF AN ANGLICAN CANNON

On a memorial stone dedicated to Bishop James Hannington at Bishop Hannington Memorial Church in Hove, England, the following words stare at you:

*Thou hast turned my heaviness into joy.*

The word heaviness invites tragic and most heartrending experiences, it invokes the embracing of sacrificial death for the sake of the city that is beyond this world—heaven. The church and the memorial stone were constructed in 1938. Beside Bishop Hannington's memorial stone, there stands the statue of Joseph Mukasa, a Ugandan Catholic who was beheaded after openly condemning King Mwanga II for executing Bishop Hannington. It is difficult for the Catholic Church to forget King Mwanga II of Buganda who reigned beginning October 18, 1884 immediately after the death of his father King Kabaka Muteesa I who had reigned for twenty years.

On 29th October 1885, King Mwanga II ordered the killing of the Bishop. The bishop had sneaked into Uganda through Kenya to spread the gospel despite the danger that was looming in the Buganda Kingdom against the missionaries. Mwanga saw Christianity and Islam as western ideologies that threatened his governance. Despite his frantic strides to preserve the sovereignty of the kingdom, it still crumbled in 1966 when the Ugandan army crushed the Lubiri. In 1967, all the four kingdoms of Uganda were abolished. The Ankole, Bunyoro, Toro and Buganda kingdoms were no more and that was the end of the feudal system in Uganda. Mwanga's father had tolerated both religions and managed to tame the two religions. As soon as he took over the throne, Mwanga ordered the execution of nearly fifty messengers of the palace who had accepted

Christianity. In 1886, he burnt to death 22 Catholics at Namugongo. The international Christian community was enraged by the savage killings and Hannington who had been ordained Bishop of Equatorial Africa chose to fight the vice from where it was rooted. Unfortunately, his secret entry into Uganda had been noticed and the Basoga chiefs arrested him.

After the bishop's followers had been lynched, Mwanga gave orders to the Basoga chiefs to have Hannington stabbed to death. He was stabbed twice—in the stomach and on the back. As he was dying, Hannington said to the chiefs:

“Go tell Mwanga I have purchased the road to Uganda with my blood.”

With these words, he died while praying to the Lord Jesus. Hannington, who was born in Hurstpierpoint, Sussex on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1847, and ordained Bishop of Equatorial Africa in June 1884 opened the gateway for missionary work in East Africa and his innocent blood cried for justice like that of the Biblical Adam's son Abel after being killed crudely by his brother Cain. His body was thrown in the wilderness, but after some time the superstitious chiefs feared a calamity could strike them. A foreigner was charged with taking the body out of Uganda. Hannington never lived long enough to serve the church in his region. His last words were prophetic to those who were actively involved in the activities of the Christian Missionary Society.

The remains of Bishop Hannington while on transit to Mumias for burial were taken to stay overnight in the homestead of Awori Khatamonga who was renowned in the then British East Africa because he was an accomplished elephant hunter. Khatamonga was an ivory trader and going by the standards of that time, he was a rich man. At that time, he was living in Funyula,

Busia Kenya. Khatamonga can be likened to the Biblical Obed-edom whom the Lord God blessed abundantly for housing the Ark of the Covenant. In the Bible, the Ark of the Covenant was being ferried from Abinadab's household in Gibeah to Jerusalem. It was during the reign of King David who purposed to return the nation of Israel to their God. But when Uzzah, Abinadab's son, disgracefully handled the ark, he was struck dead. That is what made King David to search for someone who was forthright to keep the ark until his men could be ready again to take it to their land. When Obed-edom kept the ark for some seasons, the Israelites observed how his life and that of his family flourished. It is written in the Bible thus:

“And it was told King David, saying, The LORD has blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God”. (2 Sam. 6:12 NKJV)

It was that last day of October 1885 as the body of Bishop James Hannington was lying in the house of Khatamonga when Musungu Awori was born. Was it a mere coincidence or Provident? Indeed it was a divine coincidence! The wonderful cry of the baby echoed melodically in the house as if suggesting that those who were crying because of the death of the bishop were supposed to rejoice since he had been reborn in Khatamonga's family to accomplish whatever Hannington had left unfinished. The baby, like the Biblical Samuel, was anointed for ecclesiastical work from his first day on earth. Provident was therefore part of his life from the very beginning, and it surely followed his children. Provident is the only explanation to the outflow of such great potential in a family of one mother and one father and a surprising seventeen children. The child who was born that memorable night was named Musungu (which in Samia and all the other Luhya dialects means white man). The name was a reminder to

Khatamonga that the boy had been born when elephant hunter was housing a white man who had been brutally slayed by Mwanga.

Khatamonga knew Mwanga and his entire family well. Mwanga's father had eighty five wives. His tenth wife is the one who gave birth to the infamous Mwanga. As Khatamonga pursued his trade in ivory, he used to take a stop at Mengo Hill where Mwanga had established his capital just to greet him. Many years later, Mary too could visit the kings and queens. In the year 2003, just at the beginning of a new dawn in Kenya after the tumultuous reign of President Daniel Moi, Mary walked into the state house to be awarded the title Moran of the Burning Spear (MBS) by President Mwai Kibaki. This honour was conferred to her in recognition to her relentless struggle to better the financial lives of women, orphans, and the underprivileged in the society. Her journey to the state house had begun with her grandfather who used to visit both King Mutesa I and King Mwanga II.

By the time Khatamonga died tragically, he never knew that Musungu would one day be called Jeremiah or that he would one day be ordained a minister in the Anglican Church of Kenya, previously known as the Church Missionary Society and later as the Church of the Province of Kenya. Musungu acquired the name Jeremiah in 1915 when he was baptized at Butere Christian Missionary Society Centre. That year, many Kenyan young men were being conscripted to join World War I. As for Musungu, he was not for the war of this world but for that which leads to heaven.

Musungu's father died in 1901. He was trampled on by an elephant during one of his hunting expeditions. Khatamonga died a heroic death; he died during the most dreadful thing of that age in his locality. He had the determination and bravery like that of Lt. J.H. Patterson who in 1898 hunted and killed two man-eater lions that had claimed the lives of over 135 Indians and Africans who were constructing the railway through the Tsavo. The two lions are displayed in the Field Museum, Chicago. The 965km railway from Mombasa to Butere via Kisumu was completed in 1901. Wild animals those days were extremely hostile to human beings because there was no boundary to their roaming.

A gallant elephant hunter was in those days a great personality who had selflessly given his life for the safeguarding of the people. For this reason, Khatamonga was given land by chiefs in Buganda Kingdom and also in Kenya as tokens for his work. Before the European powers shared Africa amongst themselves in a Berlin Conference in 1886, the Samia of Kenya and those of Uganda lived on a stretch of land without boundaries. The portions of land Khatamonga possessed in Samia-Bugwe in Uganda are now owned by Aggrey Awori, the son of Musungu. Khatamonga at the same time brought to his homestead many things after selling the elephant tusks to the traders from West Africa. The treasures, such as ivory ornaments, are kept by some of his grandchildren as souvenirs.

The blood of an elephant hunter that was in Khatamonga flows in the veins of Mary Okelo whose life has been a struggle to bring down modern elephants. The elephants in Khatamonga's age used to destroy crops and kill people because they roamed freely in the land. This explains why Khatamonga's work was cherished. Life was unpredictable in the days of Mary's

grandparents. Among the Baganda, a visitor is consoled on arrival. This is a long time tradition which dates back to the hazardous times of marauding hostile wild animals when it was only by luck that anyone who set on a journey to visit distant relatives arrived alive. But in the times of Mary, elephants and lions were already tamed in national parks. However, the discrimination of women in the banking industry was an elephant that still roamed freely and dangerously. When she joined the banking industry, the financial lives and conditions of women were in appalling state. Having been born in a capitalist state, she chose to define the success of women in economical terms. This is something that she tied close to her heart and practically established proper institutions to look into the matter. Poverty is the other hostile wild animal that was dangerously loose. She chose to battle it out so that there may be more than enough for her children's children.

Bishop Hannington's last words were like a seed that germinated in Khatamonga's family and in the lives of many other individuals who left their homes and went to work for the missions. When Musungu was born, his father already had two sons—Wasya and Mudei. They never acquired education; neither did they embrace Christianity in any way. Revisiting Hannington's last words, the road that he purchased with his blood was not a physical one—he metaphorically referred to the people that shall be converted to Christianity as a result of the brutal death he encountered. Musungu was purchased through the efforts of the mission centre in Butere. Hannington's last words reverberated in the Busoga soils until missionaries from that place were sent to Kenya and other African countries.

When the Butere Mission began, most of the African missionaries were Ugandan. Isaka Sidandi, Malaki, and Yesse Werega were actively involved in the mission work. They were commonly known as the Baganda missionaries. These missionaries were the tutors of Musungu at the mission. Yesse Werega is the one who mentored Musungu for priesthood. The Baganda missionaries thereafter handed Musungu over for two years training by European missionaries. In 1923, Musungu (a Luhya) and three other Luo young men were trained by Rev. Albert E. Pleydell, and in 1924 by Archdeacon Walter Owen. These were pioneer clergymen from Western Kenya region. The rare gene of being the initiator and founder of great things was passed on to his children who did memorable exploits.

After Khatamonga died, his wife Namangala Osinya was to be inherited according to tradition. But she rejected both Mudei and Wasya, her husband's brothers. This led to her rejection by her husband's community. She therefore packed her belongings and returned to her maternal home. Mary Okelo is named after her grandmother Osinya. Osinya is a word in most Luhya dialects used to refer to a person who cements something, especially the floor of a house. It also means someone who annoys others. In African tradition, the naming of a newborn after a close relative means the continuation of life. Elders who knew well the person always remarked at the amazing resemblance of the person who had died and the one named after him/her. It showed that the person who had died had been reborn so as to accomplish what he/she never did. Evil people and those who committed suicide were never named. Such people's existence was meant to evaporate like vapour from the earth.

Osinya's brother Ayienga who was living in Namboboto, Ebuloma, was still alive and wealthy when she returned with her children. In various circumstances, women always returned to their maternal homes. This used to happen especially when marriages broke, when the woman's parents recalled the marriage due to reasons that ranged from allegations of witchcraft, uncouth behaviour, to irresponsibility. Above all, the death of a husband in a home where there was no man to cater for the deceased's family occasioned such returns. So Osinya's trek to her maternal home was not a strange occurrence. It was while living with Ayienga that Musungu found access to education. Education at that time came with Christianity. The source of western civilization in Busia was the mission at Butere. Butere is about 50km from Namboboto where Musungu grew up. Being the terminus of the railway from coast, Butere was best located for trade, governance, and education since most supplies came in East Africa through the Mombasa sea port.

Despite learning at the Butere Mission Centre, Musungu never turned against his tradition blindly. In 1918, when he was marrying Miriamu Olubo Odongo, he paid 20 cows as bride price to her father Ochwada Odongo of Luchulu in Samia. Musungu's uncle is the one who opened up his cattle-shed and sent the cattle. Tradition dictated that the father was to pay the bride price of his eldest son's first wife. Miriamu and Musungu were studying together at the mission when they began dating. Their marriage took place in St. Luke's Church at the Butere Mission. Weddings were not common in those days. Among the Samia, the most important thing in marriages used to be the settling of bride price agreements. As long as the suitor succeeded in paying in full or part of the agreed dowry, he was sure to walk home with his bride escorted by girls her age who sang her praises to the new home. The following morning, the escort team could return to the bride's home with a goat as a gift to the mother-in-law.



Miriamu's marriage was new to the girls of her age in Busia and Butere who had not gone to any school. Her wedding was presided over by Archdeacon Walter Edwin Owen who was in charge of the mission. Many people thought that the white man's work was only to preach the new religion; it never crossed their minds that he could also be involved in joining people in marriage. After the wedding, the newlyweds knew they had to walk home for two days. There were no vehicles as there are today. As it was common in those days, stop-overs used to be the relatives' homes along the way.

Musungu opened the doors of Nambale Anglican Church in 1930. He had served as a deacon for some time at the Butere Mission after his ordination in 1925. He was promoted to a priest after his training in Mombasa from 1927 to 1928. Many Africans did not have the opportunity to travel and learn as Musungu had. The heads of the mission were confident that Musungu had come of age to open up a church in Nambale.

Among the neighbours in Nambale, Musungu is remembered as the priest who had very many children. He moved to Nambale as a priest and laboured to have the Samia, Teso, and Bukusu who lived in the proximity of the church to accommodate the new faith. Marsiana Ikombe, an old woman living next to Musungu's old homestead and in her 80s, says that Musungu was a very welcoming person. She remembers that his homestead was always full of people. When Musungu died in 1971, Marsiana was about thirty years old. She was a member of the Nambale Anglican Church when Musungu was the priest. One thing that defined a priest in those days was his marriage to one wife. Polygamy was the order of the day and many men therefore feared

priesthood on that account. A priest appeared to them a very unique person and to some extent even strange. In the very way that homosexuality is a shocking phenomenon in most of the Kenyan villages, so was monogamy in its earliest realizations. Marsiana too was shocked about that new lifestyle and she went to the church to see for herself who the strange man was. One thing that she noticed was that the priest lived a prestigious life.

Musungu owned a bicycle at a time when bicycles belonged to the rich people living in the urban centres. After a short while, he was always seen on a motorcycle as he carried out his duties in the region. His neighbours believed that the white missionaries who at many times visited his homestead gave him donations which were meant for the underprivileged in that region. According to Marsiana, the priest used the funds to educate his children. However, Musungu had a family transport business. He owned two lorries and two buses which were managed by his eldest son Joshua.

According to Ikombe, all the children of Awori grew up in the schools, they were never home. The home which is now deserted shows the signs of having been a busy place. A portion of the expansive land he owned is utilized by the Anglican Church, a campus of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, and some squatters. All the children of Awori found abode in the urban centres of different places in the world.

Musungu's old home is half a mile away from Nambale town in Busia. Nambale market is located at a junction where the eastern road leads to Busia, the western road leads to Mumias, the northern road leads to Amukura, while the southern road leads to Butula. 500 meters away from

the junction on your way to Busia, a road turns left leading to Mundika. 500 meters down the road, the homestead will be on your right hand side. It is opposite Nambale AC Primary School. The homestead is full of gigantic mango trees. Except for three workers, it is deserted. The warmth that many visitors enjoyed is no longer there. The fire that used to burn roasting maize and meat for the huge family is gone.

You see, some of the permanent buildings that were meant for the privileged in the village stand idle and bored. They were once leased to Busia Sugar Company. However, the company never rose from the marshes; it died even before it was born. It is a home of great beginnings. The pioneers of the company must have had this in mind when they chose this as the site for their project.

Near the gate, there is a cemetery for the Awori family. Inside a sizeable house, there are two graves lying side by side; one for Jeremiah Musungu Awori, and the other for his beloved wife Miriamu. When Mary visits the home where she was born, she turns for solace to the graves of those who once meant a lot to her. Her mother died on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1964 of diabetes when she was undergoing treatment in the Nyanza Provincial Hospital, then Russian Hospital. At that time, Mary had just joined Makerere University. Her father, Musungu, died in 1971 after a heart attack. His requiem mass was held at the All Saints Cathedral in Nairobi.

Musungu and Miriamu gave Anglican faith to all their children. Having grown up in a home where prayer meetings were mandatory for every individual, Mary developed a great reverence for God. Today she attributes every success in her life to God. The foundation that her parents

built in her and her siblings was strengthened in the institutions she attended. As Mary was growing up, her mother who was at the time running a mother's union in the local community always involved them in social work. Since most of her siblings were in school, they helped their mother in teaching the women how to read and write. Those who could not carry out the task took care of the children that the village women had come with.

Therefore at a tender age, Mary learnt to associate with people and actively involved herself in communal duties. Their mother constantly reminded them that their mission on earth was to help everyone who was in need as long as they had the power to do so. This injunction shaped her worldview as a child. She understood that her role as a child of God was not to sit and watch whatever was happening but to join and participate actively in the activities that benefited humanity. From Miriamu, Mary also learnt that her duty in this world is not to wait for other people to change the world for the better; it was their duty as the children of God to be pioneers of great works that would endure long after they have departed. Her father kept reminding them that they were endowed with immense potential.

Taking care of the children who accompanied the mothers who were determined to acquire formal education introduced Mary to the world of women and children. She was a child herself, but her exposure to Western civilization and Christianity made her stand tall among her agetates in the village. The young District Commissioners who were sent to the then Kenyan colony in the Western Kenya region, then known as Kavirondo, were mentored by her father. Musungu taught them the lifestyles and varied traditions of the Luhya people. As an ordained priest, he also inspired them to govern the people with the fear of God. As she regularly attended such

functions with her father, Mary felt that her father was more knowledgeable than the white people. It also signaled to her that their family was special since there was no any other family she knew that enjoyed such honour.

The bell used to ring, and every child in the Awori family knew it was prayer time. No one used to miss the session which was in most cases facilitated by their mother. This simple task that to other children could have appeared a punishment helped to foster discipline and unequalled commitment to the things that they were taught. In her late sixties, the ringing of the bell in Makini School reminds her of the joyful days. When she decided to quit banking at the beginning of 1992, Mary says she wanted to make a difference to children. Her busy schedule as the Vice-President of Women's World Banking based in New York isolated her from her motherland Kenya, her dear family, and the Makini School children she so much yearned to inspire. Her return to the school satisfied her soul exceedingly.

The bell used to ring, and Mary and her siblings knew what was to be done. Their home was like a school because there was a timetable of the events of the day which they strictly adhered to. She developed the sense of organization early in her childhood. Being organized every day showed that they honoured their parents and therefore long life would be granted them. One may think such was a military kind of life, but the children in Musungu's home were trained thus from the very beginning. Everything had to be orderly, everything had to be organized.

Many years later, these organization skills that the Awori acquired proved really beneficial. In the All Saints Cathedral where Mary and her siblings who live in Nairobi always meet every

Sunday, they sing hymns from hymn books. In the protestant churches in the city, such order is never followed and the hymns are sung only in moments of grief. The preservative nature of the Anglican Church does attract people of the old generation and those who have grown up in the tradition.

“It is all about what God can do,” Mary said in an interview, “I don’t think I have ever lacked anything, God has always provided. He has always been faithful to me.” Her words resound with sincerity and faith. True to the Biblical teachings which she subscribes to, her the blessings of her God has made her rich and has added her no sorrows. Furthermore, she has walked the long and winding road that leads to a life full of satisfaction and gratitude. While many people can tell of endless woes and regrets, she tells of her near-perfect life; a life as purposed by God her creator.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PRINCES AND PRINCESSES OF KAVIRONDO

It is a sad memory to the Awori family that their eldest child died at the age of seven years as a result of a snake bite. Snakes were quite innumerable in those days and they sometimes used to slink into the people's houses and hide in the beddings. With insufficient lighting, one could easily share a blanket with a stray viper. In the tales that were narrated in the evenings, no one used to mention a snake by name on the fear that it could hear and come in the house. So it was normally referred to as a slippery hissing rope. The eldest child of Musungu became a victim of the cursed snake one evening and left a sad tale for his family.

Musa Awori could also have made an impact in the society, just like his siblings who have distinguished themselves as people of great potential; the princes and princesses of Kavirondo. Miriamu, who was a community nurse, nursed the pain of losing her first born to the cursed reptile. Instead of despairing, she gave her life to treating the sick who were brought to her day in day out. When people listen to her story today, they jump in disbelief: How can a woman give birth to seventeen children? How then did she manage to remain strong for nearly seventy years? How did she knit the fabric of her family so well that only the responsible and productive individuals stepped forth into the larger society? Where did she get the resilience and willpower to invest immensely in the lives of her children? How did she manage to wish away her diabetic condition as she dared childbearing and nurturing that were ever present in her life? And when she succumbed to the diabetic condition on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1964 in the then Russian Hospital which is today known as Nyanza Provincial Hospital, what record did she set in regard to motherhood? The Queen of Kavirondo left a story that amazes modern studies in medicine. Her

departure resounded in the bosom of mother Africa, a continent that her children have lived to reconstruct structurally, economically, and ideologically.

Everything can be traced to the visitation of the bones of Bishop Hannington on the night Musungu was born and the mentorship she and her husband received from the Butere Mission. Like her mother, Mary says she reached the elevated status in the society because all her life she has relied on God who is the provider of all good things in life. Miriamu was indeed a blessed woman. It is on very rare occurrences that a woman gives birth to children who extraordinarily become influential and none at all becomes a disgrace. Had she lived longer, she could have died a very proud woman and she could have felt what mothers of popes, presidents, and other world changers feel.

Wycliffe Works Wasya, the fourth born in the family, became a millionaire at the tender age of twenty one. Mary says he was a great inspiration to her. She recalls how busy he was, and how frequently he travelled to Belgium. At that time, Works was involved in an international business that involved the sale of crocodile skins. Of course, Africa had plenty of crocodiles. He therefore got the tender to supply what the Belgians needed so much. His unequalled business acumen made him stand out from many of his age-mates. As a child, Mary was stunned at the big cash that Works harvested from his international trade. His grandfather had also traded across the borders in commodities that were risky to acquire. Maybe if Works had stayed longer, crocodiles could have definitely become an endangered species in Kenya. This probably could have put a smile on the people that live along River Tana at the coastal region of Kenya. They are always in



fear of being attacked by the merciless creatures. Works' prowess opened up Mary's worldview. She was inspired to see possibilities in life. She can still remember his elegance and charisma. She calls her brother the gifted orator.

Works was popularly known as WWW Awori in the Kenyan political arena before independence. In 1952, when Mary was barely eight years old, WWW was nominated to the Legislative Council (Legco). WWW was only twenty seven years. Having served as the Hansard Times editor, he was well acquainted in the affairs of the nation as debated by legislators in the House of Commons. In the Awori family, WWW remains a premier politician. His father had set the pace by serving in the local legislative council as the representative of the then North Kavirondo (present day Western Province). WWW was active in agitating for the welfare of Africans through trade unions. He worked hand in hand with Tom Mboya, who was assassinated in 1969 for his activism, brilliant political career, and much influence thus posing a threat to Kenyatta's regime.

WWW was among the delegates who were sent to Britain to persuade the British government to release Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and other freedom fighters from detention. He was among the fiery African politicians who agitated for independence through the slogan: "Uhuru now and not tomorrow." The slogan differs significantly from the South African freedom songs which asserted: Freedom is coming tomorrow. WWW is also remembered as the last president of Kenya African Union (KAU) before it was proscribed by the British colonial government after the declaration of the State of Emergency in 1952.

Mary Okelo cherishes WWW's commitment to the course of liberation. Even though he died soon after independence, he had stirred the waters of the sea by becoming a fighter and setting the pace for championing for people's rights through selfless politics that was enjoyed at the conception of the Kenyan nation. Dr. Joseph Muleka, a literature scholar at the University of Nairobi and who hails from Samia recalls that WWW became a strange person before his departure. He remembers WWW well and admits he even never knew that the triple W was an abbreviation construed for political purposes; he used to think that WWW was Works's actual name. Muleka states that even WWW's closest friends began avoiding him when they noted that he was a despaired man. It was as if he was out of his mind. Works Wasya became a disillusioned intellectual. He looked a frustrated and pitiable individual.

Professor Hellen Oronga Mwanzi, a literature scholar at the University of Nairobi remarks that Works' disillusionment was a result of great ambition cut short by circumstances. Such great brilliance could have become of immeasurable benefit to society had it sprouted in developed nations that had come of age to tap, tame and preserve it. Unfortunately, independent Kenya was accompanied by unpleasant betrayals. After sacrificing his time, skills, and wealth for his beloved nation, WWW found himself being pushed into oblivion by individuals who believed that their kinsmen must eat before any other person. Suddenly tribalism succeeded the nationalism that had been brewed during the struggle for freedom. The historical injustices that were founded by the colonialist were polished and with unequalled expertise meted against

particular individuals and communities. Many brilliant people were frustrated and others executed.

Moody Arthur Awori followed in the political footsteps of his brother WWW and his father Musungu. Moody, the sixth born in the Awori family climbed the political ladder so high that he peeped in the guest room of the state house when he served as the ninth Vice President of Kenya after the demise of Michael Wamalwa Kijana in 2003. Wamalwa was the idol and darling of Kenyans when he was alive and he is fondly remembered by his memorable statement that life begins at forty. His unequalled oratory distinguished him as a great leader in the world. The succession of Wamalwa by Moody seemed an anti-climax to many individuals in Kenya because Wamalwa was an inspired, charismatic, gifted orator while Moody indeed seemed moody. Wamalwa's speeches during public functions reverberated in the souls of people many years later. He was a genius who always stirred the brains of his audience. His death was extremely chilling to those who loved him and it shocked the president of that time Mwai Kibaki to declare a national mourning for two weeks.

During his limelight days in Kenyan politics, Moody was commonly referred to as Uncle Moody. In his humble gait and loving and caring nature, he portrayed the image of the African grandfather of the nation. Had he put on a cassock, many could have taken him for a Catholic priest. Moody did exceptionally well in the portfolio of Minister for Home Affairs. He will be remembered for a long time for the prison reforms that he oversaw beginning the year 2004. As soon as he took office, he ensured that the rights of prisoners were respected, and that prison was

more of a home to the convicts. No other person who had held the same docket had ever before considered prisoners as human beings. Moody will forever be cherished for introducing the television for prisoners in Kenya. This gadget ensured that prisoners see the outside world, and monitor everything that was going on in their country. Before Moody, prison used to be more of a dungeon suitable for rats and moles. After serving a jail term, one had to be taught how to be a human being again. Mary attributes this concern for the underprivileged to her parents. She says their home was also home to the disabled, orphans, and the unfortunate who came to seek asylum in the hospitable homestead of Musungu.

Unlike his brother WWW who left an admirably clean political record, Moody is haunted by the ghost of Anglo Leasing scandal. His name appeared prominently when in 2006 John Githongo tabled a report that implicated him. In 2002, the Kenyan government sought to replace its passport printing equipment with sophisticated ones from France and forensic science laboratories from Britain. A French firm which required a payment of six million euros was denied the tender which was instead awarded to a British firm (Anglo Leasing Finance) which charged thirty million euros.

The massive overpricing was nothing but fraud which shamelessly sought to enrich the politicians who were behind the scandal. Moody Awori was top on the list. He was trailed by his accomplices Chris Murungaru who was the mastermind of the scam and at that time the minister for transport, David Mwiraria the then minister for finance, and Kiraitu Murungi who was then minister for justice. Githongo revealed that even the then president, Mwai Kibaki was in favour

of the scam that fleeced taxpayers of huge sums that were used for campaigns that oversaw the end of Moi's era. Having been mentioned in a scam of such magnitude, Moody's integrity was compromised. His twenty five years service as Member of Parliament for Funyula came to an end when in 2007 elections the voters chose to replace most of the political fossils, the tainted and non-performing parliamentarians with new faces. He lost his seat to Dr. Paul Otuoma.

Like WWW, Aggrey Siryoyi Awori, the twelfth born in Awori's family, has been on the forefront of the making of the politics of the Ugandan nation. Aggrey, who once served as Minister for Information and Communications Technology, once dared to dupe Idi Amin Dada when he blatantly lied to him that the speech Amin gave when he toppled Milton Obote was being broadcast on air by Uganda Television (UTV). At that time, he was serving as the first local director of UTV since his appointment in 1967. That Aggrey is alive today, is proof enough that Idi Amin Dada was not absolutely murderous. History has very few people who lived to tell the tale after duping a coup. He was detained for two months before he escaped to Kenya by the help of his brother-in-law the late Eng. Dr. Pius Okelo. This incident remains forever twinkling in Mary's life. She feared for her brother's life when rifles started ricocheting. Matters worsened when her husband dared to penetrate the heart of violence to rescue him. When they arrived to Nairobi, it was a gracious moment in her life.

Mary fondly recalled the years Aggrey was an international athletics champion in the early sixties. That was the time when he set the record in Heptagonal history as the first person to win three events—long jump, high hurdles, and sixty yard dash. The youthful days were already

evading them, and trouble was beginning to rock their lives. He had never thought he could one time find himself in exile. And for nearly five years as refugee in Kenya, Aggrey taught at the University of Nairobi in the Department of Political Science. This is what he had studied while at Harvard University from 1961 to 1965.

Aggrey served as Uganda's ambassador to the United States from 1980 to 1985. He then transferred to Belgium by President Tito Okelo Lutwa where he served from 1985 until he was dropped by President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. This must be the period when the stalemate between Museveni and Aggrey began. When Museveni's National Resistance Army confiscated his property, Aggrey formed a rebel group in 1988 which operated from Eastern Uganda. He chose to go the very way most of the Ugandan presidents had gone: seizing power by the gun. The act of building up an army to wage war against Museveni portrayed Aggrey as a power hungry individual. Despite having been brewed in the shelter of a clergyman, he still fell as low as resorting to violence. His brothers and sisters spoke to him to give up the gamble. However, he stuck to it for five years.

Was he intending to make history by all means possible? Just how sweet is the history of violence and bloodshed? A man who had been educated at the prestigious Harvard University recruiting young naïve men to be trained to cause havoc in a country that had suffered the worst reprisals in the annals of history commits a heinous crime. Yet, when one interrogates human history, he realizes that there have occurred situations where rebellion led to deeply rooted justice and sobriety. Had Aggrey Awori's rebel group not died a natural death, Uganda could

have faced the worst of all calamities. The dictatorial and unprogressive governance of Museveni has also made Uganda a retarded nation in many ways. The Kony war in Northern Uganda has remained a permanent wound to the economy and political stability of the country. Joseph Kony, the War Lord in charge of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has for many years wrecked Northern Uganda abducting men, women, and children, and using children soldiers in his criminal activities. An additional militia could have made the situation worse and gradually taken Uganda to the state of affairs equivalent to that of Somalia before the incursion of Kenya Defence Forces in 2011.

The road to the peak of a political career is usually marred with scandals and curses. Those who have been in politics have lived to see their misdeeds in the past unearthed and blown out of proportion. Taking every stride in the political arena takes courage because each stride is rendered soiled by the opponents and interpreted as inhuman by the double edged critics in the academia. Those who walk at night on the dark village paths see with their feet, sometimes they trample on the grass, the thorns and stones, but they always find their way home...some with swollen toes, some completely unharmed.

The immediate follower of Uncle Moody shunned politics. "It is the technocrats who keep this nation going", Professor Florida Karani, the Vice Chancellor of Maseno University stated in an interview on Mary Okelo who was her classmate both at Butere Mission and at Alliance Girls. Indeed, politicians make noise, they voice the concerns of the people as well as their own selfish concerns, they direct the movement of resources in the country, yet those who ensure that the

nation keeps walking on are the technocrats. They are the nation's foot-soldiers at all times. One such technocrat is Hannington Awori.

Hannington Ochwada Awori, the seventh born of the Aworis, died on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2010. He completed his first degree at Witwatersrand in South Africa in 1952 at the peak of apartheid. He then moved to London to train in corporate executive. Mary and her siblings used to call him Mr. Chairman because he chaired very many organizations and committees and he had established himself the king of the boardroom. He served as the chairman of the Nation Media Group. He led the Standard Chartered Bank, he was the Executive Director of Unilever, the Director of Mabati Rolling Mills, Syngenta, Phoenix Assurance...

Hannington was also appointed to chair a committee formed by the government of Kenya to look into the energy crisis in the year 2000. In all aspects, he demonstrated exquisite leadership skills. Hannington was composed and instrumental in bringing up new ideas for the success of companies and organizations. Every time Mary chairs a meeting, she remembers Hannington. She wishes to be just like him. Even at his waning times, Hannington demonstrated an excellent spirit of governing people. It should be remembered that Hannington was named after Bishop James Hannington who was executed by King Mwanga. Musungu thought that his son could have grown up to become a bishop, but he chose to direct the economy of his nation instead; he distinguished himself as the Bishop of the Boardroom.



Many children in school tell their teachers that they aspire to be medical doctors. Even before they encounter teachers, children usually get acquainted with pediatricians. The encounter which is characterized with both laughter and wailings remain permanently imprinted in the lives of the children. Children come to acknowledge that doctors help in nurturing and preserving life. The common unhappy encounter many children remember of doctors is the one to do with injections. In the Awori family, when he was young, Nelson Wanyama dreamt of becoming a medic.

30<sup>th</sup> November 1978 is a memorable day in the diary of Kenyan medics. This is the day that the late Prof. Nelson Wanyama Awori a kidney specialist led a team of kidney experts in performing the first successful kidney transplant in black Africa. This historical procedure was carried out in the Nairobi Hospital. Nelson, who is the tenth born in the Awori family died in 1986. Mary says Nelson was inspired to study medicine by her mother who was a community nurse. As the nation celebrated Nelson and his team, the Aworis saw it as a family achievement. His siblings were challenged to go for landmark achievements. Inspired by her brother, Mary chose to make landmark history in the banking world. She put forward energetic strides in the undiscovered grounds in the profession. It was a way of defining herself as part of the Aworis, the ambitious achievers.

It remains a wonder how the Aworis swiftly made history through great achievements. Their destinies were open like the leaves of banana groves. The paths to their pedestals were straight. Not only are they brilliant, gifted, and talented but also wise. In the political scene, Uncle Moody Awori, Aggrey, and WWW have chewed a large portion. In the corporate world, Mary Okelo and Hannington have their sizable share and again they have left behind remarkable landmarks.

Professor Nelson Awori Centre in Upper Hill, Nairobi embodies the impact that Awori's son left behind. Mary will leave behind Makini School and Kenya Women finance Trust when her time to make an exit comes.

The eldest children are usually bogged down with responsibilities galore. In ensuring that every person in the family lives to the expectations of the parents and the society, they forget that they too are children. Sometimes the eldest children wear parenthood jackets so soon that every meaningful childhood activity becomes meaningless. The late Ellen Peres Awori, the second born of the Awori family, was trained in Israel in social work. She greatly helped the displaced people during uprisings in Uganda. Growing up in a highly patriarchal society, Peris's role as the firstborn, since Musa had died in infancy, was overtaken by Joshua. However, the nature of her profession as a social worker demonstrates her passion in helping people, something that is common in many firstborns. Her desire was to have a world where everyone is concerned about the others rather than amassing wealth for herself.

Joshua Ayienga, the third born in the family, left behind real estates in Nairobi for his children when he died in August 2012. His death coincided with the death of Martin Shikuku, a man who fought against colonialism and also, alongside with others, fought for Kenya's second liberation from one party rule to multiparty leadership. Both Shikuku and Joshua were buried on the same day. Joshua began his career in leadership as the manager of his father's transport business. Musungu owned two buses for public service and two lorries. He was at one time the superintendent of the then King George's Hospital (present day Kenyatta National Hospital). During the funeral mass at the All Saints Cathedral in Nairobi, his siblings regretted the hand of

someone who withheld Joshua's admission letter to Makerere University. This, in a way, explained that Joshua did not acquire university education like his siblings because someone was jealous of the progress of the Aworis. However, Joshua distinguished himself as a great leader in the positions that he held.

How would the story of the Aworis be complete without boasting of an engineer? In one of his sonnets, Shakespeare reckons that some boast of riches, others of splendid deeds, but as for him he would only boast of his love for his woman whom he swears to build an everlasting monument for in his rhymes. Together, let's boast of Engineer Ernest Awori, the eleventh born of the Aworis, who was a civil engineer and was involved in the construction of major buildings such as Kenyatta National Hospital and other major buildings in Entebbe, Uganda. Henry Awori, the sixteenth born in the family, who studied political science at Makerere University, chose to work with insurance. He was the General Manager of Kenya National Assurance Corporation before he became the commissioner of Insurance. The last born, Willis Mwendu Awori, is the Personnel and Human Resource Director of global International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE). Willis is the only person who has built a house on his father's homestead in Nambale.

A man with many sons will sit at the gates, so declared Solomon in Proverbs in the Bible. Musungu Awori could sit at the gates and speak. He was assured of security and protection. The Luhya too have a proverb which when loosely translated goes, "when you rejoice in the evening that bulls in a herd are bellowing, yours too must be in the stampede." In every coveted profession, Canon Awori strived to hear his bull bellowing in the herd. Some people ask

questions; as a Canon, whom else did he dedicate his resources in changing their destiny except his children? In reply, since I did not find an answer, I said that bread is for the children. I came across that statement in the answer that Christ gave a woman who was not a Jew.

The six daughters of this great family remained focused and ambitious. They grew up at a time when women knew little about education and careers but because of the influence and exposure they had at the mission and in the home of influential and enlightened parents, they aspired to reach the best in life. Christine Hayanga is an accomplished lawyer who is married to Justice Andrew Hayanga. She is the fifteenth born and immediate follower of Mary.

Winfred Odera, the eighth born in the Awori family, trained in Scotland. She then worked for Kenya Institute of management for a long time before she began a catering college and trained many people in Nairobi. Margaret Openda was an educator at the Siriba College before it became a campus of Maseno University. She is currently an administrator at Makini Schools. Her office is on the slopes of the upper school, a few metres from Mary's office. Rhoda Ouya, the fifth born of the family, was a teacher in her local community in Munjiti, Maseno. She married a medical doctor. Her commitment to the church led her to sponsor the building of St. Mary's Church, Munjiti. Her children built a library for the community. Grace Wakhungu, who is the thirteenth born in the Awori family, studied social work in Germany and then business management in Britain. She worked as the General Manager, Kenya Reinsurance and afterwards held the same position at Consolidated Bank.

Such families as Canon Jeremiah Musungu Awori's are rare. Raising such a number of children is in itself an outstanding highlight. As much as family connections contributed to their unsurpassed successes, they too were born with unequalled determination and strength. Kavirondo, a name which used to refer to Western Kenya during the youthful days of Musungu, had never before accommodated such a great family. The hardships he endured, such as walking for fifty five kilometres with his wife after their wedding at Butere Mission, have been rewarded bountifully. A bicycle came, then a motorcycle, then the Buick which he drove to the very end of his life. In Kakamega town, the Canon Awori Street demonstrates the appreciation that the people of Kavirondo had towards Musungu's contribution to the society.

## CHAPTER 5

### ACADEMIC STAIRS

The better part of Nambale in the early 1940s was forested. It was dominated by the Luhya people particularly the Samia sub-tribe. The roads were not well developed as they are today. Sometimes there were tribal clashes with the Teso who lived on the slopes and environs of Mt. Elgon. The hostility died gradually with intermarriage between the Teso and Samia. Sometimes the enmity is rekindled due to political differences. Someone who has traveled across Kenya can appreciate that Nambale, and Busia County at large, is fairly developed compared to places like Pokot, Lamu, and others. At the same time, the region cannot be compared with places that had political advantage by virtue of producing a president. Kenya has always developed according to political affiliations and the trend is still the same today.

Even though Uganda was partitioned from Kenya, people from Western Kenya visiting their relatives easily cross the Busia border, and others settle there. There were banana groves growing all the way from Uganda to parts of Nambale and Funyula. These bananas were meant to feed travelers. Monkeys too took advantage of the bananas growing in the wild. The land of Matoke (Ugandan name for steamed bananas) was then a haven, a storehouse of food. Then, incidents of ebola virus disease had never been reported. It was in 1976 that the first outbreak of the disease was witnessed in Congo, near River Ebola. The humility of Ugandan women is widely renowned. The people in Busia adopted their lifestyle with time. Schools were few at the time.

It is in Nambale, deep in Busia where Mary was born way back in 1944. She was named Mary Osinya. Her paternal grandmother was known as Osinya. She was born in the year when for the first time helicopters were used in warfare in the Second World War during the British Atlantic patrol. Her parents were at that time living very active lives in social matters. In 1945 when Mary was a year old, the status of canon was conferred to her father and he became the first African from western Kenya to hold such an elevated office in the Anglican Church. Her elder brother Joshua was in charge of the transport business of her father. Musungu owned two buses and two lorries which operated in the entire Busia and other parts of Western Kenya.

Margaret Openda, Mary's elder sister says Mary was a beloved child. The brothers were there to protect their sisters. Even from childhood, Mary distinguished herself from others through her intelligence and concern for others. There was no child who was as close to Musungu as Mary. Margaret remembers seeing Mary carrying the children of the women who came to their home for treatment or tuition. She was always trailed by children of her age; there was something admirable in her that other children saw in her. With every provision within her reach, she lived a life of happiness.

In 1950, Miriamu walked with Mary across the fence to Nambale primary. She was six years old and was ready to acquire learning in a school set-up. On her mother's back was Christine, the fifteenth born. She was still an infant and her mother gave her the required attention. Mary walked along with her sister Grace, the thirteenth born. The bond of sisterhood was strong on that first day in school. Grace had the instructions to ensure that her sister Mary doesn't get lost

or hurt in any way. When she was handed over to her teacher in the nursery class under a tree, she quickly followed her mother to the primary class. On the second day, Grace attended the nursery class with her. Soon she got used to the new environment and fell in love with school.

Most of the children of her age in the village at that time were being hidden by their parents from teachers who went looking for learners in their homes. For girls, it was a different matter; education was seen suitable for boys. Many parents harboured mistrust of school which they associated with the white man who to many of them was an oppressor. As a consequence, the boys loved by their parents were never sent to school except on rare occasions. School going children were very few. Mary's case was different because her parents were enlightened and her elder sisters had already gone through the system. At Nambale A.C. Primary, Mary was among the very few girls who were attending school.

The beginning of Nambale Anglican Church Primary in the late 1930s was like opening a gateway to success for the Awori family. The Nambale A.C. Primary is opposite Mary's parental home. Fenced by barbed wire, the old buildings that have seen the entrance and exit of boys and girls stand in silence during the holidays. Even the Constituency Development Fund that was used to refurbish many schools in Kenya did not help improve the school in any way. It seems more deserted and determined to crumble. Yet from those blocks that look ordinary and ruined, people of potential have been churned. Sometimes ores of precious minerals lie hidden under ordinary infertile soil. Moody Awori schooled in the same place and he became Kenya's Vice President. It is in the same school that Mary and many of her siblings began education. With the



introduction of free primary education in 2003, the student population is overwhelming and thus the quality of education rendered in the school is poor.

The primary school stood next door, just across the fence. The school was the initiative of the Anglican Church that was based at Butere mission. When Musungu became a priest, he was sent to open a church in Nambale. School and church usually went hand in hand. The school was then opened in the remote area. This is where Mary began her schooling. Her mother was a teacher at the school and her father who was the priest was the overseer of the school to whom the school principal was answerable. So as she attended part of her primary school studies, she felt like the school belonged to her parents. One thing that Mary learnt from her parents which she has never forgotten is the belief that there is no limit to success, that one can achieve anything great in the world.

When Mary was posted to work in a run-down in London, she detested the place very much and faced the Managing Director of Barclays Bank to relocate her. Life in the slum is something she had never experienced and she was not ready to put up with it at any cost. Having grown up in the mission, she had never before seen someone drunk. In the London run-down, matters were worse; it appeared to her like the hell which her father used to speak about in his sermons. This indeed revealed a life spent in royalty. The glaring reality in Kenyan urban slums such as Kibera, Mathare, and Mukuru escaped her. In the present day, some people in the slums still live in caves at the dumpsites. The fellows still wake up in the morning and wait for another day to crawl on and on.

In 1958, Mary joined Butere Mission for upper primary which constituted of classes five, six and seven. Butere was a tough beginning for her because it was her first time to be in boarding school. Being a missionary institute, the routine was similar to what she was used to in her home. There was prayer time, singing and Bible reading sessions but the much attention she enjoyed at home was no longer there. Butere was a mixed school and little attention was given to the girls who were a minority. Furthermore, nearly all the children in the school were from privileged parentage. Mary was at Butere at the onset of her adolescence which is normally characterized by emotional and psychological turmoil. Of all the institutions that she attended, Mary is very reluctant to discuss the life she had at the institution. The only good thing she experienced in the school was her prowess in sports. She was actively involved in netball and hockey. When it was time to leave Butere after her Form Four, she was very happy because she never liked the school.

Seven girls from Butere mission school qualified to join Alliance Girls for Advanced level. Apart from Mary Okelo, the other girls from Butere were Florence Karani who later became the first woman chancellor of a public university, Maseno University. Before holding this position in 2003, she had served as the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academics Affairs at the University of Nairobi for many years. Her strong leadership qualities were developed at Alliance Girls. Joyce Oluoch pursued law and became a Lady Justice of the Kenya High Court; and Elizabeth Masiga became the first woman Chief Inspector of schools. Alliance Girls High School is the first African girls' high school in Kenya. It was founded by the Scottish missionaries in 1948. The

school is built on a 71 acres piece of land which was donated by the Presbyterian Church. The church is still the sponsor of the school up to date.

It was in 1962 that the school began offering A-levels. The pioneer group constituted of seven girls from Butere and six girls from Alliance. Before independence, the school was known as African Girls High School. Kenya High School was for girls of European descent. Delamere Girls, now called State House Girls was also set aside for Europeans and Asians. This racial alignment in the education sector seemed to suggest Africans had a different destiny. Despite the insensitivity of the colonial government, the teachers at Alliance who were mostly missionaries went an extra mile to inspire the girls who were under their care. The girls were challenged to work determinedly and make a significant contribution to their country. "Miss Bruce always told us that if we failed, we would have failed the country because we were the pioneer A level students," Mary said in an interview. The words of Ms Bruce stirred the desire for excellence in the girls and modeled them into patriotic persons. Mary and her colleagues came to realize that they carried the destiny of their nation. It is rare nowadays to find teachers who can mentor children in school as it was in those days; equally, it is rare to find children who can listen to their teachers and follow their advice.

Teachers at Alliance were highly educated graduates of Cambridge and Oxford. Most of them were women missionaries who did much in inculcating Christian values in the girls. They cultivated a spirit of responsibility and the quest for excellence in Mary. She says those women

were her role models. Mary admires Mother Teresa who sacrificed her life for the poor and left a legacy of service to humanity.

When she had just joined the school, Ms Hardison, Carey Francis' sister, became her close friend. Ms Hardison was her teacher and mentor and she knew Mary's parents well. Through her, Mary was equipped on the handling of social matters. Furthermore, Hardison always bought many gifts for her and made her life wonderful. At Alliance, Mary got an opportunity to get very close to Seisian dogs that belonged to one of her teachers. She enjoyed walking with the dogs in the school compound whenever she was free. This attachment to pets at that age was a way of welcoming western culture. Teachers at Alliance were very friendly to her and her colleagues. The case was different at Butere where teachers held a very elevated position and were always ready to cause harm on any student who went astray. Because she believed in compassion, Mary never approved of such hostile approaches to correction of behaviour among teenagers.

When Mary joined the school, Ms. Mary Bruce was the principal. She had succeeded the founding principal Mrs. Jean Wilkinson in 1954. The school motto—Walk in the Light—had an impact on the lives of the girls who went through the institution. The motto whispered to the girls every day urging them to do that which was for the benefit of the society; it reminded them that wicked deeds were not meant for them; it challenged them to view themselves as a chosen group from the many girls of their time who never had the chance to step in the school.

Among the alumni of the school are great women such as: Nyiva Mwendwa, the first woman cabinet minister in Kenya; Margaret Githinji, the first woman Permanent Secretary in Kenya; Dr. Sally Kosgei, the first woman head of civil service; Lady Justice Effie Owuor, the first woman judge of High Court and court of Appeal. Many women who have made great contribution in Kenya studied at the school which is a historical vanguard in academics in the country. Even though many schools have come up and are a tough challenge to Alliance Girls, it still remains the greatest due to the name that is deeply rooted in achievements.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE QUEEN OF MAKERERE

At the age of twenty, Mary was a stunning beauty. She was not just the village beauty, but in the East African region the judges of Makerere University beauty pageant agreed she was worth looking at. A descendant of the Awori, a great family, she effortlessly swam to fame. As she walked on the corridors of Makerere University, she exuded confidence because the world was before her. Born in the times when Africa was blossoming with opportunity, it was almost certain that she knew the highway to a great future was open for her just as it opened for her parents and elder siblings. During her first year at Makerere, Mary studied Geography, Sociology and History. She later specialized in history.

Despite the glittering lights that beckon everyone to Western civilization in the urban centres of Kenya today, joblessness and crime on the highways cause people's hearts to tremble exceedingly. Those who were there in the days of the colonialists reckon that life was not as complex as it is today. The Africans were being oppressed and exploited, but there were opportunities for those who had seen the inside of classrooms.

Beauty touches every heart. It is powerful. It is crafted in the lofty places. Beauty pleases the soul; it paves way to the heart with ease. It is always welcome to any territory. Even the most vicious lionesses hesitate to devour a beautiful princess. For what a loss is it for a beautiful princess to be torn into pieces. She who exists to make the world admirable, pleasant, pleasurable, and forever appealing should always tarry in the world. Ralph Waldo Emerson observed this concerning beauty: "Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we

must carry it with us or we find it not.” He implied that beauty can only be appreciated with those endowed with such affinity as to recognize and locate it from a world crowded with disgusting things.

Ayi Kwei Armah could not hesitate to remark that the beautiful ones are not yet born. In his narrative, it is “the man” who sees the writings concerning beauty on a public service vehicle. He even talks of the chichidodo, a bird that hates excrement but feasts on maggots that come from excrement. Even though Armah’s focus was the beauty of a life devoid of graft in Africa, particularly Ghana, only those who are blind to such wonders as a few unique well cultured women can say the beautiful ones are not yet born.

The word beauty means a lot to women. Once there was a girl who was asked by her school master what she thought about her future. The girl innocently said:

“Sir, I know my future will be bright.”

“Why do you think so, young girl.”

“Because I am the most beautiful person in the universe.”

“Who told you?”

“My boyfriend.”

The boyfriend may have been flattering the girl, but the girl believed him. Her life began revolving around the notion of beauty. And all women have a soul in which beauty is engendered.

So when Mary Osinya was declared the Makere University Rag Queen in 1964, which is the equivalent of Miss University in the contemporary times, it became a lifelong major highlight. In her secret desires, the whole world should have witnessed that auspicious encounter. In a special way, this victory confirmed to her what her parents had always told her: "There is no limit to achieving the best in the world." 1964 is the year that Kenya gained self governance. Again, this was the year that Mzee Jomo Kenyatta became the first president of Kenya. The colonialist had just left a year earlier. It was as if Mary had been crowned the queen of East Africa's elites. The idea that black was ugly and close to the devil collapsed that evening. It was like the renaissance in Harlem city where the black people asserted their beauty through art and music. The jubilation that resounded in the hall when Mary was announced the winner of the beauty pageant was like the songs that brought down the walls of Jericho during the days of Joshua.

Miss University is normally a beauty pageant that is organized to celebrate the physical endowments, wits, and talents of students who have the desire to develop their country through their special gifts. Mr. and Miss World beauty pageant began in 1954. This is an exercise that enjoys massive TV audience. When more than 4 billion people around the world gather to watch the event on the television, one can hardly understand what goes on in the mind of the lady being idolized. Mary felt she was on top of the world when it happened. The pageant for men is not that famous. What stirs the world concerning men are acts of bravery.

Having been brought up in a clergyman's home, Mary says boxing never crossed her mind, not even once. Even though she had trained as a Kenya Prison Officer in 1963, she was still the compassionate daughter of a priest. Her training as a prison warder may have come about as a



way to seek for opportunities in every way possible and this led her to work at the Lang'ata Prisons for a year before joining university. As for beauty contests, she argues that it is something that began in the days of Hadassah. Hadassah, popularly known as Esther, managed to become the queen of the Persian Kingdom which stretched from India to Ethiopia during the reign of King Ahasuerus. Queen Vashti's defiance necessitated the search for other beautiful women in Persia, for truly beauty has never existed as a monopoly. Ahasuerus in his greatest moments wanted to show off to the nobles that he married the most beautiful lady in Persia. Vashti blatantly refuted his request to show off to the nobles. And so she was kicked out. Then followed a beauty contest four years later. Emerging as the most beautiful meant taking the status of royalty. Hadassah used the opportunity to change the Jews who were the minority in Persia. She even risked her own life and halted a genocide plotted against the Jews by Haman who was the Prime Minister.

Winning the Rag Queen title of Makere University remains a memorable moment in Mary's life. She became the fashion queen of Kampala. Fashion designers came looking for her to display their new products. It earned her more cash and opportunities to meet and interact with many people in Uganda. This also gave her an opportunity to stand for female students from Kenya in protecting their rights. She indeed became the voice of the minority just like Esther of the Bible. This also helped her to get a job in the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Kenya immediately she graduated with an honours degree in History.

The work that Cecilia Mwangi, who at one time emerged Miss Kenya, has done in the fight against jiggers cannot be neglected. Central Kenya has been faced by the menace of jiggers

which feast on the feet of the underprivileged especially men who have encountered domestic violence and abandoned by their wives. After winning the title Miss Kenya, Cecilia chose to use her title to change the lives of those suffering from the menace. In a way, those who win the beauty titles get baptized to work tirelessly for the society. Instead of touring distant lands to have glorious moments for herself, she chose to seek for funds from non-governmental organizations and well-wishers to ensure that jiggers are completely wiped out in Murang'a. This is something that is reflected in the pioneers of beauty pageants. Mary began her initiative to speak for the African women after grasping the Rag Queen title at Makerere University. She has fought the battle all along. Even today, she speaks of the honour that women should be accorded in the African society.

Makerere University was established in 1922 as a technical school offering carpentry, building, and mechanics. A few years later it started offering courses in medical care, agriculture, veterinary science and teacher training. In 1935, the school became Centre for Higher Education in East Africa. It was offering post-school certificates at that time. The centre became an affiliate college of the then University College of London in 1949 and began offering degrees. It became a full fledged University of East Africa in June 1963. So, when Mary joined the university in 1964, the institution had been existence for about forty years. Many East African scholars such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o studied and wrote extensively on their experiences in the institution. Makerere was a prestigious centre of learning; to the people in East Africa then, it was like Harvard University to the rest of the world.

While at the university, Mary participated actively in sports. She had developed this passion while at Butere Mission. She represented the university in many competitions whenever they palyed with different companies and organizations. Her brother's prowess in Olympics inspired her a great deal and she also aimed at setting a record of her own in netball and hockey. However, her brother Aggrey Awori was in a class of his own. This very busy lifestyle made her focus on important matters in life. If she was not studying, she was on the field playing or in church praying. Even though far away from her parents, she never turned mischievous because she believed that God in heaven was always watching her every step even in darkness. Ms Hardison had also repeatedly told her to carry herself with dignity all the days of her life.

Makerere was the springboard of Mary's success in the life that followed. Had she not graduated from Makerere, she could have remained a prison warder and retired in 1999. As a Kenya prison warder, she could have risen in the ranks and brought about a few reforms in favour of women officers and prisoners. The university did equip her for higher universal ideals. Without undermining the prisons department, one agrees that it has been given a very limited space in the developing world. The mention of Makerere ignites Mary's memories of the exposure she enjoyed with people from many countries in Africa. To this day, she talks of a Professor Becker who taught her Geography. He not only taught them when they were freshers, but he also inspired them and challenged them to distinguish themselves in their areas of study. He reminded them at all times that Africa was awaiting their input so as to rise from poverty and ignorance. As Professor Becker spoke, Mary felt in her heart that she was being commissioned to use her potential to make her continent a better place in every way possible.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE RESILIENT MOTHER

During the requiem mass of her late eldest brother Apollo Joshua Ayienga Awori, Mary stood at the pulpit of All Saints Cathedral and fondly recalled their well-knit family. She was executively dressed in a brown dress, a black coat, and a black wide hat. One time she admired some wonderful shoes that were to be found only in Canada. Her Late husband Dr. Pius Alois Okelo ensured that they flew all the way from Iowa in the US, where they were on a tour, to Canada to acquire the most coveted shoes. Women sometimes go an extra mile to embrace the sweetness of life. As she spoke, her voice was a little bit shaky. Was it because of age or grief? Her eyes could still glow in the dimness of the moment.

Eulogising Joshua whom they commonly referred to as Senior, she remarked that he was a man who exercised proper and moderated control of the large family. Adhering to Christian foundations which were layed down by their father, the Late Canon Jeremiah Musungu Awori, the sixteen children worked for the successes of each other. She mentioned that rivalry and jealousy have never existed in their family and they have passed that baton to their children. It was evident that the beauty of unity had always permeated the Awori family. Mary recalled an incident when Senior put in place “damage control” on her during a family meeting. Mary used to be radical in her remarks during such meetings. And to ensure that everything went on smoothly, Senior instructed the late Peris to sit next to Mary and monitor whatever she said. On noticing that she was about to say something nasty, Peris pinched Mary so hard that she yelled. Senoir said—“Damage control in place.” Mary learnt to speak with constraint and moderation from there hence forth. As she talked about this on the 30<sup>th</sup> August 2012 in the All Saints

Cathedral, the mourners of Joshua laughed heartily. Joshua had lived for 88 years. His was a long life full of colour. That afternoon, his casket was near the altar and it was wreathed in flowers.

Most of the bereaved were dressed in black suits and they sat on the benches in the middle column. After Mary's tribute to her fallen brother, she walked back steadily bowing when she reached the casket. The solemnity of the occasion spread throughout the church. Her reserved seat in the church was next to her children and her siblings. Her eldest son Joseph, the second born Laurence, and Claire Niala the last born were all there. One could easily tell that Joseph and Laurence are brothers from the striking resemblance. However, Joseph is gigantic and he looks like the Hollywood wrestlers or rugby players. Laurence looked more composed and he seemed meditative while Claire seemed reserved.

Mary's children used to play in the banking hall in Westlands as they awaited her to finish work. Those days she was the manager of Barclays Bank Westlands Branch. She always took time off to rush and pick the boys from St. Mary's School which borders Riverside Estate and Lavinton. What assisted her very much was her time consciousness which she acquired from her parents. Her father and mother were also very busy people and they always reminded their children that only the disciplined people can make optimum use of the twenty four hours that God gives them every day. With such understanding, she never allowed clutter in her work and she strictly followed her day's routine. However, in 1973 when Joseph and Laurence were young Mary had to forego a promotion in a Nakuru Barclays Branch. She was not ready to leave her husband who

was at the time lecturing at the University of Nairobi and take up the position of Manager. At that time, there were no other universities in Kenya apart from the University of Nairobi. Motherhood was more important to her than career advancement.

Joseph the eldest boy went to St. Mary's and then Strathmore School. He then joined Hillcrest for his A Levels before proceeding to West Ontario in Canada for his Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Economics. He studied his Masters in Business Administration in the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom. He now manages the Makini college founded by his parents. Laurence went to St. Mary's School, then Strathmore School for secondary education. From Strathmore School, he proceeded to Deanclose University in Britain. He later on joined Manchester University for a Masters degree in Mechanical Engineering. After his studies, he worked for British American Tobacco (BAT).

Claire Niala, the only daughter of the family and whom Dr. Okelo used to call the heartbeat of the family admires the resilience of her mother. She says she hated school. Born in different times, mother and daughter seem to have embraced different aspects of life. Traveling most of the time to many distant lands, Niala found life wide open. She had the rare opportunity of encountering people from all walks of life. It will be fair to say she luckily escaped the miseries that the African child goes through. A typical African child is born in disgusting poverty. She goes to school in rags and dreams to become a doctor some day. She hopes that when she becomes a doctor she will get a lot of money and help her parents out of the mess. But her dreams are cut short when she drops out of school because of hunger, and because of tuition fees. Like Claire, a few African girls have ever had such chances.

Claire went to Loreto Msongari, then Green Acres for secondary education. She went to Hillcrest for her A Levels. She then joined Marlborough College in Britain where she specialized in psychology. Marlborough College is where Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cambridge studied. Her rise to royalty is still fresh in the minds of those who watched the wedding on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2011. The wedding was at Westminster Abbey. Because of technology, the whole world had a glimpse of that magnificent spectacle. The royal wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton was one of its kind. England came to a standstill and watched in admiration what it meant to be royal. Down the annals of history, it will live to be the greatest wedding in the world. The fact that Claire Niala shared the same tutors and facilities with Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cambridge proves the limitless efforts the Okelo's put in place to guarantee their children best lives. When she joined Sheffield University where her father studied his PhD, she changed course and pursued paediatrics. Claire holds a PhD in Paediatrics and currently runs a hospital in the Makini Middle School.

Despite Mary's busy schedule, she managed to bring up children who excelled academically and socially. Joseph was born in 1969 when Mary and her husband were living in London. The white baby-sitter, Julie, whom they hired to take care of Joseph as they worked hard to succeed in their studies was entitled to a very lucrative salary. Julie earned the equivalent of the stipend that Mary was being paid. Being a banker herself, she managed to ensure the family still remained stable even in the face of financial tempests.

The coming of children means that one must forego many pleasurable things in life. Many rich people lose their children the moment they surrender them to house girls and house boys. Mary never took chances with her children. Dr. Okelo was close to them till his last day on earth. Mary recalls the countless trips he made to Zanzibar, Belgium, the entire Europe and many other places in the world. He was mostly in the company of Mary and Claire Niala. Exposure to the world is in itself a lasting lesson. Seeing the world opens a person's worldview. So as the Okelo's took their children across the world, they were opening the future to them. It was a metaphorical way of saying the world is wide enough to accommodate any noble cause; the world is high enough to sustain any restless ambition. The travels also showed the Okelos that the best things in life are accessible no matter how distant they may seem to be lying.

Mary will remember Dr. Arungu Olende for as long as she lives. They lived together in the William Good Enough House, the halls of residence for post-graduate students. It is Olende who introduced her to Dr. Okelo who was then pursuing his doctoral studies. As if it was destined to be, the relationship picked up from day one. She lived to always call him the first class man. To her, he is the best choice she ever made in her life. He was a man who was crowned by sophistication after sophistication.

The trophies that Mary and Okelo won on the dancing floors demonstrate their compatibility. Okelo being a man who grew up in Nyakach where he used to participate in local dances impressed Mary. Joy Ochola, the administrator of Makini Lower School says she has never before in her life seen such excellent dancers as Mary and Okelo. Having something in common makes courtship sail to marriage just like a motorboat sails from the deep sea to the shore. Before



meeting Okelo, it is difficult to tell whom Mary admired or loved in her home Nambale, in Makerere, and even in London. Her siblings only recall that she was forthright. Yet love is like the ocean...so mysteriously unfathomable. To some people, memories of love do open wounds that better remain hidden. But there comes a love that surpasses all the memorable moments; a love that buries all the horrible experiences that one ever encountered.

Okelo's father, Mzee Odiko kept telling the villagers of Nyakach that his son married from a royal family. Mary herself says she is descended from the Bafofoyo, a subclan that has royal blood and destined to lead the Samia clan. This was not an illusion since Mary and her siblings established themselves as true princes and princesses. They made it into different influential positions in the country and even beyond.

Her wedding in 1968 in London was attended by the then Kenyan High Commissioner to Britain Dr. Josephat Karanja. Her brother Hannington Ochwada was the one who handed Mary to Okelo. It had began in the Williams Good Enough House. When citizens of a country meet far away, the bond of nationhood is quite strong. Mary married at the ideal age of twenty four. At the time, she had already distinguished herself from many of her agemates and far many women born and bred in Kenya. Weddings are some of the greatest encounters in life and she is glad that her sons Joseph and Laurence followed suit and wedded when their time came. The determination to grasp the best fruits of life does and has always bubbled in the blood of the Aworis.

## CHAPTER 8

### A REFORMIST

In the northern part of Kenya, the Turkana live at cross-roads with the Merille from the neighbouring Ethiopia. The Elemi Valley Triangle is infamous for the killings that have taken place for generations and many of the Turkana and the Merille have been affected. This is a region where the girls wield guns as they graze cattle. This brings in mind Achebe's story, "Girls at War". In most cases, women are victims of war. But when it comes to a time when girls are on the forefront of the battle, people realize that it is not a light matter. The women in Turkana know little about the fashions that trouble modern women in other regions of the country. Most of them wrap their waists with pieces of clothing and leave their bosoms and chests open. Far away in Narok, the Maasai girls live in the wild. Until recently, many of them knew little about education. The place they live in is hostile. The lions from the Maasai Mara roar in the bushes outside the *manyattas*. Leopards hover around the homesteads every hour.

Back in Nambale, where Mary was born, women labour to put food on the table. They work tirelessly on other people's farms to get a coin for maize meal. Some girls have to leave school early enough to go and dig. Circumstances hinder many people from achieving their goals. Yet there are those who were born in the best of times, in the best of places, in the best of families... Mary is such a person. Indeed she worked with determination and diligence to get in the elevated position where she sits today, but it is an indisputable fact that the political privilege that her family shielded during her childhood propelled her high above women without a family name.

The children of clergymen in the early days of independence stand out in the society because of the chances that they were exposed to. Clergymen and teachers were the first people to experience the sweetness of success in the postcolonial nations. This explains why Mary rejected the very first job that she was offered in London. She was brought up in the missions where life was favourable.

Having worked in the prisons, Mary aimed at reforming every situation she encountered and perceived to be out of order. While she was working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1967 as an assistant secretary for six months, Barclays Bank advertised vacancies for management trainees. She applied and she was offered a chance. The chance that Barclays offered Mary was her gateway to her success. The management trainees were sent to London Bankers Institute. When she returned to Kenya in 1969, a time when Joseph was already a year old, she worked at Pioneer House Barclays Branch in Nairobi. Later she moved to Kenyatta Avenue Barclays Branch, Market Branch, and finally at the Westlands Branch.

In the banking sector, Mary's heart cried for women who were in most cases perceived to be capable of becoming clerks and cashiers and nothing more. She was the only woman in the management and as soon as she began working at Pioneer House Branch, she initiated a Barclays Bank Women Association. Her vision was to mentor women within all the branches in their careers. She sensitized them to pursue further studies and aim at becoming managers. She advised them not to remain stagnant in the positions of clerks and cashiers but to be progressive. The efforts that she put in the association brought her closer to the situations of women in the

banking sector in Kenya and made her pursue even a higher goal of having policies changed because initially women were discriminated. No woman could access credit from any bank in Kenya without the authorizing signature of her husband or father. This is a fight that Mary spearheaded in the bank until finally she had the policies changed.

Michael Wall and Peggy Snaida from Wall Street in New York embodied Mary's vision on the plight of women in the financial world. Mary met these women in Mexico during a United Nations Women Conference in 1975. The agenda of the conference was to establish ways of economically developing women in the world. The two women who spoke in the conference were thereafter to tour different nations and establish women's status in regard to access of capital and property ownership. Mary befriended them and when she left Mexico; her agenda was to propel her Barclays Women Association to another level. She submitted her report to the management of the bank when she returned to Kenya. During the women association, she sensitized them on the need to fight against any form of gender discrimination and marginalization.

Michael Wall and Peggy Snaida finally visited Kenya in 1976 and Mary updated them on the economic crisis of women in the region. The two women were emissaries of black women financial empowerment. They had championed for the same in Latin America in the sixties and the women's financial situation had greatly improved. Through Mary, Kenya became their major target in their mission in Africa. In 1978 Wall and Snaida sponsored by World Bank organized the Amsterdam Conference for women from Latin America, India, and Africa. Mary

attended the conference which focused on sensitizing women to form financial organizations so as to liberate themselves from economical slavery. The Amsterdam conference was a defining moment to Mary Okelo. She realized that changing policies was helpful to a great extent, and financial organizations reached the heart of the problem in an attempt to liberate women from economical slavery.

Day and night she dreamt of a better lifestyle for the women in Nairobi and the entire Kenya. She remembered what her parents told her and those words came back as if they were speaking them in a divine voice: "You can do anything; you can achieve anything great in this world. God has given you dominion over everything." She felt like a woman in labour for something great was about to be born. The inspiration she had acquired at the conference was still burning in her soul. She decided to speak this to her sister Christine Hayanga who was then working with the Food Agricultural Organization (FAO) which is mandated to address food security in the world through regional states. Christine who is an accomplished lawyer was involved in availing of credit to women in Agriculture. Together they agonized on how they could come up with an organization to help women improve their living standards through access of finance and ownership of property.

Mary's encounter with women from India and Latin America revolutionized her worldview in the financial affairs of African women on the continent. On her desk on Harambee Avenue, she laid down a plan for a national organization. She put into place the legal aspects that her sister

Christine had suggested to her. She thought of all the possible ways of soliciting funds for the organization.

On her desk as the senior bank manager at the Barclays Bank Harambee Avenue in 1981, everything became clear. She drafted letters inviting women from different professions. In their meeting, she spoke to them on the need for an organization. The women from banking, law, and in the education sector joined hands and worked for the success of the initiated organization. They set up the objectives of the organization and the major one was to avail credit and other non-financial services to the largest number of women entrepreneurs. The women decided to found a financial trust which they called Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWFT). The trust which was registered in 1982 as a no-profit organization focused on transforming the economic and social lives of women in the country. In the same year, Mary won the Barclays customer service award and this greatly boosted her confidence in the direction of establishing a financial organization for women. At that time, she was also the editor of the bank's staff magazine, a platform she used to sell her ideals.

In the infancy stages of KWFT, Susan Sonye who was then in FORD FOUNDATION stepped in and gave the trust a great boost by approving a funding proposal which according to Mary would be termed below expected standards in the financial world today. Sonye encouraged the women to proceed with their noble ambition in transforming women's lives in the country. FORD was the first funder of the trust and with that capital; the one hundred founder members contributed

two thousand shillings each. Other women were mobilized to become members by contributing money according to their abilities.

KWFT is currently the leading micro-finance exclusively for women in Kenya. The micro-finance was built on the belief that women can transform their lives and that of their families. Mary was the first chairperson of the trust. She still worked with Barclays Bank and only volunteered her time for the trust. She was very determined to see the trust grow and therefore she liaised and corresponded with donors and raised funds which helped make it stable. Because she was very much experienced in the banking world, she helped in the formulation of policies and operational procedures.

The year that Mary, together with other elite women in Kenya, registered Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWFT) is the year that the second President of Kenya Daniel Toroitich arap Moi was jerked into action by the infamous 1982 Air Force coup attempt. When the name Hezekiah Ochuka is mentioned among military officers, there follows a chilling silence. Hezekiah Ochuka can as well be mentioned along Samuel Doe of Liberia who was tortured to death by forces loyal to Charles Taylor. These names carry with them blood and terror. The end of Mobutu Sese Seko too, after an era of suppression in Zaire, is not to be left behind. It is the story of the post-colony when innumerable disappointments caused by greed and malice blossomed. So the year 1982 saw the change of tact in the administrative strategies of Moi. The people that died on the Sunday night of August 1982 were many, twelve were hanged in the course of time, nine hundred were jailed, and the Air Force was disbanded. But as much as the men were slaughtering

one another savagely and hungering for political power, the women were forming organizations to better the society. The person behind the wheel of success in this organization was Mary Okelo. She was looking in the future where her country was supposed to go.

The period between 1982 and 1985 saw tremendous efforts by Mary to set up functional credit schemes for women. Together with the founder members, Mary came up with Biashara Lending Scheme (BLS). This scheme was entitled to lend credit of up to a maximum of fifty thousand Kenya shillings to individual women in registered groups that focused on business development. The credit was to be repayable in a period of four years. Then the Uaminifu Lending Scheme (ULS) was formed. This scheme gave priority to groups dealing with manufacturing business and innovative ventures with the capacity to create employment. The ULS lent money to groups which in turn lent it to individuals.

With the success of BLS and ULS, Mary thought of a way of lending money to women in business but not in any group. This led to the formation of Barclays Bank of Kenya Credit Line Scheme (CLS). She persuaded Barclays to enter a program with KWFT so as to strengthen the trust's operations. In CLS, the bank provided credit, the trust offered management skills, training of women entrepreneurs, and other technical services. The individual women in businesses were required to present their trade licenses and show that their businesses are registered. With the support of Barclays Bank, Mary trained women through workshops on the need to access finances through the women's organization. She also taught them on how to make profit and



progress economically. She drew largely from the experiences that women from Latin America and India narrated during the Amsterdam Conference.

In 1985, the Women's World Banking (WWB) based in New York approached Barclays Bank and requested it to second a proposal to have Mary as the WWB region of Africa representative. This was great news to her because the territory of her influence in the lives of women was then expanded. In the capacity of WWB African Representative, Mary travelled extensively in African countries training women and setting up women financial institutions similar to KWFT. During her tenure countries such as Uganda, Zimbabwe, Mali, and Zambia benefited from her efforts when she oversaw the establishment of micro-finances for women. Through inspired trainings, she managed to make the women own the organizations she established. She explained to the women how such an organization had benefited women in Kenya. In the midst of her dedication in African nations, her dear brother Professor Nelson Awori passed on in 1986. She was very devastated. When she returned to New York after the burial, she was reenergized to leave a legacy in banking in the very way that her brother had done in the field of surgery.

While at the WWB, Mary did not forsake KWFT, on the contrary she used the opportunity to establish a program between WWB and KWFT. Apart from Barclays, WWB became a donor of the trust. Makini School was still in its young stage and it had presented seven pupils for KCPE.

Towards the end of 1986, the African Development Bank (ADB) approached Mary and requested her to take up a position as the Vice President of the bank. This position required the endorsement of the government. At that time, Kenya was undergoing a traumatic political turmoil. Many people who were implicated in the 1982 Air Force coup attempt were still under detention. The mastermind of the coup, Hezekiah Ochuka was hanged in 1987. The government, which in every sense meant Daniel Moi the President, harboured a lot of mistrust towards some communities. Mary was frustrated through and through until she realized that the government was determined to obstruct her from the position. Tribes were determinant factors in the dealings of the government at that. Recalling that particular incident, Mary said: "Unfortunately, I was not in the right political tribe." The President assumed that Mary came from the Luo tribe because her surname was Okelo. The colonialists had established a culture of tribal politics when they grouped Kenyans into ethnic provinces. This culture was nurtured by the founding President Jomo Kenyatta, and Moi followed suit. One could easily conclude that Moi had vowed to suppress in the worst manner possible the Luo, the Luhya and other tribes that were against him.

The African Development Bank was determined to take Mary into their establishment at all costs. The management of the bank decided to change the position of Vice President to Senior Advisor to the President. This position did not require the endorsement of the President nor any other government official. Furthermore, the position had far better advantages than that of the Vice President of the bank. The appointment to that position in 1987 saw Mary relocate to Abidjan in Cote d'Ivoire. In Abidjan, she represented the president of the bank and was in charge of formulating development policies. Early in 1987, the initiatives that called for her attention in the bank were majorly the private sector in banking, environment and women development.

Having noticed the significant contribution of Mary in the WWB as African Regional Representative, ADB was certain that her potential could be instrumental in propelling it to a better level of service delivery in the Africa. The bank needed a visionary and innovative person whose ideas are practical.

In her Abidjan experience, Mary remembers the support of the current President of Liberia Her Excellency James Ali. At that time she was faced with developing policies for three initiatives in the bank: the private sector and Non-Governmental Organizations; environment and development; women and development. She however dedicated most of her strength to the development of policies for women in ADB. Since there were no gender policies in regard to women development in Abidjan, Mary travelled in ADB member countries in Africa to find out if any country was better off in the matter. As she travelled to those countries, she advised governments on gender mainstreaming in bank projects. The survey she carried out revealed to her that there were no such policies and the ripe time had come for her to make things better. During the survey, she met with James Ali in Nigeria and she was very supportive of the formulation of policies in favour of women in the bank. Mary had earlier met Ali when she was working in Kenya with City Gram.

In 1988, Mary organized a great women's conference in Abidjan which focused on formulation of policies on the development of women in Africa. The conference was sponsored by ADB and it was attended by invited women from all over the continent. The one week conference was very fruitful since the proposals suggested by the participants were forwarded to the board of ADB

and policies were formulated in every country. Mary ensured that those policies were implemented fully in each country. She was always travelling to different nations in Africa to oversee her vision materialize. This success opened yet another international door for her. Enigmatically, her prowess in banking continued flying higher and higher. According to her, the Biblical scriptures were being fulfilled her life. She always meditated on the proverb that says “a man’s gift shall take him before kings.” The gifts that God had deposited in her life were in fruition and they took her to places she never imagined when she was a girl.

At the peak of her service delivery in 1989 at the ADB in Abidjan, the Women’s World Banking offered Mary the position of Vice President with effect from January 1990. She had earlier worked with the global organization as Africa region representative from 1985 to 1987. In the capacity of deputizing for the President, she was tasked with overseeing the global operations of the bank. Most of the time Mary travelled to the capitals of the most developed countries in the world to solicit support for women's economical empowerment. She also corresponded with multilateral donors such as the World Bank and European Union to raise funds for WWB. Apart from this, she was also tasked with the reviewing and recommending changes in the bank’s policies to make them gender sensitive.

Mary recalls that much of the travels all over the globe were necessitated by the need to advise governments on gender mainstreaming. Initially she had crusaded for the same during her tenure as the African representative of WWB. In the position of Vice President her scope of operation

widened. She was always on flight and one time she even wondered if she was a bird or a human being who should walk the long walk of life.

After working for two years with WWB, Mary felt that it was high time for her to retire home and experience the warmth of family. She was also fatigued with endless travels around the world. She actually felt that she was missing something great which she experienced in childhood. She missed children. In 1978, she together with her husband had founded Makini School. A school to her was the best platform for her to inspire children and make them feel excited about knowledge. She wanted a platform to share her life with children who will keep the nation alive when the old people have returned home.

When Mary resigned from WWB at the end of 1991, many of her colleagues and friends never understood what was happening to her. Mary's testimony written by Susan Wakhungu-Githuku in Life Journeys indicates her saying: "People thought that I was either crazy or going through a phase of depression to leave such a high position and opt to work with children. My job was kept open for almost a year, for they thought I would return"(178). Having learnt the art of making money, Mary did not have to continue staying in the offices of the imperialists. She had to return home and try her hand in minting her own money. As much as her passion for children drove her to quit the lucrative job, one can also quickly note that she was determined to create a Makini empire that could surpass the dollars that she was earning at the WWB. Entrepreneurs are normally sharp strategists and in every move that they take is, in the long-run, usually the best.

In her office today, one can hear the bell ringing and children suddenly rushing out to play. This is what gives her joy in life and she vigorously dances with the children every time the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) results are announced. The dances of the Makini School community every year tell the story of success because the school always tops the national examination.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE EDUCATIONIST

Two children from Olympics Primary School in the heart of Kibera slums were offered scholarships at the beginning of the year 2012 to study at Makini School Ngong Road. When they arrived in the school, they amazed at the excellence of the school in terms of facilities. Having lived in the slums all their lives, the school was indeed a wonderland to them. They had never before seen a swimming pool. Where they had been enrolled in class six, they soon found out that there were swimming pools for every section—lower primary, middle school, upper school, and high school. In the classes, the pupils were in for yet another surprise; every classroom accommodated about twenty five pupils only. The space was enough and the air for breathing clean and fresh.

In Kibera, the pupils encountered sewage instead of swimming pools; they were used to crowded classrooms of over eighty pupils in a stream. They had never seen computers, and at Makini they realized computer studies were necessary for their times. Mary's dream before she founded the school together with her husband in 1978 was to enhance a supportive environment for children so that they can realize their potential and become the best they can. In 2008 when the school was celebrating its thirtieth anniversary, the founders looked back in time and appreciated the fact that they had travelled a long journey and they had changed many lives in the academy.

From the city centre, Nairobi, Haile Selassie Road snakes from the Country Bus Station westwards to the roundabout at the junction with Uhuru Highway. Haile Selassie Road is a

memorial for the Ethiopian Emperor of Amharic origin. He was heir to a dynasty that traced its origin to Queen Makeda, known in Abrahamic tradition as Queen Sheba who had an association with King Solomon. Such naming of Kenyan highways was very significant in the wiping away of the colonial landmarks. With the coming of independence, names such as King George's Highway, Queen Elizabeth Avenue, and London Street disappeared. Haile Selassie Road passes the baton Ngong Road. Ngong Road snakes all the way to Ngong Town which lies beneath the Ngong Hills. Before one reaches Dagoreti Corner Shopping Centre which is about fifteen kilometres from the Haile Selassie/Uhuru Highway roundabout, Makindu Road branches eastwards leading to Riara Road. A few metres from the Makindu/Riara road junction stand Makini School, Ngong Road. The institution is a place where Mary Okelo has never missed to be on the day of national KCPE results announcement. Her joy of the year is normally realized on that day when the children from her school emerge the top in academics in the country.

Makini School welcomes long sleek cars every morning. Many parents who have established themselves financially find it the best thing to ensure their children access quality education offered in the school. The children are also taken across the world for international tours. Their parents cater for all the expenses. The expansive campus welcomes the children of the people who matter in Kenyan corporate world as well as those who dominate Kenyan politics. The school is proud for the fact that over 10% of the members of parliament have their children schooling there. Some of the parliamentarians whose children have gone through the school include Moses Wetangula, James Orengo, Charity Ngilu, Francis Nyenze, Bishop Margaret Wanjiru, Gitobu Imanyara, Kalonzo Musyoka, Laiboni M'mukinda, and Linah Kilimo. Other public figures whose children have gone through the school include Wallah bin Wallah, a



famous author of Swahili books; Dr. Gibson Kamau Kuria, a leading human rights activist, and the Managing Director Nation Media, Cerylle Nabutola.

The year that Kenyatta died was very instrumental to Mary and her husband Dr. Okelo. In a colonial bungalow in Riara, a great school was born. They called the school Riara Gardens. The kindergarten was then headed by Mrs. Eunice Wangai who took care of eight pupils. Riara gardens acquired a new name in 1981 and became Makini School. That was the time that Mary and her husband began the construction of phase 1 of the upper school. The first KCPE candidates were seven and they sat for the exams in 1985 and the school emerged number eight nationwide. By the time the school celebrated its tenth anniversary on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1988, it was a fully fledged primary school. In 1991, Makini School set the pace by being the first primary school in Kenya to introduce the study of computers.

Mary remembers that when she visited the minister for education at that time and explained to him the intention of the school to begin computer studies the minister remarked that computers were a luxury. Her intention was to persuade the minister to advocate for reduction of tax on computers which was very high at the time. At that time she was working with Women's World Banking in the capacity of Vice President of the bank based in New York. At the minister's remark, Mary was shocked at the static and stagnant mentality that dominated the education sector in Kenya. She was certain the world was headed to a computer era, but the custodians of education could not see beyond the obvious. She went ahead and acquired the machines at a very high cost.

It is in 1992 when Mary became fully installed in the school after resigning from her job as the Vice President, Women's World Banking. As a child, she used to be the accountant of the offering that her father received from the church as the clergyman. This was her earliest training in accountability and transparency. The church offering is taken as sacred, and that means no child can dare steal it because he/she is taught that the money belongs to God who discerns people's intentions even before they are conceived in the mind. Furthermore, it is in the Sunday school that Mary learnt that all people were created equal before God. This enabled her to be gender sensitive and to fight for the welfare of women in the banking world. In an interview with the Financial Post of 25<sup>th</sup> August 2011, Mary remarked that "women come from far, far away." This loaded statement shows that her travels around the world has made her well acquainted with the suffering that women in the world go through because of discriminative policies. In a country like Kenya, it is true women come from far away; the challenges that they encounter along their journey are sometimes very disheartening.

When the school began, Mary was busy working as the senior bank manager of Barclays, Westlands Branch. Dr. Okelo had ventured into consultancy after lecturing for some time at the University of Nairobi. At the time, very few people thought of private schools. Education had not really developed roots in the nation and very few girls had seen classrooms at that time. The society took girls for a source of income, especially in the remote areas. They would be married off as soon as possible and twelve heads of cattle could be drawn from a suitor. Among the Samia, women remained homeless. They couldn't call their parents' home their home because

members of the community constantly reminded them that they were strangers; they were reminded that they were sojourners and exiles. The reminder always came in the question of when and where they were going to be married.

Mary was lucky to have been born of enlightened parents who had been influenced by the mission in a great way. At school, she learnt of the new ways of life. From childhood, she chose to be a woman who would make a difference and she embraced education and found in it a great hope. She gave her life to school life. The teachers in the schools she attended, particularly Ms Hardison when she was at Alliance Girls, became her role models and advisers. Looking at her today in her office in Makini School, there is every reason to believe that she indeed changed the world, and the world too changed her. The world can be small, it can also be big. Her ideas have brought about a great difference in everything that she has touched. It is her passion for children that led her to study a postgraduate diploma in Early Childhood Education at Froebel College, Dublin in Ireland. Her desire has always been to make an impact in the lives of young children.

Makini presupposes the care needed in fostering a society that will embrace all humanity. Understanding the fragility of the country that had just emerged from crimes against humanity committed during the reign of the colonialist, the founders of the academy chose to carefully nurture young brains in the school and make them know that the world is endless. Being one of the very first private schools in Kenya, it was a way of breaking loose from the norm. This was indeed a vision of having independent minds in the country that had unfortunately been submerged into the greed and malice of the political leaders who had initially been taken for the

saviours of Africans after the departure of colonial oppressors. With time, many realized that the reverberations of oppression were louder than before.

Makini, a Swahili word which whispers to everyone the need for rapt attention, doing it with utmost keenness, painstakingly, delicately, is a silent prayer for the school to tread the unknown path of academic excellence with confidence to a better future. The best leadership provided by Mary in the school has seen it turn into a great empire of dissemination of knowledge to young people whose parents have means and ways. The school management ensures that children do not just concentrate on studies and forget their talents in co-curricular activities. The vision to churn out all round individuals has seen the school's alumni excel in different ways in life. One finds it amazing to note how learners in the school have performed greatly in sports. In 1991 Muthoni Mbugua represented Kenya in the Junior Tennis in All Africa Games in Cairo; in 1997 the junior group represented the school in International Ringo Championships in Poland; in 2003 Justus Gogi came fourteenth in African motocross in Namibia. These kinds of performances remain memorable in the children's lives. Having been given an opportunity to exploit their talents to the maximum in crucial developmental stages of life, these children grow up believing in themselves; they grow up into adults who will stretch life to its breaking point and finally grasp the best that the universe can offer.

The pupils and students also travel across the world in educational trips. In 2004, they were taken to South Africa and France; in 2005 the primary section toured Egypt and Italy while the secondary students went to Emirates; in 2006, the primary and secondary students toured

Thailand; and in 2007 they went to Malaysia. This exposure has a great impact on children and Mary believes that when they grow up they understand that the world is accessible. Through Mary's travels across the world, she learnt that the ideas that developed Rome can develop Kenya. Therefore taking the children and teachers from her school to different nations eventually works out to bring out influential citizens. Egypt which is surrounded with puzzles of the ancient kingdom that saw the erection of pyramids stood before the eyes of the primary pupils in 2005. This in a very special way fulfilled the commission of the Geneva Child Rights Declaration of 1949 that humanity has the obligation to give the best to the child. Noting the fact that such minds are very adventurers, exposure to world wonders powerfully propels their minds beyond imaginable heights of thought, creativity, and innovation.

The journey to a better country calls for well equipped people who are educated, sober, and determined to make a difference. This is the journey that Dr. Okelo and his dear wife Mary embarked on in 1978. The colonial bungalow in which Dr. Okelo and Mary began Makini Schools carried some overtones of imperialism. The strangers who had dwelt in it might have forgotten a piece of cloth or a copy of the colonial times newspaper. Of course, at that time, many Kenyans wished never to recall the violations of their humanity as they had experienced in the colony. So learning in such a house was very symbolic—it represented a new struggle under the umbrella of the former imperial power. But this was not meant in any way to bring back such crimes as were committed during that Dark Age in Kenya. The school was begun purposely to enlighten the African child, and to make them understand that beneath the skin, all humans are the same. With education, the Africans were to emerge confident to face the challenges of the world anywhere under the sun.

Having been established in an area where many whites still lived even after independence, the school also provided an opportunity for the African children to study with children from other races. And this indeed equipped those who schooled in Makini with the universality of the human nature. When the school introduced the International Baccalaureate (IB) course in 1998, many students from different countries abroad joined and brought with them an international flavour. Geneva vetted the school and gave it a charter to offer the course. Makini School was second to St. Mary's School, Nairobi, to offer the course. However, Mary does not consider St. Mary's School a Private School because it is sponsored by the Vatican. All these efforts demonstrate a manager who is always willing to implement any new beneficial idea at every given opportunity. This agility and aptness of Mary has distinguished the school in every aspect ranging from management to exquisite performance in the country.

In the neighbourhood of Makini Schools, the posh apartments stand beckoning. Maybe such a fortunate surrounding might have significantly contributed to the success of Mary. Having carved a niche in the Kenyan map of academic prowess, challenges such as the mushrooming of private schools in the region posed no threat whatsoever. Even the establishment of the Riarra Group of Schools in the vicinity could not shake a leaf on the trees at Makini. Knowing how to handle the people is a plus on the school management. Joseph, who Mary discovered in his childhood that he was very good with people and encouraged him to pursue courses that led him to human resource management, is the one who handles most of the issues affecting the staff and the parents. Though the neighbouring school Riarra Group of Schools is well developed, it is

condemned for poor management characterized by harassment of staff. Unlike Makini School, Riara School records an overwhelming number of teaching staff send off.

Ms Joy Ochola believes that the input of parents to the growth of a school is vital. According to her, many private schools fear Parents Teachers Associations, but Makini was the first private school in Kenya to form one in 1989. This association gave parents an avenue to contribute to the management of the school. It also ensured that teachers and other staff members in the school were well taken care of by the school management. The PTA also ensured that the school embraced the national face in terms of enrollment of staff. It went further even to recruit staff from countries abroad. Ms. Joy Ochola who hails from South Wales is in the management of the lower school; Major (Rtd) Ausie Walker from New York in USA was the first Parents teachers Association (PTA) which was registered in 1989; Dr Richard Wilding from the US was the school's principal from 1996 to 1997 and he was succeeded by Mr. Simon Scot from Spain.

Ms Joy Ochola who has the history of the Makini Schools at her finger tips studied at Cardiff University which was then a constituent college of the then University of Wales, and completed her degree in French and English in the mid 1960s. She taught in Britain before moving to Kenya after she got married to Ochola, a close friend of the Okelo's. Ochola was also studying in the United Kingdom when he met Joy. For many years Joy taught at State House Girls, formally Delamere Secondary School and afterwards Delamere Girls after the boys were moved to the current day Upper Hill School, even before African girls were admitted in the school. She witnessed the influx of Indian girls in the school in 1972 when Idi Amin Dada expelled Indians

from Uganda. Having taught for many years, her insight on education matters in the school is normally taken seriously.

Joy Ochola's knowledge of the Makini Schools is amazing. She is confident that the academic excellence in the school was reached as a result of commitment by the staff to delivering the best. She also argues that the teachers employed in the school are highly qualified and competent. Furthermore, the good working conditions for the members of staff contribute to the enviable performance. She was very instrumental in the introduction of IB which put the school on the international map as it took position one in Kiswali performance worldwide in 2001 and 2002.

The Makini School secondary has not been in the limelight compared to its primary counterpart. Despite the availability of the best resources in the premises, the senior school has remained silent. In Kenya, there's normally an interesting exchange of learners transiting to secondary school: the best students in primary come largely from private schools and they join the best public secondary schools while the worst students largely from public schools miss chances in public secondary schools and end up seeking opportunities in private schools. Teachers in private schools watch this with amazement akin to that of tourists who watch in wonder the crossing of the wild beast at Maasai Mara National Park.



Makini School marked its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1998. That year, Dr. Okelo was quite vibrant and conspicuous in the occasion. Big personalities had gathered at the Makini Middle School grounds which is a few metres off Ngong Road. They were looking back to 1978 when the school was born and thanking God for guiding them all through. The children were performing poems, skits, dances, and songs before their parents and the distinguished guests. The Information, Communications and Technology department too were showcasing their prowess in incorporating learning with the technology. The ICT team turned on the television and at that moment, the breaking news shocked everybody. The whole function was marred by the terrorist attack on the American Embassy in the city.

The entire Makini School community that had attended the ceremony switched their attention to the breaking news. Everyone no longer concentrated on the victories of the school over the years. The heartrending tragedy suddenly took precedence of all the affairs of the nation. The panic that wrecked the city affected even the children who were ready to showcase their talents to the special guests of the day. And for whatever reason the menace was conceived and orchestrated, it was condemned in the strongest possible terms. That time Mary couldn't help but shed tears for the big loss that Kenya had incurred.

Following the unpreparedness of the Kenyan disaster management team and magnitude of the bombing, the Israelite rescue team arrived. With the sophisticated equipment and expertise, they helped a great deal to salvage the lives that were trapped in the rubble. About five hundred people died and thousands were injured. Nairobi city was a place of confusion and sorrow. The

sirens deafened people's ears as the victims of the terror attack were rushed to hospital. Osama bin Laden, who was killed in 2011 by the United States army after being hunted for nearly fifteen years, claimed that he was the mastermind of the terror attack. He later on bombed the Pentagon, the World Trade Centre, and even attempted an attack on the White House in 2001.

In the year 2000 the Columbia Business School did a case study on success story of the school for their Master of Business Administration program. The school has also won the Africa Enterprise Award for Entrepreneurship, an award that recognizes the high quality of education offered in the school. Furthermore, Makini stood tall as the only educational institution in Top 100 Mid-Sized Companies in Kenya in the 2008 to 2010 awards. For this gigantic stride in society, Honoree International in 1999 awarded Mary Okelo the Who's Who of Professional and Business Women Award for significant career achievement and contribution to society. Nazarene University too honoured Mary with an honorary doctorate on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2011. The Vice chancellor of the university Professor Leah Manangu stated to her that she was being honoured with the Doctor of Letters for her distinguished service to the community.

It is true Mary was shocked when Dr. Okelo suddenly died. However, sorrow did not take the best of her. Her steady strides as she walks to her office at Makini Schools exude the confidence of the makers of a nation. The motto of Kenya Women Finance Trust—Banking on Women—indeed declare her dream come into fruition in her time. Her struggle through the course to make the lives of women better is history in itself. Her life gives a glimpse into the country Kenya. Kenya, a country where being a woman is not the worst limitation, but the bankruptcy of the

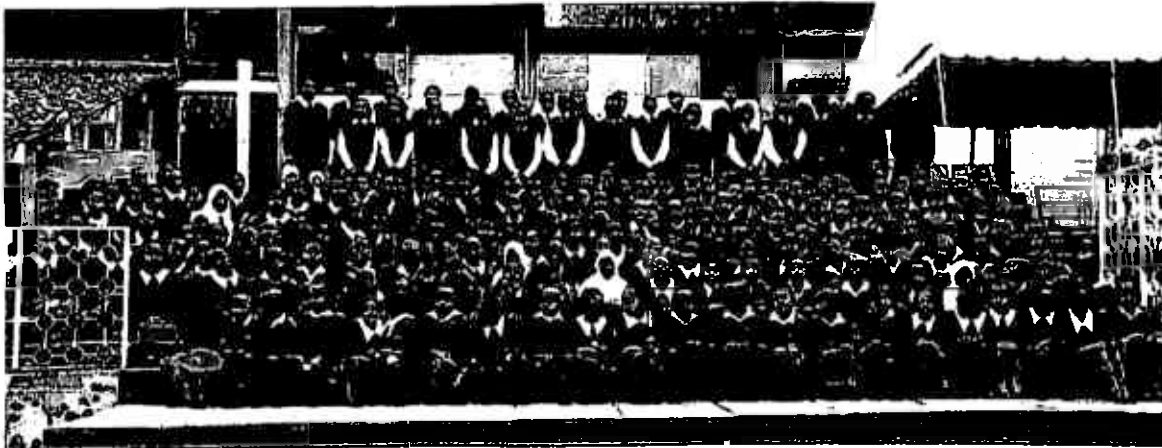
fighting spirit. Her fight against the segregation of women formulated by gender biased individuals is politics in itself. Her success in life is nothing but metaphysics. And how she has celebrated every moment of life is music to the soul.

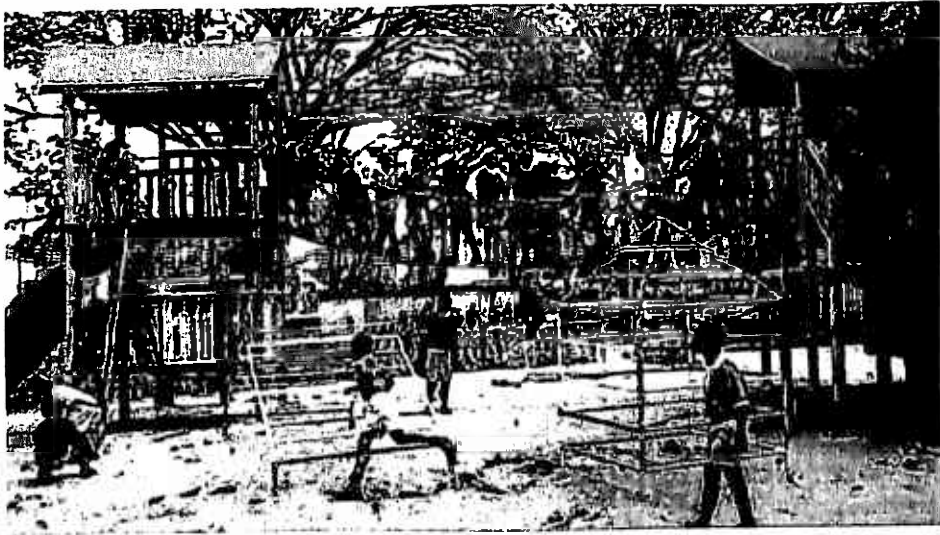
Today as Mary plans to relocate to Makini School in Kibos near Kisumu, she knows that she will hear the bell ringing and the children playing until the very end of her life. And when she shall be reunited with her soul-mate Dr Pious Alois Okelo who lies silent in their homestead in Kibos, children from all the Makini Schools will come to their beloved grandma with countless flowers in appreciation for her dedication in transforming their lives.

## Makini Schools Kenya



The Upper School sloping down to Kirichwa River.







**Joseph, the eldest son of Mary with children at Makini School, Kibos**



**Mary with the prefects' body of Makini School, Kibos**

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