

**A YOUTHFUL SPIRIT FOR ALL TIMES:  
A BIOGRAPHY OF JULIA AUMA OJIAMBO**

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## DECLARATION

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## DEDICATION

To my loving mum, Tabitha Kerubo Were –  
You who has been the model and essence of womanhood,  
You who would give anything to see me go far in life.

To the men in my life:

Dad, Clement Were

And

My dearest brothers Dan Were and Peter Sigadah–  
You who believe that the girl child has great potential.

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# CONTENTS

Dedication .....	i
Acknowledgments.....	ii
Abstract .....	v
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Introduction.....	1
1.1 Overview.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	5
1.3 Objectives of the Study.....	6
1.4 Hypothesis.....	7
1.5 Justification .....	7
1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study .....	8
1.6 Literature Review.....	9
1.7 Theoretical Framework .....	16
1.8 Research Methodology .....	18
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> .....	<b>22</b>
A Youthful Spirit for all Times.....	22
Prologue .....	22
First Impressions.....	22
<b>PART ONE</b> .....	<b>27</b>
Childhood.....	27
1. Her Father's Heart .....	27

2. Early Influences .....	34
3. Daughter of Nature .....	42
4. Sipping from the Cup of Knowledge .....	48
5. In the Face of War.....	60
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> .....	68
<b>PART TWO</b> .....	68
Higher Education and Work Experience .....	68
1. The Making of a Nutritionist .....	68
2. Pioneering Development.....	99
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> .....	103
<b>PART THREE</b> .....	103
Life In Politics.....	103
1. The First Plunge into Politics.....	103
1. A Legislator with A Difference .....	131
2. A Crusader for Affirmative Action.....	150
3. Life After Parliament .....	173
Epilogue .....	181
The Spirit of an Eagle .....	181
Conclusion .....	184
Works Cited .....	185

## ABSTRACT

The efforts put in place, both conscious and unconscious by women in public spaces have contributed to a large extent in the achievement of the national development goals. Be it in policy making, income generation, poverty alleviation, eliminating illiteracy or empowerment of the masses, these women have been at the forefront of various campaigns aimed at improving the well-being of their target groups, whose results can be verified by valid and verifiable statistics. Among these women are writers, educators, politicians, entrepreneurs, managers, medical personnel, entertainers, pastors and scientists, just to mention but a few. This is to say that the influence of women has and still is being felt in all domains of the social arena, which is part of a long struggle to raise the status of all people in the society. However, even with the visible changes that these women have effected in the Kenyan society, most of their efforts have not been acknowledged or well documented, thus the existing debate about the inability of women to handle matters of power as well as men. This study focuses on Julia Auma Ojiambo, whose participation in the political agenda has made her a considerably conspicuous person in the Kenyan public space. The focus of the study has been to write a biography of Julia's life so as present aspects of her life that have contributed to what and who she is today. Her journey to self-actualization, the challenges she has had to overcome, and the impact of her achievements to the development and political agendas of Kenyan society are some of the salient issues that have been captured by this study. The study was carried out in her childhood home area, her current constituency and various social arenas she navigates in. I collected data through interviews, observations and review of documents. I then wrote a biography to capture important milestones in her life.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 OVERVIEW

Recently, studies on gender have gained popularity due to a growing interest in social histories. Initially assumed to belong to history departments, social history was not given too much consideration in literary studies, but it is now considered a multi-disciplinary area. Of interest to this study is the branch of social history known as women's history that seeks to examine the role played by women in history and how historical events have influenced these women both individually. Special emphasis has been laid on women because they have been previously marginalized and culturally muted, and the effects of this physical, historical and textual violence continue to affect them up to now, so that they continue to be viewed as incapable of exercising rational thought in positions of power and their contributions to the historical moments like struggle for independence continues to be ignored, yet it is now a known fact that women influence the personalities of very many people, starting with their children, to their fellow women and even husbands, sons and fathers, then their friends and other people they come into contact with, both locally and internationally.

The Millennium Development Goals and The Kenya Vision 2030 recognize the importance of women empowerment, especially since the recent population survey carried out in Kenya indicates that women are still the majority in numbers. This therefore signals that an increase in women participation in policy making and national labour industry will result in national development, yet very few women are embracing this opportunity, as indicated by the inadequate



number of women stepping up to contest for the third parliamentary seats suggested to be set aside for women.

Currently in Kenya there has been an ideological shift that has witnessed a change in how women are perceived in this society, particularly with regard to their participation in social and economic growth and developmental matters. Thus both men and women are now learning to appreciate the role of women in the society, evident in the decrease in resistance towards the adoption of the third women policy in all government institutions and parastatals. Thus the Kenyan public space has a wide variety of women whose influence has been felt specifically through their role in the development in Kenya's history. Locally, in Kenya, examples are Wambui Otieno, once a freedom fighter; the late Wangari Maathai, whose efforts to conserve the environment particularly the Mau forest earned her a Nobel peace prize; Martha Karua, who has remained firm in her political agenda and is the chairperson Narc-Kenya and a 2012 presidential aspirant; Njoki Ndung'u, well known for her campaign against sex offenders, just to mention but a few.

However, as it will be discovered in this report, many people still do not acknowledge the competence that women have that puts them on the same scale as men, or that the gendered debate against the participation of women in governance is as a result of social and cultural norms of our patriarchal society that have stereotyped women. From the colonial era to date, the history of Kenya(ns) has been shaped by activities of various women, but their contributions have sadly been either omitted or improperly documented, pushing them on the sidelines.

Despite the vigorous efforts of women organizations to give them equal footing, many women still do not recognize the influence or power they have. Many women in public spaces have an immense impact on their publics, thus writing their life stories gives the public a source of inspiration through relating with their social icons' experiences.

Public spaces create forums and agencies for shaping the opinions and philosophies of the masses. They are vantage points from which a single person can influence the thoughts of multitudes of people (Warner 16, 23). This has been severally witnessed during election campaigns, where baseless propagandas have been spread and acted upon regardless their truth factor. It is thus obvious that most people take to heart the actions and words of their social icons as unquestionable truth, and it is therefore sad that this trust is in most cases manipulated for selfish gains. Julia Auma Ojiambo is such a woman in Kenya's political public space. Her life story has the potential to boost other women's self-esteem and instil courage in the masses by foregrounding some of her inspiring experiences as well as her approach to life that has made her a successful academician, politician and a person whose interventions are admirable and have saved many from oppression and ignorance.

Despite the inspiring quality of the life histories of these women in public spaces, very little has been done to enlighten the masses about their lives' journeys, from which the public could borrow a lot. This brings to focus the issue of private and public with reference to public figures. Michael Warner argues that there is a thin line between the terms public and private where public figures are concerned. This is because being in the spotlight makes the public interested in a particular person's life to pry into the most intimate aspects of their lives, therefore distorting

their privacy (22-3). Thus in such instances it is always difficult to ascertain the level of truth and propaganda in the anecdotes that have been created around their character. Since there are a multitude of myths and stereotypes surrounding the public figure's personality, more often than not, doubt is shed on their credibility especially if the person in question is a woman in a patriarchal society.

In such cases therefore, the public focuses on the negative aspects of the social icon's life that are deemed juicy rather than the inspiring qualities and achievements that mark their success in life. From an informal survey that I carried out among ten university of Nairobi students, many are only aware of Julia Ojiambo's Presidential bid which they deem a failure, without necessarily viewing the attempt as a success because she has opened the minds of many to the possibility of a female president. Thus her academic achievements, the success of her researches as implemented at the grass-roots level, or even her other projects aimed at raising the living standards of the poor like the goat-milk projects, or her efforts at empowering women, especially the fact that she is among the founders of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake organization, or that she was a key figure behind the Kenya delegation of women to Beijing that changed the history of Kenya towards a female-sensitive country are details hidden from the cognition of many. This is a problem that this study has tried to address through the writing of this biography.

This study focuses on Julia Ojiambo, documenting her life history into a biography, presenting a holistic image of her life experiences from childhood to date, giving the public a glimpse into her life, from which they can understand her, appreciate her efforts of creating a better Kenya and emulate her Philosophies in life. Julia is: the former MP for Funyula Constituency and the first

woman to contest for a Presidential seat in Kenya, the first female assistant minister in the Kenyan cabinet, the first woman chairperson of the Labour Party of Kenya, a professor in nutrition, the first black female lecturer at the University of Nairobi.

What makes Julia stand out from many other women is the fact that she has served in the two government regimes of presidents Kenyatta and Moi as an elected parliamentarian. She has also lost and won many battles in politics, but she has not given up yet. She is the first woman in Kenya to defeat a man in politics, and the impact of her triumph can be better understood in the context of a highly patriarchal society, at a time when politics and male dominance were highly intertwined especially when she had no political godfathers. Looking into her past gives one the impression of novelty in experiencing something of everything for the first time. This study hence brings Julia Ojiambo into societal recognition by reconstructing her life history from childhood to date, so as to give both the young and old a historical figure that would challenge, inspire and empower them.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Biographies have a profound effect on people, considering their ability to influence how the public learns a lot from someone else's life experiences. In literature specifically, it gives living proof that culture has a direct impact on human life, disapproving the myth that novels are eutopic, thus removed from human reality. Women's role in governance has received mass attention, thus an understanding of what shapes these women's psyche is important in giving policy makers a glimpse of how culture affects the women's participation in the public space, as well as ways in which women's participation in matters central to their well-being can be

enhanced. This will in turn give tentative solutions to operational problems. In addition, the study will give policy makers and economic planners a glimpse into what really happens in the grass-roots, to enable them to equate decision-making with the needs of the people.

Public spaces create forums and agencies for shaping the opinions and philosophies of the masses. They are the vantage points from which a single person can influence the thoughts of multitudes of people. From the colonial era to date, the history of Kenya has been shaped by activities of various women in public spaces, but their contributions have sadly been either omitted or improperly documented in historical records. Despite the inspiring quality of the life histories of these women, very little has been done to enlighten the masses about their about their experiences and philosophies, from which the public could borrow a lot. This study therefore seeks to re-write the history of Julia Oiambo, a Kenyan woman who has been an active participant in the Kenyan public space. This will be achieved by recreating important milestones in her life from birth to date, highlighting her struggles and achievements that have seen her become a fairly popular person in the fields of academics, politics and women's empowerment in the context of the historical development of Kenya. These will then be presented in an artistic manner that will also contribute towards the archiving of life histories in the literary genre.

### **1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To recreate important milestones in Julia Ojiambo's life both public and private from childhood to date into a biography.
2. To highlight the struggles overcome by Julia Ojiambo vis a vis her achievements as a woman in the Kenyan public space.

## 1.4 HYPOTHESIS

1. Apart from Julia's life in politics, very little of her other aspects are known by her public.
2. Julia's life as a public figure has not been easy specifically due to the fact that she is a woman in a patriarchal society.

## 1.5 JUSTIFICATION

There was a need for this study to be carried out now as opposed to a later date because despite the fact that the society is rapidly changing and people in such African countries like Rwanda and Liberia have already understood that women can just be as good enough leaders as their male counterparts, in Kenya, there are still very many hurdles that hinder women from really getting involved in politics. Many of them face economic hurdles, but often their biggest hindrance come from cultural deterrents that make it impossible for women to ascend to political power. A general feeling in many patriarchal societies is that women cannot be effective leaders and that men cannot be led by a woman. Many Kenyans cannot imagine being led by a woman president. In fact even up to now (in the year 2012) when pollsters interview Kenyans about whom they want as their president, Martha Karua comes a distant 6<sup>th</sup> after Raila Odinga, Uhuru Kenyatta, Musalia Mudavadi, William Ruto, and Peter Kenneth (all men). (*Daily Nation*, 1 October, 2012). Why such an apathy towards women leadership? Why don't Kenyans understand the advantages of having equal representation in the political arena? Even though many women have already proved that they can be organisers, planners and think tanks in social economic and political spheres, why is there a dispirited attempt to engage them even more in politics? These are some of the questions whose answers can be found in this study. As Kenyans head towards electing new parliamentarians on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2013, it is imperative that we focus on

what ails or what hinders women from engaging actively in politics. This biography will enlighten the reader, concerning why and how Kenyans choose leaders, how political agendas are to be pursued, and the role that women play especially so in a society where demographic surveys have for a long time indicated a higher ratio of women as opposed to men. More importantly, this study is justified because it gives readers a chance to take a look at a woman like Julia Ojiambo, who has already been in the political public space so as to understand the challenges she has gone through and what she has achieved despite these challenges. Her life history may then become a model and a lesson to other women (and even men) who are engaged or would want to be engaged in the Kenyan political process especially as Kenyans get ready for the 2013 elections.

### **1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study was seeking a documentation of the life of Julia Ojiambo, so she was the main focus of the study. However I also drew instances from other people who influenced her to be what she is today. The study thus relied on document reviews, her own perspectives as well as opinions of other people close to her, likely to know her from close interaction.

Julia Ojiambo is one out of a large number of Kenyan women thus I can not assume that her experiences are particular to all Kenyan women. While studying her life gave me valuable insight into the experiences of several other women, focusing on her as the subject limited the study to only one person. Therefore, while it stays true to her, it is not be specific to the other women in public spaces or Kenya as a nation as human beings are not universal in character, as not all women in Kenya have undergone the same experiences as hers. As the study was directed

by the need to understand her path to academic, political and social empowerment career(s), it was however limited to only a segment of her life that shaped her personality in the eyes of the public, ignoring others that may be of influence.

The respondents were also limited to a number that would allow extensive interviewing, as including very many people in my research would not only be expensive, but might also have duplicated some answers. In addition, the research would also have stretched over a long period of time, presenting the risk of lose of focus in the study. However, even while aware of the limitations, this study still had the power to provide an important contribution to the understanding of the impact that life experiences and histories have in shaping a people's well being.

## **1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW**

With the increasing awareness on women's rights due to endless campaigns by parastatals, government bodies and non-governmental organizations, different scholars have also come out to research on the under representation of women in the world. Eagleton 1991 has explored how images of women influence how the public perceives them, in most cases showing them as deficient of positive contributions towards the society. In response to this, women have tried to breach this misconception by voicing their concerns and embarking on campaigns to empower other women. As part of making their situation as a marginalized group heard and breaking the silence on the social injustices being propagated against them by the patriarchal society, Showalter 1988 says that women advance their plight through their writings. This is why Muchiri 2010 affirms the need to adhere to black feminism, while affirming the need for



gynocriticism as it gives women the platform to express themselves, which is different from how men express themselves or the women they write about. It has therefore come out that the reason for women's continued absence in the records of history is as a result of men being the writers of history and their light treatment of matters pertinent to women. There are various reasons for this omission, but the most outstanding one lies in the patriarchal nature of the social institutions that continue to side-line women. Considering the effects that women suffer due to their constant misrepresentation like the exclusion of their works from the canon, there is a need for the re-writing of history to include the active participation of women in different spheres of their countries' historical times.

This is what Stratton 1994 advances in her argument for women's participation in the literary criticism front, as she argues that exclusion of women literary expression as part of African literature is assuming their absence all together, which is also manifested in the historical arena. She observes that there has been a tendency of assimilating gender into all categories when discussing matters arising from the post-colonial experience, a tendency which assimilates gender in all the binary divisions of the said categories into the male gender. Therefore, women's double oppression continues to haunt them up to date. As a result, she attempts to write African women writers back into the African literary tradition.

Smith and Watson (1998) have attempted a theorization of women autobiographies, and they observe that women have a distinct way of writing as opposed to men. They however point to the fact that women lack the agency to express their plight, creating the need for women to step up and write fellow women's biographies. Muchiri 2010 furthers this argument by pointing out that

the number of men's life writings continues to increase faster than that of their female counterparts. However, she focuses her study on the autobiographical voice, thus there continues to be a vacuum due to inadequate women's biographies and autobiographies available for analysis.

This is why Carli 2001 identified the need to examine how a person's gender affects his or her ability to influence others, saying that much attention with regard to sexual differences had been laid on "the extent to which men and women are influenced by others"(725). In her research on gender differences she identified the need to research on how gender differences affect people's ability to influence others, and goes ahead to discuss factors that moderate gender differences. This is especially important when studying women in public spaces because they have the capacity to influence the people they come into contact with as they are more often than not the ideal role models to their publics.

However, she did not look at how these factors which, mostly due to stereotypes, affect an individual's personality and the conceptualization of their identities as is in Julia's case where myths surrounding her are considered the true representation of her personality. This therefore calls attention for an in-depth research into the human psyche, as opposed to empirical studies. With reference to Julia Ojiambo, her challenges in the political public space can be understood in light of Carli's claims that most people assume men to be more competent in positions of authority than women, making them less open to the influence of women as a result of the stereotypical female role (726). It is this refusal by the society to acknowledge the importance of women and girls' influence in legislative matters that inspired this study. I have therefore

attempted to bring the public into recognition of the abilities of Julia Ojiambo as a female politician in the public space and the influence she exerts both overtly and covertly on her public.

In feminist studies there has been a tendency to analyse women outside their historical background, yet it is necessary that the subject, in this case Julia Ojiambo, be understood in the context of her history and culture. Carli 2001 and McGregor 2010 say that in contexts of interaction, culture is at the center of character formation as it is that which moulds one's character and motivates their actions. This is what Carli calls context of interaction, and she puts culture at the centre of character formation (726) just as Dilthey puts history at the centre of all life writings. On her part, McGregor argues that attitudes towards women as socially constructed, and that these result in the formation of myths and stereotypes about some social icons. It is these myths that often give rise to stereotypes that more often than not, provide basis for the segregation of women in the society. Therefore issues of marginalization of people in a society are created within the nuances of culture (272).

For instance, to explain why her society was in the throes of gender inequality, Amadiume 1987 captured how gender discrepancies brought about by colonialism affected women's lives by denying them opportunities like education which were awarded to boys due to the Victorian tendencies of assuming women's roles to be as home makers and not thinkers. This is why the gender roles established by the patriarchal society and the absence of many women scholars who were empowered to document fellow women's experiences ensured the absence of the female gender in the historical documents was never questioned. Over time, men have attempted to justify this discrepancy and they continue to apply the male domination structures that further

push women into a darker corner in the historical archives where they will hardly be unearthed. She further acknowledges the existence of African feminism in the traditional Igbo society that seeks to elevate women into a higher position, which has been alluded to by Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira in her memoir, A Letter to Mariama Ba.

Life writings are an important archaeological effect because they immortalize living people into historical documents. However, of greatest concern to the history of women as a marginalized group is who contextualizes the events and from what point of view. This is because over the years men have been the writers of history and over time they have almost ignored the contribution of women in the social, economic, and cultural development, particularly in Kenya. It is this fear of a man -who hardly understands what it feels like or what it means to be a woman- writing her life history that inspired Virginia Woolf to do it herself as she thought that she was the best person to narrate to her children about her life experiences. She did this in order to avoid instances of gross misrepresentation. To date, Woolf's writings remain the first texts that scholars in the feminist circle refer to in their studies. In fact, she provoked the need for scholars to look into the lives of women in different spheres of life. But as much as many feminist scholars and literary critics have recognized the importance of studying female subjects, very few have attempted a scholarly representation of women in life writings. In cases where an attempt is made analysis of already written texts is more often than not given priority over the actual writing of the text. Therefore, I recorded the experiences of Julia Ojiambo into a biography which will then function as a historical document for future reference that will still exist even after the demise of the narrator protagonist.

However, this is not to say that writing about one woman's experiences provides a template for understanding a cross cut of women. In an attempt to explain this argument, I looked at Smith and Watson 2001, who explored the problems associated with attempts at understanding the plight of various women from the perspective of one individual. These scholars argued that by assuming that one woman's experience is universal, we run a risk of generalising women's experiences and in the process overlooking unique experiences that may have shed light on an area of concern. That's why Dobie 2009 advances the idea of separate identities by borrowing Lacan's idea of the mirror model so that instead of assuming that Julia is a blue print of all women's experiences, we assume that she is a representative of a larger population's experiences by projecting the collective unconscious mind as an archetype. This is what inspired me to write a biography that would give an account of another woman's life history to an already existing archive. Recently there has been an increased demand for biographies and autobiographies. Hence it is pleasing to note that many women in Africa are taking the chance to expose their life experiences to other people. In the long run, other women draw inspiration and learn from the life writings of fellow women, as acknowledged by Muchiri, Watson and Smith.

It is however paramount to note that it is difficult to attain objectivity in the writing of life histories. Pollock 2005 and Smith and Watson 1998 have stressed the importance of memory in the remembering process during the narration of events, a factor that is important to note in biographies. Since the process of writing biographies requires the narrator protagonist to recollect past experiences with the aid of memory, it is important acknowledging that this process may not be accomplished in an organized manner, as Smith and Watson uncover that memory is triggered by certain events. This means that the linear order of events dictates the

flow of events as Douglas 2010 elaborates, thus biographical truth may be hampered by other events such as selective amnesia due to trauma and the need for self preservation. As a result, when compiling the research findings into a biography, it will be necessary to employ Hayden White's employment as a strategy of reconstructing a narrative out of some few facts in a realistic manner, thus employing the strategies of fiction to creatively reconstruct history without necessarily distorting the facts.

On her part, Wanjau 2008 admits that the process of writing life histories is propelled by the desire to come to terms with one's identity, thus she stresses on the importance of point of view in narration, be it in the interviewing process or the writing of the biography. This is because narrating life experiences relies on self-expression that plays an important role in the depiction of characters in a certain image. She also discusses the importance of the author obtaining material that will ensure the credibility of the story. Central to her argument is the role of heteroglossia in the writing of auto/biographies, and she suggests the use of anecdotes and oral testimonies to provide the author with a variety of voices and points of view that will result in polyphony.

Finally, all life writings are written for an audience, thus there is a need for an author to ensure cohesion of facts in the text. However, as Marcus and Watson 2001 observe, many women's narratives are characterized by fragmentation, thus the author has the crucial task of comprehensively re-arranging historical facts in a creative way to pass across a certain message in such a way that the audience will be captivated to pay attention to the text. As Rancie're has elaborated, literature has the special ability of turning mere historical facts into powerful narratives that are used to explain certain historical concepts. The biography therefore combines

fiction and facts, in the process giving history a different aspect. Biographies exhibit generalizations from particulars, portraying the similarities in human experiences. Thus history appropriates people's life experiences to demonstrate instances that exist independent of man. It therefore emerges that narration is a very important aspect when researching into life narratives, as expressed by Pollock, 2005 and Bal, 2009.

## **1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The feminist biographical theory focuses on the experiences of women in the biographical context, and it was the main theory I used in my study. In this case I focused on the theoretical foundations of Anderson 2004, Marcus 1994, and Smith and Watson 1998. According to Anderson, women have for a long time been segregated along the gender divide but she says that writing life histories of women will go a long way in creating a positive identity of women by other women relating to their experiences. Marcus stresses the importance of understanding an individual woman as a separate entity, a part of the gendered construction of "woman." This theory will further expound on the reason as to why it is important to document the life histories of women in public spaces. It also explains why the construction of a female identity is important in giving voice to the marginalized groups in light of the insightful ability of women to conceptualise phenomena while giving them an emotive aspect. This will also go a long way in establishing the truth factor as the story is majorly narrated by Julia about her life history.

The feminist biographical theory was also important in highlighting how Julia as an individual woman has fared in the minds of Kenyans in the context of the Kenyan political public space. Marcus 1994 and Smith and Watson 1998 stress the importance of understanding an individual

woman as a separate entity, a part of the universal gendered construction of “woman.” This theory further expounded on the reason as to why it is important to document the life histories of women in public spaces, and the reason as to why the construction of a female identity is important in giving voice to the marginalized groups, in light of the insightful ability of women to conceptualize phenomena while giving them an emotive aspect. Theory of the auto/biography validated the story as having the biographical truth due to the authority of experience, viewed from the perception that the story is about Julia Ojiambo’s life, majorly narrated by her but documented by me, thus she is the Biographical subject whose history has been reconstructed, without whom the research findings would not have been the same.

The Marxist biographical theory helped me to understand how people’s personalities are influenced by their material situation, class and power structures. This study therefore gave me an insight into how the character of Julia Ojiambo has been shaped by her status in the society as well as her material disposition. Since I interpreted from my perspective as opposed to Julia’s, I provided the agency for the re-evaluation of the circumstances under which the subject was brought up and nurtured, which have influenced her philosophies in life and consequently her personality.

I also used the cultural biographical theory to complement the feminist biographical theory. Gender is a cultural creation, and culture is people-specific. In view of this, it was therefore important to analyze the context in which an individual was nurtured, as their present life exhibit traces of the societal norms and practices. Most importantly, this theory highlighted the way in which dominant groups in the society determine what is acceptable and what is unacceptable for



the larger body (Dobie 174), the Subaltern according to Antonio Gramsci. This theory was applied to demonstrate how a person in position of power influence policy-making by motivating the Subaltern to challenge the hegemonic structures and effect social change through empowerment of the masses (Dobie, 174). Thus the study will borrow from the branches of cultural studies known as cultural materialism and cultural feminism.

I also borrowed Genette 1980 and Bal's 2009 principles of the narrative composition to give the story a focus, in such a way that I was able to give the story a voice distinct from mine to draw a way the focus from me to Julia. This was done through different levels of narration to differentiate between my opinions, Julia's opinions and other participants' views. I also attempted to give the story a logical sequence, and to create binary oppositions and relations between the past and present. Genette and Bal's opinions helped me during the reconstruction phase to avoid descriptive pauses that narrative gaps, as well as to maintain a logical and creative frequency of facts and events to give the story a sequential order. They further helped me to show how transitions in Julia Ojiambo's character, personality or identities formation occurred from childhood to date.

## **1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

I employed qualitative research methods in this study, defined by Strauss and Corbin as one that mainly uses interpretive analysis and non-statistical procedures to provide findings (Strauss and Corbin 11), a definition similar to Creswell that qualitative research is a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell,4). The suitability of qualitative research methods in this context lay in its ability to

expound on the lives of people in a community, their actions, emotions, etc (Strauss & Corbin 11). and the fact that data was collected in its natural setting with me as a participant. I also used multiple methods of data collection and analysis to achieve triangulation for reliability, while interpreting findings in the context of the meanings the participants attached to the research problem. In this study therefore, I focused on understanding aspects of Julia Ojiambo's life that helped me to achieve an in-depth insight into her character, in the context of her experiences and achievements.

I focused on the life of Julia Ojiambo, utilizing her experiences from childhood to present to reconstruct her personality, while relying on influences exerted on her character by occurrences, actions or philosophies of people close to her at one time or another in her life. She was therefore my study population, and every aspect of the study revolved around her. From the multitude of women in the Kenyan public space, I purposively sampled her due to the wealth of experience she has not only in politics, but also in other spheres of the public such as academics, social work, empowerment of women and research. I also targeted participants who had been in close contact with her, who I sampled through the snowballing technique after interviewing Julia and identifying the people she mentioned as having inspired her, as well as including other people whose contributions may have been important, though not identified prior to the research but mentioned by other respondents or whose names keep propping up in the course of the research. The research was then divided into five parts: prologue, childhood, higher education and work experience, life in politics and epilogue.

I conducted unstructured in-depth interviews with Julia Ojiambo to collect information regarding specific aspects of her life as well as other people close to her. Unstructured interviews were relevant because of their flexibility that allows wider exploration and generation of additional insights and data (Rubin and Rubin 16). These interviews shed light on Julia Ojiambo's socio-cultural progress from childhood to adulthood, and the process of her character formation. I also observed the surroundings in which Julia once lived to recreate her experiences in a definite physical setting. I also observed the non-verbal expressions of the respondents to get a clearer view of their perceptions of her, as well as to identify gaps and silences in the course of interviewing her. I then collected secondary data by reviewing critical documents, written and audio-visual material including documentaries, mini-biographies, newspaper articles, and journal articles. I sourced these documents from bookstores, libraries, media houses, and various organizations that she has worked with.

Following this, I went to the field to collect primary data which I recorded by hand writing, taking photos, and recording. I then transcribed and coded the recordings and typed the notes into a computer. I also read through the secondary material on Julia and selected the relevant information to include in my research report or to guide my field research. Thereafter I interpreted the information that I had gathered from the research, both primary and secondary and to conclude the data analysis, I compared and contrasted the findings from the primary and secondary data from which I will made inferences and interpretations.

I also used triangulation to ensure credibility (Creswell 191), from multiple sources of data collection and analysis. After coming up with a tentative report, I presented it to different people

to review the findings and for peer reviews. I also conducted a series of member checks with Julia Ojiambo as the research report is an authorized biography. I also sought the opinions of my supervisors, Tom Odhiambo and Judith Jefwa.

In respect of the legal and ethical requirements, I ensured that this study adhered to the ethical codes. The research has thus attempted to attain biographical truth, and to respect the democracy and rights as well as wishes of the participants. This however excluded instances of deception and infringement of the dignity and privacy of the participants, thus freedom to give required information (Hamersley and Atkinson 209). To ensure this, I obtained a letter from the university authorizing me to carry out the research. When just about to undertake the field research, I approached the participants to explain my intentions to include their views in my research, as well as the purpose and content of the research so as to give them the opportunity to withdraw from the research at an early stage. Thereafter, I acquired their informed consent voluntarily. As part of the preparation for the field study, I informed the participants of their role in the research, the reasons for conducting the research and how the findings would be used. I also sought the respondents' consent to record information during the interviews. I will also maintained the confidentiality of the participants (Creswell 91), omitting their names upon their request to maintain their democratic rights. Finally, after obtaining the research findings and conducting a preliminary analysis, I presented the findings to selected participants so that they could verify if the facts were well presented. In addition, all the data, information and sources were appropriately acknowledged in the research report.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Youthful Spirit for all Times

#### PROLOGUE

##### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

It takes a breath to know somebody, it takes a sigh to decipher what is in someone's life, but it takes reality to accept that people are not always what they appear to be, says Victoria Woolf, in *Sweet Compulsion*.

When I met Julia, I have to admit, I was grudgingly forced to admit, Woolf had been right. This is because from that first encounter I discovered more about her than I had previously done from reading the numerous articles that I had stumbled upon about her. Underneath the media publicity I unraveled a hard-working woman who has so many depths contrary to the image I had conjured in my mind. Hence I began to see a new side of someone who has previously been dismissed as incompetent to lead this country, as seen in the publicity campaigns of the 2007 elections and the period thereafter.

Getting in touch with Julia was not easy, probably because being a public figure makes her wary of people's advances as more often than not they want something from her, just as I did. So when in March I went to see her in one of her offices situated in the modern Fifth Avenue Plaza along Ngong road, I was quite impressed. I had come in earlier than her thus that afforded me the opportunity to look at her without her feeling the pressure of my scrutiny. My first impression of Julia was that she had such a powerful command of her body and her surroundings. I remember expecting a body to match her deep voice yet here she was, a petite woman of about five feet two, slender and with a

chocolate complexion. She had a graceful walk, her back poised straight and head held high. She had a pair of low-heeled shoes and a *kitenge* with brown prints well tailored into an outfit that did justice to her still flawlessly slim figure. At seventy-five years her face still looked radiant and without wrinkles.

Ushering me into her office, Julia soon changed her demeanor from formal to friendly. I noticed that the room was arranged like a boardroom; with one big table centrally placed and chairs arranged around it. At the head of the table was a chair, taller than the rest, indicating that it belonged to the boss. Julia then started chattering away about how great it is to be young and in school (referring to me) and we even discussed about the directions to our various rural homes! As she talked to me she moved from her desk to the other wall that was framed by huge windows affording the occupant of the expansive office a wide view of the beautiful Upper Hill area. I silently watched her quick and sure movements as she gathered the equipment placed on a low table just below the huge window to serve me a cup of tea. All the condiments arranged before me, I was struck by her excellent skills as a hostess because in the space of five minutes I had completely transformed from a state of jittery unease to complete relaxation, laughing at her jokes and freely chatting with her.

Looking around her office I saw proof of her scholarly background, as copies of her published works on nutrition were part of her office display. In fact, she showed me her published work on the dietary habits of the Abasamia, which she informed me, had been a case study of the Abasamia from Western province. At the end of the visit I was inspired to achieve as much as she had and probably even more, not only in the world of academics, but also in adhering to the ethics of good nutrition that might prolong my life on earth and leave me looking as young and energetic as her.

Satisfied that I was completely at ease Julia then brought up the agenda of the day. With a tender tone like a mother speaking to her daughter she asked that I explain how I proposed to conduct the research and from there I brought her up to date with my research methodology. Following that she gave me a verbal consent. But as I came to learn later, getting in touch with Julia is a task in its own. She is a very busy person with a highly flexible diary so that it is almost impossible to make an appointment with her because she is not always in control of her day's activities as her itinerary always changes as per the day's events. As a result, her policy is 'to live everyday as it comes.'

From my conversation with Julia, I came to the realization that being a public figure is no walk in the park, to use the cliché. She narrated to me how she finds herself constrained in many ways as a public figure. For her, time has become a very precious commodity that she must portion it very well. On this particular day she had already attended four meetings that morning and still had to attend two more before going home to attend to some urgent private matters. Nevertheless she realizes that she has to differentiate between her public and private life, which she says is never easy. Despite all, she has made it her business to effect positive change more so for the women and children and finds it part of her life because for as long as she can remember, her people back in her rural home have considered her a role model. Therefore, Julia considers sleeping more than three hours a waste of time, and says she does not have the luxury of sleeping for twelve hours. It was then the import of the phrase, "Julia is one of these women who wear trousers" dawned on me. This is a phrase that one of the men I interviewed from her constituency Funyula used to describe her. My respect for her increased tenfold.

But for all her tenderness, I realized that dealing with Julia requires a high degree of patience and intelligence, as well as the ability to accept criticism. She is a very sharp woman with the tongue of a razor. She does not mince her words. In fact, she pays attention to all details with the careful attention of a meticulous calligrapher who crosses all their *f*s and dots all their *i*s. Thus she hardly compromises with people who do shoddy work. On our first meeting she informed me that she is a very out-spoken person who says things as they are, a factor I ascertained on our follow-up meetings. She also told me that she respects scholarship and true to her word she was always willing to assist me during my research. However this was only after she had gone through my concept notes and work-plan and received documented proof from the University that I was a student who had proposed to research on her.

Later on I also came to realize that she has several other offices as she works with the Labour Party of Kenya, the Kenya Fund for the Disabled, and the Center for the Advancement of Women and Children all of which have offices which she has to tour every day. Unfortunately she says that the last one is currently dormant because it is a non-profit organization being run by charity and she has not found many volunteers willing to work with her. A proud woman, appeal to emotions has never been Julia's strategy. She is a person who is never eager to get help or garner the support of people by playing on their sympathies, thus Julia lets her performance record speak for her. But then, maybe that's her Samson's yoke. This is because in a society where many people publicly proclaim their achievements which they use to gain immense popularity, Julia is very modest. She has a tendency to down-play her achievements so that it is only a few of those who are very close to her or who have been ardently following her career that know the mountain of change she has effected in society.



Although her name is Julia Auma Ojiambo, in this work I will refer to her simply as Julia because of two reasons: firstly, this is the name she is known by in the Kenyan political arena and secondly, her friends call her by that name thus in that respect you by virtue of reading this are also friends.

## PART ONE

### CHILDHOOD

#### 1. HER FATHER'S HEART

All children have dreams but then, not all children live to see their wishes fulfilled as adulthood dramatically introduces them to the other side of life, reality. This especially comes to pass when the innocence of childhood is crumpled like a wilting rose as age advances. Therefore, growth becomes a nightmare, as it has a way of changing a person completely, either for good or bad. Sometimes where there was optimism now abides pessimism, and where hope reigned now disillusionment conquers. However, in the endless struggles for survival what stands out is the ability of any individual to turn the forces against them to actually work in their favor. This was the valuable lesson that Julia learnt from her loving parents Saulo Okello Majale and Tesera Were.

The village of Kadimbworo situated in Busia District of Western Kenya is a place that formed Julia's childhood landscape. Seventy or so years ago none of its inhabitants knew that they would receive so much publicity. In fact, none of them would have imagined that it would come from one of their own women. Although it is close to Busia, which is a very busy border town, Kadimbworo was a rather shy village inhabited by quiet and laid back people. But as it were, fate had a different twist up its sleeves, as this is the place that Julia grew up. Even as a child Julia already bore the markings of a very beautiful woman and needless to say, she still looks gorgeous at seventy-five years. She still has an eye-catching aura about her that boldly screams at the onlooker, *angel*.

From a very tender age Julia was surrounded by people, especially her parents, who had strong convictions about her potential, which explains the high level of confidence she has. Julia and her siblings were treated the same way. This is because in her family there were no distinctions between a girl and a boy child; all were the same, children with the same capabilities. Saulo and Tesera inculcated strong personal values in their children so that they learnt to stand up for their values and opinions in the face of compromising situations.

Gradually, the good upbringing that Julia and her siblings got inspired them to pursue their heart-felt desires without fear of negative criticism. Julia's parents had so much influence in her life that they became her mentors. Therefore, while her mother influenced Julia's career choice in nutrition and her adult personality traits, her father would then inspire her involvement in politics because during those days a religious leader also took part in the community's politics. He also inspired her participation in religious matters from a very impressionable age and to date Julia is still an ardent Christian, even ministering to students in various institutions including The University of Nairobi.

Julia's life history can be traced back almost seven decades ago in the village of Namboboto. As a religious couple who believed in the value of children, Saulo and Tesera wanted to increase the size of their family. Having given birth to five children: the first a girl called Ruth Auma, the second a boy called David Majale, the third a girl called Esther Oundo, the fourth a girl also called Priscilla Menya, the fifth a girl called Rosa Nakhabi, Tesera was not yet ready to call it quits. Therefore she was soon in the family way again. After a period of over eight months when the child was almost due, Tesera decided to walk more than fifty kilometers to Butere Mission Hospital. This is because with her expertise in midwifery Tesera knew the time for delivering Julia had finally come. Having

acquired so much knowledge on maternal and child health while working alongside her aunt Ada Asembo, she really wanted her baby delivered at a medical clinic, as there was no maternity hospital in Samia. Besides, her aunt Ada was at that time a midwife at Butere Mission Hospital and she thought she would be safer in her hands. Thus the sixth of Majale and Tesera's children was born on the twenty-ninth of November in the year 1936. A healthy and beautiful baby girl called Julia.

In accordance with the Christian tradition of baptizing children within seven days of being born, this baby girl, was baptized and named Julia Auma by Reverend Leech and her godfather Reverend Musiga of Muthiero Church Missionary Society of Gem. Although nobody is really sure how long it was after the date of her delivery they all agree that it could not have been more than seven days in keeping with the teachings of the Old Testament in the Bible. Under her mother's hawk-like dedication Julia would grow up to be a plump baby who no one liked to carry because of her weight. She however turned this otherwise negative aspect to her advantage as she learnt to fend for herself from a very young age, a virtue that endeared her not only to her siblings but also her parents.

Later in life, Julia's mother explained to her that she was named Auma because of two reasons. First because she was born facing downwards and such babies are called Auma as a mark of respect to their mothers at birth, especially since Tesera had displayed her strength having endured the long journey to Butere. Secondly, her father seemed to have liked all that surrounded Julia's birth and therefore named her Auma after his mother despite there being another Auma already in the family in the person of her eldest sister Ruth. Maybe their father had seen great potential in his eldest daughter who had achieved a lot in her young life and also because his mother had inspired him a lot in life. As the Majale family resided in the Namboboto Church compound they were shocked to

realize that some people in the village did not like them. This was attributed to a great rivalry that existed between the Christians of Samia South and those of Samia North. When Julia's father, who was a Southerner, was elevated to the position of a Deacon in the Northern church this did not augur well with some of the Northern people who did not want the Southern people to hold senior positions in their church. As a result, they had planned to kill the Majale's by torching their house. Luckily, this news reached them through their well wishers thus Saulo and Tesera managed to run with their children in tow. They ran away to a place known as Kadimbworo. They had carried nothing with them and only had the clothes they wore on that day.

When Saulo's family arrived in Kadimbworo they decided to settle there with the help of well wishers. At their new compound in Kadimbworo where they had fled to, her father built a thatched roof community church where he continued to minister the word of God. But bad luck still pursued them. Even before they had completely settled down, the new church structure that Saulo had erected was also razed down to ashes by arsonists suspected to have trailed him from the Northern Community Church. Thus once again Saulo was forced to move the church premises further from his home to its current ACK St. Paul's Parish site at Sigalame. Later a primary school was built next to the church. The primary school was an extension of the playgroup established by Saulo. The primary school then grew to be the well-known Sigalame Boy's High school. Today the St. Paul's Parish Church at Sigalame is named in honour of Reverend Saulo who had the vision of its foundation.

The new house that Saulo built for his family was an imposing stone and corrugated iron roof structure designed in the architectural trend of his time. It had corrugated iron roofing that was considered very 'ultra-modern' back in those days. Julia's family home also functioned as the

missionary station thus it occasionally functioned as a house of prayer just like the church. They woke up every morning to study the bible, led by their father. Julia remembers her father's most treasured advice, "If you are humble, if you listen to Jesus' voice, if you greet others and make them happy you will also be happy. One good thing you do to someone also makes the other do a good thing to you." Thus Julia and her siblings were brought up in such a way that they acted out of common sense and goodwill for mankind, not due to any external pressure. The children confined themselves to a Christian environment and its teachings because the community that related to their parents came to their home for spiritual healing. Therefore the values they were learning were useful as they applied them where needed.

At Kadimbworo, Saulo and Tesera were blessed with three more children: Perpetua Anyango, Agnes Ajiambo and the last one Edward Siata. But despite having two sons in a family of eight children, Saulo faced constant ridicule from his community and even family members. Considering the community's disregard for female children in the 1920s and 30s Saulo was considered childless because the ratio of boy to girl children in his family was wanting. The community's regard of his situation was so bad so that when his brothers were portioning out the family land after their father's demise, Saulo was highly affected. He was allocated the least portion in the rocky areas away from their homestead because it was assumed that he had no sons to inherit his land. In fact, Tesera was considered a barren woman. Despite the respect she got as a missionary, culturally she was not allowed to speak in the village about family matters. But being a very strong Christian she never gave up hope for a future free of gender-based restrictions. She realised that even the impact of Christianity had not been enough to change what their people thought about women. Therefore, she endeavored to change the world starting with her children whom she brought up to respect everyone

despite their gender. This strategy worked in her favour as her children became very confident in such a way that they did not withdraw into cocoons even in the face of public criticism. This is perhaps a factor that has played an important role in ensuring that Julia keeps her head above water in the face of constant public censorship as a woman in the public space.

The fact that Saulo had suffered because he had more female children than male made him vow not to expose anyone else to the same treatment. As a result, Julia and her siblings were brought up in a manner that eliminated from their minds any tendencies towards gender discrimination. Their parents believed that all children were equal in the eyes of God and they felt that it was wrong to treat girls unfairly.

According to the Samia tradition boys herded the livestock in the bushes as they recounted the legendary tales on heroic deeds they had heard from their parents and grandparents. In the meantime, the girls would carry out household chores. But then this was not the case in Saulo's homestead. Here all participated in all types of chores regardless their sex. Thus Julia and her siblings collected firewood, fetched water, looked for vegetables to cook and ground grains of all types on two stones to make into flour for Ugali. Just like the boys the girls also herded cattle and goats. Their parents also taught them to associate with all people from all walks of life. Thus they were allowed to interact with people who took alcoholic brews or those who smoked pipes (which was against the Christian teachings) so as to change them for the better. But they were also cautioned to avoid those ones who refused to change. However, free integration with boys was not allowed and the two sexes did all things separately except when they had to learn together activities like singing, dancing and when practicing defense skills in the event of tribal clashes. As a matter of fact, the boys were taught

to protect the girls and vice versa.

As time went by their lives became gradually attuned to the village's way of life. Like the other villagers their home life was often a mixture of happiness and sadness depending on the situation at hand. However, the most traumatic experience they went through was when Tesera lost her youngest daughter Agnes. The loss of a child, however young, can be a very devastating experience to any family and Julia had to go through the agonizing experience of watching her mother mourn her eighth daughter Agnes. When a catastrophic event leading to death happens, very many people are caught so unawares that their reflex actions are almost always disappointing as it happened on that bright morning.

On that fateful morning Agnes the young girl of about four years had been running around the compound screaming and babbling with laughter as she played. Julia remembers that Agnes was very fond of swimming. So as it happened on that day as she was running around the compound she happened to come across a huge trough filled with hot water. Ruth who was the eldest daughter used to do her laundry on Saturdays and she would line up a series of troughs with water so that she could do her laundry in an organized manner. However she did not see the child who just came and jumped into the trough full of hot water. By the time her limp and already lifeless body was picked from there, she was completely burned. She died that day. That experience left a permanent mark in Julia's life and has made Julia to always endeavour to be there for her children. When circumstances like living and studying abroad as well as the election period tore her away from her children she felt shattered.



## 2. EARLY INFLUENCES

To understand Julia's family background even better, it is important that we understand her parents' early influences.

To most young men, the idea of war is always alluring. This is especially so because there are always enticing tales of heroism surrounding wars. These tales are often constructed about battles that are reputed to be responsible for the conquering of legendary armies and cities. Therefore they often inspire in young men the desire to do something similarly great for the good of mankind, and while seeking such opportunities many young men plunge themselves in wars without giving it much thought. It is with this spirit that the young Okello Majale, Julia's father, embarked on a journey to the unknown with only dreams up his sleeves. But as he was later on to find out the war experience is undeniably a nerve-racking experience.

For Okello such an opportunity arose in 1918 and together with two of his brothers, they were recruited as carrier corps. Their duty was to ferry provisions to the soldiers during the First World War to various destinations. But as it was later on to happen Okello was eventually recruited into the Kenya African Rifles troops. Following this, he was deployed to Addis Ababa, then to South India and finally to Burma. In fact, he was reputed to have been one of the best able-bodied men in the Kenya African Rifles troops. It is this experience that first brought him into contact with the white soldiers. These soldiers were elite men and they would narrate to him stories about their lives in Europe and how education had changed their lives for the better. He decided that if he survived the war then he would pursue education at whatever cost.

Fortunately Okello survived war and after going back home he trained as a teacher at the African Training College, which later on came to be referred to as Jean's school, Kabete, or the Kabete Technical Institute. He also trained as a priest at the Limuru Theological College, now St. Paul's University, Limuru. The technical skills he learnt enabled him to design and build, with the help of a few men, a family house of stonewalls and corrugated iron roof. It was the only one on the entire Kadibworo region, a structure that is still intact after almost eighty years now. The surviving members of Saulo's family see this structure as more than a house. To them, it is a heritage that stands alone in its pure form having defied the storms of time it has lived through over the years.

Upon completion of his studies he became a schoolteacher and an assistant inspector of schools in the education system under the Church Missionary Society of the then North Kavirondo region whose focal points were the Maseno Mission School for Boys and Butere Mission School for girls. It is with this spirit that he embarked on a life-changing mission for his society, an excursion that would enable him educate his children regardless of gender to the highest level they could get to.

At that particular time in the history of Kenya world wars were not the only issues that affected Africans. Their conversion to the Christian religion was another major issue affecting them. Missionaries were establishing their strongholds in the course of soliciting for converts thus there was a great rivalry and a covert struggle for power. Initially, the battle line had been drawn between traditional religious practitioners who saw Christianity as an enemy of its beliefs and practices, but later on there also ensued a fierce competition between the Roman Catholics and Protestants who were also advancing their interests.

It was among all this commotion and power struggles that Okello Majale converted to Christianity. He joined the Anglican Church. He was christened Saulo after the biblical Saul and embarked on his missionary work armed with the white man's education and the word of God. A man blessed with the unique gifts of good counseling skills and charisma as well as his social standing as a clergy saw his community bequeath him with the role of community leader. Under his guidance the community grew to greater heights in not only religious ways but also developmental matters.

Like every man who believes in the centrality of the family, Saulo began a search for someone to share his life with and he found her in the person of a very talented, beautiful and intelligent young lady while in his line of duty. Tesera Were was born into the Abalundu clan found in Masaba village of Eastern Uganda thus she was popularly known as 'Namglundu'. The name Tesera is the Samia interpretation of the current name Tessie or Teresa. Her other name, Were, is a mythical African name that means god or goddess. Tesera had come to Kenya to live with her aunt Ada Asembo who was an early Christian convert and a well-known midwife. Like her aunt Tesera was also a terrific midwife and a veteran social worker. She later on joined her aunt in her missionary activities through which she met Saulo. Julia says,

"It took Saulo and Tesera time to see Tesera through her bible class, baptism, confirmation in the Anglican Church, and even customary negotiations and payment of dowry. Therefore, I guess it could have taken them about two to three years of courtship before getting married." Finally, they got married on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 1923 and theirs, Julia believes, was a match made in heaven. After their marriage, Saulo took his wife to school where she trained as a social worker and later on worked alongside him. He was at this time a mission teacher at the Kabete Institute, which was

under the Church Mission Society. Later they both became missionaries when Tesera became an evangelist and a mission teacher. This made it easy for her to intermingle and work with the community because she was the wife of a clergy. True to her name, Were, Tesera proved to be a "goddess." She was a very loving and selfless woman who was determined to see the good in every person she met. She always believed that there was some goodness in everyone; "One just had to be patient enough in order to see this goodness," she would say often.

After marriage she achieved a high status in the community almost similar to that of her husband. Therefore, she was accepted in that new role as a woman in the limelight because the villagers saw that she was not only dedicated to community service, but she was also passionate about serving her people: She attended to the sick, as the nurse; she dressed up the brides, as a matron at weddings; she attended to widows, sat as a comforter of the battered women; she was there at the christening of their children, as their god mother, she helped them put to bed, as the midwife; and she helped them solve their family disputes, as the counselor for them she was their "goddess", and they literally took her that way. At the time of Julia's birth, her father was an arch-deacon of the Anglican Church Missionary Society stationed at Maseno and Butere, with Butere being the mission station and Maseno the educational center. For the girls especially, growing up in the community as unique children was not that difficult for them because their mother had already set that pace for the societal attitudinal change towards womanhood. The community expected Tesera's daughters to be like their mother. Therefore they automatically followed their mother wherever she went in order to learn from her. Julia found herself replicating the kind of job her mother was doing. Thus the villagers just accepted the children in the same spirit as their mother.

In fact, Julia and her siblings were so reliable that when the villagers wanted someone to send they went for them. When the same people went to the church they would find the same children helping their parents to clean the table and chairs and sweep the floor. From these experiences, Julia learnt the valuable lessons of tolerance and being her sister's keeper. Julia's parents became the coveted service leaders. She regrets the deceit that is so prevalent in the society today. She says her parents would have detested it and she says, "If they were to turn around in their graves and hear people today talk about service leadership as if it was new discovery, they would wonder what had gone wrong."

Growing up in a missionary home meant that visitors were an integral part of Julia's life. Among the people that visited them were prominent politicians like the late Western region political legend Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Masinde Muliro, spiritual leaders like Reverend Ndisi, Reverend Musiga, Reverend Obadia Kariuki, Reverend Elija Gachacha, Reverend Oywaya and the late Canon Awori among others. In addition they once hosted British teachers and Australian missionaries such as Leah Appleby; the first translator of the bible in English to Luhya language, popularly known as 'Eshimwenyi' or the smiling one. Therefore, observing one delegation after another and hospitality accorded them instilled in her the tradition of according the same treatment to others. Considering her parents' insistence on their participation in the hosting of the visitors, Julia got a lot of experience of being a hostess. She said, "With time my love for people grew and as I grew up I knew I would be happiest and more fulfilled when working with people."

Tesera was known all over the village for her kind nature. She would bring to her home all the disadvantaged children from the neighborhood, put food on the table and say, "All of you are my

children. If you don't get in and eat, then don't expect that I'll give you some more food later on."

So they would all eat food from one tray with their guests.

Although she loved her children dearly Tesera did not allow them to get away with laziness. A disciplinarian, she ensured that anyone who had not contributed to the household chores would not be allowed partake in the meals. As Julia recalls her mother would instead order the lazy one to sit in a corner while facing the wall away from the meal. This meant that as the rest of them ate the one under punishment would only "smell" the food. Later on, if any food had remained, the lazy child would then be told to come and eat. Needless to say, none of them committed the same mistake twice. Therefore Julia learnt that to sit with the others and eat they had to participate in the activities together, a factor that made them very eager to work hard thus life for them was very competitive and challenging but nevertheless good because they worked together. The valuable lesson of sharing stuck in her heart and today, like a true academician Julia never hesitates to share any new discovery she makes. She asserts,

"I hate to know that my contribution is of no use to anybody and that hurts me so much. It also hurts my ego. If I am not able to count something positive in my day then it is not a good day to me. I always try to make somebody happy and make a positive contribution in life and above all I don't wish to enrich myself."

With nostalgia Julia remembers how her family lived a communal life: working, eating, praying, and even sleeping together on the floor. To ensure that her children grew up living in togetherness, Tesera spread a mat for everybody to lay their head down while sharing one blanket. Julia recalls

how they practically lived with the community. Whenever a meal was made they never ate just as a family. Under their mother's supervision, *Ugali* would be cooked outside then served in a single *oluderu*, which is a big traditional round tray made from papyrus reeds. Then the accompanying stew would be put in several smaller bowls around the *oluderu* following which they would all be told to wash their hands, say a prayer and eat from the same place.

Julia recalls how her mother would stand there to ensure that everyone ate and that every little child's hand reached the *Ugali* and dipped the hand in the bowl of soup so that they could eat. The children were so used to sharing that they did not think about 'my plate' or what it felt like to possess anything in their home. Thus Tesera surely succeeded in entrenching the spirit of sharing in her children. Today Julia has extended to her community the nutritional values she learnt from her mother through the Kenya Nutritionists and Dietitians Institute of which she is the brains behind and which she heads. The institute has offices situated at the Fifth Avenue Plaza, along Ngong Road.

Julia also empathizes with people with disabilities. Not only did she take a huge role in the establishment of the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE), but she is also the chairperson of the donations committee in the Kenya Fund for the Disabled.

As the sixth child in their family, it was easy for Julia to constantly learn from her elders. Thus at the time she was growing up in the village playgroup her older sisters were already through with primary education that was as good as secondary education. An interesting fact is that although

primary schools went to class eight, the girls could only go up to class four. This is because although there were intermediary schools that offered classes up to standard eight for the African boys there were none for the African girls. Therefore when the African girls got to class four they dropped out and were employed. Thus Julia's sisters became her role models and according to her, an eternal source of encouragement and inspired her to be successful.

However, the one who seems to have left the greatest impact in Julia's life is her eldest sister Ruth Auma, with whom she shares the name Auma. It is not always that a parent gets the privilege of having a daughter like Ruth. Apparently she had such a strong personality that everyone, including the neighbours, wanted to be associated with her. Perhaps it is this, combined with her highly ambitious spirit that saw her become one of the first female African teachers in Kenya. She worked with other strong teachers like Muthoni Likimani, Ruth Habwe, Priscilla Abwao, and Jemima Gechaga. In fact, she also went a mile ahead to become the first woman to work with the Kenya Prison Department at a senior level, admirably as an Assistant Commissioner of Prisons. Her leadership qualities were manifested when she started the Lang'ata Women's Prison, and later on the Nakuru Women's Prison, Kodiaga Women's Prison, and Nyeri Women's Prison.



### 3. DAUGHTER OF NATURE

In the new village of exile, Kadimbworo, homesteads were scattered over bushy areas as if scared to come in contact with each other. The distance from one home to the other being so large, a wide expanse of land was available for farming making it possible for everyone to own huge chunks of land. Amid this monstrosity of space, stood Saulo's house, a solid-looking four-walled structure with galvanized iron roofing. On a sunny day, the roof would gleam with the enthusiasm of the morning star brightening the spirits of the on-looker. It was in essence an early peek into the waves of modernity that would flood the area, like the waters of Budalangi<sup>1</sup>, infecting the once purely African concepts with traces of the Western culture. Nevertheless, the inhabitants always tried to cultivate good relations with each other and during that time communalism prevailed, as theirs was a closely-knit society. Therefore, harmony existed most of the time. Both men and women worked together in their farms, taking turns at helping each other in their farm work. Therefore, growing up in this community Julia learnt at an early age that the spirit of communalism is bound to achieve more than a one-man army. It is this strategy that she would later on employ when leading her people as the MP of Busia Central.

At a time when the earth seemed untouched and uncorrupted by the machinations of technology, nature was revered and preserving it was second to human nature. For instance, for every tree cut in her compound, Julia's parents planted more. How she wishes that the current generation would borrow a leaf from this. Their compound was full of fruit trees such as paw paws, mangoes, lemons, guavas, bananas and pineapples, which supplemented their dietary needs as sources of Vitamin C.

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<sup>1</sup>Budalangi is a constituency in the larger Busia District of Western Province. The region is prone to frequent floods.

Of course at her tender age she did not really understand why her parents insisted on their growing certain foods but now she admits that these fruits gave them a very strong immune system that shows in her today because despite her seventy-five years she still looks young and vibrant. In her adulthood she published her first book, *Trees of Kenya* that is an environmental textbook in the Kenyan educational system.

Julia's parents were farmers and they felt that their children should also appreciate farming. Therefore they apportioned each of their children a small piece of land with which to practice farming. Julia was allocated a small cotton farm that was given to her by her parents to encourage her to wake up early. She would always wake up at 4.30 a.m. to attend to her farm before going to school. Her parents' decision to train her to raise money out of her cotton crop instilled in her financial skills. Out of the money proceeds from the cotton, she would buy salt for their family. Thereafter, if there was any money left, she was allowed to buy herself a piece of material to make a garment or buy a bar of soap. The cotton garden remained vivid in her mind and it is what inspired her to successfully lobby the parliament to pass the historic Cotton Development Amendment Act in 2005, which she authored and tabled in 2006 in the 9<sup>th</sup> parliament. This is the law that has seen the development of Kenyan cotton retain its high rank in African Growth and Opportunity Act, (AGOA) and others in the World Trade Textile Industry.

Julia's family also reared animals. She remembers with fondness the goat that they kept near their kitchen garden. She always fed her with leaves and vegetable peels and in return the she-goat gave them an endless flow of milk, the richest and most creamy milk that she has ever drunk. Later in life

she was inspired to start the now famous Kenya Milk Goat Project in pursuit of children's' and mother's nutrition. In 1976 she was awarded "The Food and Agricultural Organization, FAO Ceres Gold medal Award" for her contributions towards the well being of mothers and children. To achieve her dreams, she decided that all the proceeds gotten from the sale of her award should be used to initiate a national milk goat project. Her initial idea was to import exotic goat breeds from France and the Middle East that would mate with the Kenyan breeds to get a hybrid. Therefore the Toggen Burgh, the Anglo Nubian and the Israel Bedouin, which are high milk yielders, were imported to Kenya but unfortunately the Israel Bedouin did not fare well in the Kenyan climate and therefore perished. However, the Toggen Burghs and Anglo Nubians survived and have now changed the livestock milk herds in Kenya for good.

Saulo's family lived a humble life bereft of the infrastructural development that exists today. As Julia recalls there were no boreholes, electricity, tarmacked roads, or cars. Actually, the first car in her village was reverend Saulo's vintage Ford V8 that was bought for him in the early 50's by his son David Majale, who had become the proud holder of a Bachelor of Science Degree of the prestigious Makerere University in Uganda. This car made it easier for Saulo to travel to Kisumu, Kakamega, Bungoma and Mt. Elgon to administer the word of God. In the line of duty, he met many influential religious leaders. On several occasions during his missionary work in the slopes of Mt. Elgon he interacted with Elijah Masinde of *Dini ya Misambwa*<sup>2</sup> and brokered a peaceful co-existence between Dini ya Misambwa and the Christians of Mt. Elgon. Being the only car in the village, the Ford V8 attracted a lot of attention and admiration and whenever it stalled, he never lacked people to help him push it back to life with a choking sound and cloud of smoke. So whenever a villager

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<sup>2</sup> Dini ya Misambwa is a religious sect that borrows from the Legio Maria beliefs. The Legio Maria, which is a religious sect, is highly concentrated in the Lakeside region of Kenya.

would get a ride from it, they would always go around the village telling exciting stories to those who had never gotten into a car. To a large extent therefore the Vintage Ford V8 contributed in a huge manner to bringing the lost sheep back to the house of God.

In this harsh but exciting rural life, Julia and her siblings did what all the other rural children did: They ran barefoot, dressed like the other rural children, and had their heads shaven. However, they did not participate in the traditional rites of passage that necessitated the removal of the six lower teeth in girls. This was because once initiated the girl was automatically declared ripe for marriage regardless her age. As Saulo thought this practice was detrimental for the well being of the girl child he did not permit his children to go through this practice. As such, a silent war was waged between Saulo and the beliefs he stood for versus the villagers and their traditional beliefs. Nevertheless, Saulo's children did practically everything from the same common sources as the other villagers.

Julia and her siblings would go together to the bushes to collect firewood and fetch water then pluck wild berries such as rich in vitamins and minerals on their way home. A very curious child, Julia naturally loved discovering new things and her sister Rosa Nakhabi was her perfect partner in her excursions. Being Julia's immediate elder sister, Rosa was also her favorite. She was her greatest friend, and her trusted confidant. Despite their shared case of sibling rivalry, there was never a case in which hatred was openly displayed between them. They were tomboys through and through, and together they would climb trees on sloppy hillsides in search of berries to eat.

During one such outing in their rendezvous Julia and Rosa came face to face with bullying. It was on a hot afternoon while the two of them were busy eating wild berries in the bush when some boys

ambushed them in order to scare them to prevent them from eating the wild berries. The little bandits in the making were from Ebukiri and Ebuburi villages in the larger Samia, among them the late Joseph Obara who became one of the brilliant Makerere graduates in microbiology and the late Prof. Hampton Pamba-the longest serving Dean of the school of Health Sciences at the University of Nairobi. At first the two girls were startled and shocked beyond action. However, instead of running away as the boys expected them to do, they cut aloe Vera leaves and hurled the thorny pieces at them which made the boys take to their heels, howling as they ran with their arms flailing wildly as the aloe juice itched them to the marrow. To put paid on the boys' humiliation the two girls later reported them to their parents for mistreating them, an incident that led to them being flogged thoroughly. The result is that they never ever dared scare the girls again. Suffice to say, some of these boys became Julia's best friends until their recent demise.

Apart from such instances as the one above, part of their adventure as a brood of siblings included trapping and eating insects such as termites. But in the process, they would always ensure that they avoided not-so-friendly insects such as mosquitoes, Tse tse flies, praying mantis and other animals such as snakes, snails and slugs. While in the wild they learnt how to set traps to catch rabbits and squirrels which they would use for stew. However, this never augured well with their neighbors who called them pigs for going against their traditions. For a very long time, longer than anyone could remember their community had been against the practice of eating bush meat and chicken. Strange as it may sound, this rule only applied to girls yet Julia and her siblings deliberately went against this rule. In fact, they broke so many taboos, and quite often totems too, that the villagers were enraged!

Remember, Julia and her sisters had not undergone the Samia initiation ritual of extracting the six

lower teeth as custom demanded. So with their teeth intact and with the habit of eating chicken, the villagers thought that these were wild women! As if that was not enough, nobody ate squirrel meat but being naughty children they found so much fun in chasing rabbits and squirrels which were so many in the area. As part of their escapades they would ensnare one and eat it to the chagrin of the community! They faced so much ridicule that villagers said that they would never be married. They would be sneered at and people would often say, "Look at them, they will remain barren!"

In this respect, at first Julia and her siblings were seen as young women who openly ridiculed their customs, thus they were categorized as girls who would never fetch dowry since they were doing things that were anti-cultural. Yet eventually the villagers appreciated what this family was attempting to do when their not being initiated into adulthood saw them finish school and get employment rather than getting married at a very tender age. But then that is how in many patriarchal societies the women used to be scared from eating good and nutritional foods. Therefore Julia and her siblings grew up into very strong and healthy children that ran to and from school. According to Julia, they were called all kinds of names and of course their parents stood in a very bad position for encouraging that kind of thing. Her father and mother were not very popular for encouraging women to grow up with free spirits. This greatly surprised those people who had foretold the Majale daughters' doom. Instead of perishing they were thriving in good health! Thus when the villagers saw their efforts bear fruits as they saw a healthy family in the face of child malnutrition that was prevalent in the area, they gradually began to emulate them. In fact, the children turned out to be such balanced children, that many women would bring their girls to live with Julia's family so as to be trained by their mother, Tesera, to become equally good women. In turn, Julia and her siblings became their role models.

#### 4. SIPPING FROM THE CUP OF KNOWLEDGE

Julia's parents' orientation with Christianity and the outer world exposed them to education. This in turn ensured that they gave all their children equal opportunities to go to school. Saulo had started a village play group - an equivalent of this day's pre-school- because he saw a future that would necessitate possession of this. Following this, he kept its doors open not only to his children and those of the

Congregation but also to any children in their village whose parents wished allowed them to attend the school. So Saulo and Tesera had a playgroup at their homestead that catered for the early educational needs of any interested children from Kadimbworo were welcomed to go through. After mastery of basic learning skills like reading and writing the children were promoted to primary school, which was also established by Saulo as an extension of the playgroup. Therefore, Julia and all her siblings went through their father and mother's playgroup and primary school set up in their mission station. At first, the children would scribble in the dust on the grounds of the school compound before graduating to write on slates.

The primary school that Julia attended, the current Sigalame Primary School to be precise, was a mixed school and the children came from all over the village. Just like the other children Julia and her siblings were part of the pack and when they left their household to go to school they joined the masses just like the other kids. They were therefore never given any preferential treatment. Like it was customary in many rural schools at that time they did chores not only at home but also at school. They were sent to fetch water, and told to clean the floors. If they didn't meet any of these requirements they had to face the wrath of the teachers who probably thought that the Majales felt they were special children.

The playgroup and primary school went only up to class six after which the children had to go through elementary examinations. However the girls could not even sit examinations in their Samia area, as there was no school catering for girls' education at this level in their area. Therefore, young girls had to go to Butere Intermediate School, which was the nearest girls' school, albeit for Europeans. This school was almost fifty miles away from home and they had to walk there, as there were no buses, in order for them to go sit that examination. Imagine several age groups of eight year olds and nine year olds walking extremely long distances to go sit an examination. They would carry little wooden boxes with food. They carried traditionally cured food wrapped in banana leaves on this journey. Such food included dried meat and dried fish eggs locally known as *Amachee*. The fish eggs would be sun-dried, then wrapped in banana leaves following which they would be put in hot ash to bake as there were no ovens at that time. This would then form a very good accompaniment to carbohydrate meals.

Julia and her sister Rosa were the only girls in their area who attempted to enroll in another institution to further their education beyond class four. This is because there were no schools to cater for the African girls' educational needs beyond the basic primary four. The two girls therefore became the first females to dare break that trend and even so they were forced to seek it in Butere. The other family nearest to them that had girls going to school was the late Canon Awori's. Not only was he a dear friend to Saulo, but his family has produced prominent personalities, including his daughter Mary Okello who is the proprietor of Makini Schools, and Moody Awori, Kenya's former vice President and Julia's former political opponent for the Funyula parliamentary seat. Although they were originally from Bukhayo<sup>3</sup>, which was far away

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<sup>3</sup> Bukhayo is part of the larger Western province that is home to the Luhya people. The Bakhayo culture is almost similar to that of the Samia.



from their area, they lived in Eulumwoyo village in Samia North during those early days when there was no road transport.

It is true that hearsay can be deceiving but history hardly ever lies. As a young girl Julia had been very enthusiastic about schooling. She had role models in the form of her five siblings who had already gone through schooling. However, Julia says that if she was told to walk the fifty miles again she doubts she could do it now. This is because the children always arrived with blisters on their bleeding feet, crying from the excruciating pain. But then Julia had this urge inside her, pushing her to be like her sister Ruth. Her parents ensured that none of their children ever gave up learning.

Their evenings at home would be spent in the company of their parents who would switch on the radio so that they would listen to the News. Saulo also narrated to his children about his experiences when he lived in Nairobi, and Addis Ababa. The two parents would then inspire their children to get educated by telling them about other mission schools where girls were also going to school. In return, their daughters felt that they needed to be like the other girls receiving education. In addition, Julia had always hoped to walk in the footsteps of her cousin Mike Majale who had gone to Makerere to pursue medicine. He later became the first orthopedic surgeon in Kenya. She remembers how her cousin Mike and her brother David would talk about titrations and mathematical tables. This never failed to captivate her.

Consequently, like the other children who had gone before her, Julia embarked on a journey at the age of eleven years old. This journey, unknown to her, would change her life for good. In the

company of her sister Rosa the two girls went to Butere Intermediate School to sit the Common Entrance Examination, CEE in 1947, an examination that would determine if a student who wished to proceed to an intermediate school after class six was fit to enroll into the program. The parents at home informed their fellow Christians before their children's departure that the children were on their way. Their parents relayed a message to Rangala, which although a Catholic Church, had someone to offer the children water in a plastic can to drink, as well as potatoes and bananas so that they could get the energy that kept them walking. Upon reaching Simenya they were offered somewhere to sleep, and then given porridge and a potato each to eat early the next morning. Because they were very young, a man or woman walked with them to Mudhiero Mission Station where they would again be given food and someone else would walk with them to Butere. After sitting the CEE, Julia and Rosa became the only girls who qualified from their lot, and in 1948 they enrolled in Butere Intermediate School.

In fact, her two year stay at Butere became her first exposure with equally ambitious girls outside her home area. Among them was Hon. Grace Onyango who was the head girl. Grace was a tall, clean and meticulous girl who always allowed Julia to jump into her warm and clean bed whenever it was too cold for the small girl from Samia. Grace, in 1984 became one of a handful of female members of parliament in Kenya. She was later to serve as a Assistant Minister in the cabinet of former president Daniel Arap Moi.

Being a quick learner, Julia was able to go through school very fast by skipping some classes although the transition from home to Butere was torturous especially since she was very young. While at Butere Intermediate School, she was appointed prefect and learnt to be a leader. She was

also drafted into a team of that was translating the Bible into Luhya<sup>4</sup> language. When in 1950 she sat the Kenya African Preliminary Examination, she hoped that the end would be far away as she really wanted to go to high school.

While still at Butere, Julia specialized in home cookery and needlework. She excelled in them as she was very passionate about them. Upon her admission to Alliance she chose to follow the same trend. She opted to do Home Science, Chemistry and Biology. This is because food science and biochemistry are inseparable.

Initially, high schools for African girls were not an integral part of the Kenyan education system. There was of course the Kenya High School, which was for Europeans only, as well as Loreto Convent School that catered for both Europeans and Indians. The African girls who had gone to high schools before were from the Kikuyu area and they had gone through Alliance Boys' High School. This is because Alliance Boys' then opened through the church of Torch opened doors to the girls from the Church of Torch. Thus Margaret Kenyatta, a former mayor of the city of Nairobi and Joan Gitau, a prominent educationist became some of the first African women to go through a high school.

So by the time Julia was through with Butere Intermediate School, the government for the first time had been in the process of setting up the first African Girls' High School at Kikuyu, the current Alliance Girls, for girls who had excelled. During Julia's school days they had to wait one year for the examination results to be announced as they were marked in Britain. So when the results were finally out in 1950, eight girls from eight provinces all over Kenya were selected as

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<sup>4</sup> The Luhya are found in Western Kenya and they are part of the larger Bantu group that is found in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa.

the first beneficiaries of the African Girls High School pilot project. Thus they were to start the first form one class at the African Girls' High School. When news broke out that for the first time in the history of Kenya girls were to be admitted to a girls' school for Africans the people were ecstatic. "Who were these girls who had excelled?" This was the question asked by many Kenyans. The news spread like fire in the bush that eight girls had been selected as the first batch of students to be admitted at Alliance Girls High School, and then known as The African Girls School, headed by Carey Francis who was coincidentally a man. Thus these girls found themselves in the limelight almost overnight, with many people wondering how they had managed to do it; it was simply phenomenal. Together with Julia were seven other girls from other parts of the country namely: Eddah Gachukia, an acclaimed professor and academician; Winnifred Wanyoike, the first Africa state trained nurse and the first to qualify to Kenyatta National Hospital; Charity Kamaga Wairimu Wamuyu, the first chief of Nairobi Municipal Education Department. The others are Grace Aketch Aluoch Odhiambo, Margaret Muhombe Alividza, Lois Muthoni Waruhiu, and Sarah Lukalo. This was a special group of girls who had set permanent high academic goals and standards for countless others who later would come to this school.

The whole nation knew about Julia and the other seven girls because their success accorded them a lot of publicity. Everybody talked about this school that had finally given "the daughters of the soil" an excellent opportunity to flaunt their academic prowess. Despite its almost negligible number compared to the entire Kenyan population, eight was nevertheless synonymous to the big dreams and hopes harbored by the disillusioned Africans. Thus it was like a thousand girls had been granted the opportunity to go to secondary school. Now the girls would be able to compete, with boys in such schools like Maseno High School, Alliance Boys High School, Mangu School,

and Kakamega High School!

To make things even better for the eight girls, they were awarded African District Council Bursaries to encourage them to go to school. This is because their parents probably wouldn't have afforded to pay school fees. In Julia's case, as soon as the news about her admission to Alliance broke out she received guests of her own. The first was Jaramogi Oginga Odinga the African Development Council (ADC) chairman Nyanza, who visited her at their home in Kadimbworo with the ADC bursary after her exemplary performance. This visit was then followed by that of The North Kavirondo- Kakamega head, also offering Julia another bursary. But this was not the end of her recognition as other people who admired Julia's excellent performance visited her and brought her eggs, or even bouquets of flowers. Others also prayed for her to encourage her.

Julia's acceptance into a girls' high school changed the people's attitudes towards girl child education. While Julia was still at Butere, people in her village thought that Julia and her sisters passed examinations simply out of favoritism because their father and mother were well known individuals. The effect of this was that it took time for the other girls to believe in their ability to pass examinations. They had the mentality that only boys could pass examinations. With Julia's excellent performance, the girls' education began to pick up among the Samia. Some torturous customary practices like the forceful removal of the six lower teeth began to be discouraged. Another phenomenal change unexpectedly came with this desire for education. Girls began to be like the Majale children who did not undergo this ritual.

Furthermore, the girls also discovered that eating eggs was actually good for their health, a factor

that prompted them to start looking at their physical health and focusing on something else apart from getting married. Previously, girls would get married, sometimes to very old men at very tender ages of even six years, as long as their lower teeth had been extracted. Luckily though, the response by the community was very positive as they saw that what the church had been advocating for was giving their children opportunities to make their lives better. The people began to see that some of the stereotypes pertaining to girls were untrue and that in fact many customs disadvantaged women in the society. They now saw that it was important to allow girls to concentrate on their studies. Girls could make it in life. The Majale daughters were a living proof.

Although the prospect of leaving home was difficult, her parents who were very strong-spirited people encouraged Julia. While at Butere mission station the young Julia had been taught to be resilient. She had also been taught good social and spiritual values. At Butere she had been an outstanding character and the surrounding community was awed by what she had already achieved. This automatically put her in a different stratum in the society. This factor gave her the strength that would keep her moving in the face of adverse situation in the future.

In Butere, Julia and the other girls had been told that Butere was simply a platform for better things to come. So, when towards the end of her intermediate education they were told that a new school was being opened exclusively for girls Julia made herself a promise not to miss out on that golden opportunity. With all these preparation and counseling, Julia was somewhat prepared for the next phase of her life. Nevertheless, as part of their orientation the girls were told how far away from their home the new school was, thus they were counseled on how to cope with the new life including how to get into the train and off it.

Julia's first journey by train was one worth remembering. When the day for departure finally arrived, Julia's parents took her to Kisumu to board the train. The compartments in the trains were not like the current ones. They were door less buggies, which were basically luggage compartments and animal buggies. The travelers had to squat in there as there were no seats. This did not really shock Julia. Instead of squatting she decided to stand up and constantly strained to see all the exciting but strange things going on around her. She wondered what time they would reach. This was occasioned by the fact that it was uncomfortable to sit in the cramped up space in the buggy. Julia also realized that grabbing any sleep was not very easy because of not only the lack of seats but also because of the noise the train made as it went up and down the hills and the valleys. The train wound its way to various railway stations so that its engine could be stocked with firewood. Since they were not allowed outside, her head would be craned out of the window to see how the wood fuel was stocked into the steam engine. Then she would hear the now familiar sound *tut u tut u cha cha cha* as the train finally pulled away to continue with the journey.

She vividly remembers the Kisumu railway station master giving her some food, then relaying a message to the one at Kedowa about her, so that when the train pulled up at Kedowa the station master was waiting for her with some tea, *Chapatis* and boiled meat, which she took gratefully before going back to the train. As the journey progressed, Julia began to learn how to be comfortable. After eating her meal she put her head down in an attempt to sleep amid this madness. After a long struggle she finally dozed off, and would drift so deep into slumber land that even the loud noise would not hamper the long sought after bliss of rest. As the journey progressed even the adventure that daytime offered could not be compared with her desire for sleep. So when night fell she would catch some sleep amid the annoying sound of the train as it crawled along the

metal tracks, *tut u tut u cha cha cha* that had now become a distant droning in her ears.

But as she slowly became acquainted with the atmosphere in the train her anxiety slowly diminished. So by the time she woke up again, they were at Kijabe. Finally, when the train arrived at Kikuyu there was another station master Mabula, a very wonderful man who woke Julia and her fellow students up, got them off the train and give them some breakfast before they walked to the school. Mabula did this even in other consequent train journeys they were to make over the years. If Mabula had not done this they would have gotten lost, as they could have easily slept all the way to Nairobi. Therefore the youngsters heavily relied on the goodness of the society that understood that these were naive girls and boys traveling on their own to a destination far from their home. Furthermore the boys on the train had also been told that there would be young girls traveling with them, and were requested to take care of them. This they did like they would their own sisters. As Julia narrates, “They were real brothers from home to Kikuyu as they were courteous and carried our luggage from the railway station up to Alliance.”

Although it was a very great opportunity for Julia, at first she did not like Kikuyu and Alliance. The Kikuyu area was very cold and the students did not have the luxury of boiled water. Considering the circumstances behind the school’s establishment, luxuries like warm water for bathing and good food were at the bottom of the list of the school’s priorities. They slept on mattresses made of cut and dried grass packed in calico cloth and it was very uncomfortable as the grass pierced through the cloth grazing their skins, sometimes to the point of bleeding.

The food was also terrible as sometimes Julia and her fellow schoolmates ate half-cooked maize



and beans. The firewood was often wet. A tree would be cut and immediately used as firewood. Because it was wet, sometimes it would fail to light. As a result, warm water would be instead used to soak raw maize and beans so that by lunchtime the children would have something to eat. Breakfast was usually porridge and sometimes it would just be flour mixed with cold water and when poured into a plate the flour would separate from water. With the fear of disappointing those who had believed in them so strongly, they had no alternative but to persevere the hardship and work extremely hard to succeed.

Julia and her school mates found themselves in constant interaction with boys from the Alliance Boys High School as they practically had to share facilities such as laboratories considering the boys' school had four fully equipped laboratories for Chemistry, Biology and Physics experimental work. In addition, the school curriculum also catered for the extra-curricular activities such as sports, thus the students also met through sporting activities and over the weekends when they had some free time. Like most brother/sister schools the girls cheered Alliance Boys during school competitions with other neighboring schools such as Mang'u High School. And needless to say, the boys exercised their protectiveness over the girls to the extent of keeping vigil at night at the girls' school especially when the Mau Mau war reached its peak.

During school holidays the high school students from various parts of the Western region would meet for different activities in order to keep in touch with their contemporaries and to encourage one another. When she first attended such an event, Julia was a student in form one whereas the others were at various levels of their high school education. So when they met they would organize social events such as debates, singing contests, dances, and how to play musical instruments. They

would also revise their school work. They also organized various contests which Julia never wanted to fail at. On several occasions she excelled in the Mathematics contest. Julia's parents would encourage her to go for holiday tuition so as to perform better in her weaker subjects and in such forums those who performed better in a particular subject would teach the others.

Hillary Ng'weno and Hillary Ojiambo were their mentors because they were way ahead of the others and they had also performed brilliantly in their Cambridge School Certificate Examinations. The rest of the students tried to keep in touch with these two brilliant scholars because while Hillary Ng'weno was awarded an admission to the prestigious Harvard University, Hillary Ojiambo was awarded a scholarship to Makerere University to study medicine, which he joined in 1951.

## 5. IN THE FACE OF WAR

The first students of Alliance including Julia were in the middle of the struggle for independence. This is due to the unfortunate fact that the war was concentrated in this Alliance-Kikuyu area. At that time Julia was a school prefect and a house prefect of Watson House. As a school prefect she found herself under extreme pressure, as she had to protect her charges at night in the cold, because the colonial government could not offer them any special protection. Besides, since this scenario had not been anticipated it was not planned for in advance. To add on that, if any special consideration was to be given to anyone, then it would automatically be granted the white settlers, as it was they who were purportedly at risk of annihilation. The vulnerable people like Julia and the other students who were supposed to be protected suffered. Thus the students together with their colleagues from the Alliance Boys' School became their own guards at night. They filled empty sacks with sand, which they threw around the school fence to form a barrier so that bullets wouldn't pass through. When night fell, they would take turns sleeping outside with their heads on the sand, *pangas* firmly held in their hands as they guarded their dormitories. Come day, the same students had to go to class.

In October 1952 Mzee Jomo Kenyatta was finally arrested after a long period of tussle with the colonial regime soldiers. The whole school was in a state of shock as the school fraternity had been avidly following the progress concerning the struggle for independence. Julia says, "Although still young, we were able to understand what the arrest of Kenyatta alongside the other freedom fighters meant for us. It was a dangerous period for all of us." The atmosphere got so tense that there seemed to be a hunger for blood everywhere. Julia was scared by the gunshots incessantly

flying everywhere, and their safe haven was not spared either. The fighting became almost unbearable; one could hear girls screaming out of fear. At this point, there was hardly any learning taking place, rather a pretense of it.

Basing on the kind of picture the British soldiers had painted of the Mau Mau, Julia wondered who they needed to protect themselves from, the Mau Mau or the British soldiers, who claimed to defend their people. All she knew was that they had to protect themselves. Julia was at pains to explain that

“Women were raped and killed in tens of thousands but interestingly do you know that when people talk about the freedom struggle women are hardly mentioned? There are very few women's experiences narrated to document the suffering. I talked to one of the ‘Mama Uhurus’ and she told me how these soldiers really abused them. They were raped and bottles were warmed and inserted in them as punishment for their men yet even after this they still couldn’t divulge information about their men.”

Thus to lend a helping hand to the victims of the struggle the students of Alliance Girls High School played a very key role in the founding of Dagoretti Children’s Home to cater for bereaved and the abandoned children. After an ambush, the girls who had enrolled in the Kenya Red Cross and St. Johns Ambulance Brigade at the school used to go round their neighborhood when the shootings had subsided to see if any children had been left around with nobody to take care of them. Julia recalls, “Sometimes we would find the mama dead and the baby still suckling, so one would just pick the baby and take it to the children’s home. I still can't get some of those disturbing images out of my head.”

When the colonial regime saw that their efforts to curtail the activities of the Mau Mau were bearing no fruit it went into a fit of rage. So one day in the wee hours of the morning the colonial government soldiers barged into the Alliance Girls' School compound armed to their teeth for a battle. This is because they thought that the Mau Mau had sought refuge in the midst of their fellow blacks. In an instant the whole school was thrown into disarray. There were students running everywhere screaming and teachers seeking refuge in their houses. Since the war had now spilled into the school compound the girls were loaded into army Lorries at night and taken to Machakos Hills and dumped into camps while the soldiers took over their school compound.

All these events were took place when Julia was in form two. At this time the girls in the school totaled about fifty because they had been joined by form one students. They were all still glorying in the thought that the country was looking up at them as the first batch of African women to be taken through a girls' high school. Indeed, they had to grow up very fast. They stayed in the Machakos Hills' camp for six months. Life had to go on. They had to attend classes and live through life in the hills. It was a very difficult time for all the young girls. They had to survive and they knew that only the fittest would survive. They would listen to the radio to hear what was happening thus they were determined to complete their studies and join the other Africans in the struggle for independence. Even though they were sick more often than not, none of them died. Forced by circumstances to grow up almost instantly Julia observes, "We had to act like mothers to each other all the time. The girl guides took over the role of taking care of the others." Being a class or dormitory prefect also meant added responsibility.

Learning and living in Machakos Hills was very difficult and uncomfortable. The terrain was

rocky, the temperatures biting cold, and the water salty. The winds in Machakos were dreadful at night.

“We didn’t have adequate clothing as the schools had not prepared us for that, and walking on those sides of the hills was hard. If you fell ill, it was horrible. You could not cry or complain as everyone was suffering. The food was horrible; the maize was cooked in salty water and it was not well done. It was simply immersed in hot salty water and we had to chew it raw.”

Although the quality of food back At Alliance was not better, the Machakos Hills experience made it appear worse. This is because back in their school environment whenever Julia and her fellow students did not like the food given to them, they would jump over the fence in order to buy bread from the famous Mai A lhe Bakery. Despite being a mud and timber structure in which, according to Julia, the sweetest bread she has since tasted was baked. But in the hills there was nothing like that, so they only had to grudgingly eat the raw maize and beans.

Julia believes that somehow God gives extra shock absorbers to people in difficult circumstances. Drinking that salty water made them diarrhea. As if that was not enough, Julia was bitten by a snake, an incident she chooses to describe as a taste of fire. As she recounts,

“On this fateful Sunday morning I had been left at the school as everyone went to church as I was so weak to even walk because of the diarrhea. So I slept out there in the grass and to my horror, I felt a very sharp sting only to realize that a snake had come and bit my leg. I really hollered and I remember my leg was in so much pain. Only by the grace of God did I survive that snake bite.”

However, she and the others survived.

The Machakos Hills experience taught Julia various lessons, among them, the need to be to be

patriotic to one's nation. She admits that the reason for the people fighting was for them to be able to live and see the next day. They also fought because they wanted leadership and to be a leader they believed that one had to stand at the front, fight and die for the others. She also discovered that they needed to work as a team to be able to win that war regardless whether one was a man or a woman.

During those tough times various women acted as Julia's role models and her source of inspiration. One of them is Field Marshal Muthoni. Of course, at that time Julia did not know who Muthoni really was. She would simply hear about her from the people around her and that made Julia so proud of her that later on in life she decided to seek her out. Currently they are very good friends. She came to learn that Muthoni the Field Marshall actually fought from the frontline. Another group of women that really inspired Julia were the carrier corps. These ones carried the tools of war but also sought and brought messages, food and ammunition to the fighters. They were the sly agents who went to and from one Mau Mau hideout. They were the sly agents who went to and from one Mau Mau hideout. They carried the food and ammunition in their baskets while pretending to be mere farmers or market women carrying foodstuffs in the baskets on their backs. Unlike men who just stayed in the frontlines to fight, these women merged roles: At home they were the heads of the family and watchmen over the properties but in war they supplied ammunition and food. If anything, the women suffered more as they had multiple roles to play. Julia is sad that even though women played a big role in the independence struggle, when the role of honour is called out, it is the men who are often mentioned as the heroes of the struggle.

When the political fever subsided the students were taken back to the African Girls' High School

in the late 1952 to resume their studies. It was necessary that they go back as they had to prepare to sit the Kenya Junior Secondary School Examination, in order to proceed and sit the Cambridge School Certificate exams after the four years of secondary school education. After settling down in their old environment, it seemed like almost everything went back to normal. However, the girls had gone through a lot. They had witnessed people die in large numbers, they had seen children separated from their mothers, and they had seen babies suckling from the emaciated teats of dead mothers. They had also learnt to fend for themselves in very difficult circumstances. All these experiences would never be erased from their minds. However to give the school some credit, the mentors of the young minds tried to return a degree of normalcy to the school atmosphere. Julia especially sings praises of one of her teachers, Joan Gitau, who she refers to as her favorite teacher. She describes her as the kind of teacher that every parent would wish to have for their children. This is because she was passionate, hardworking and God fearing. With her encouragement the girls were determined to give the Boys' schools a challenge and prove that they too could earn the respect accorded to boys' schools. Julia reiterates that teacher Joan made her want to do as well as the boys or even better. Although the boys had started earlier there was no way that they were going to accept to play second fiddle to Alliance Boys' High School across the river, or even to Mang'u High School, the school of her future husband Hillary.

The same year that the students went to back to Kikuyu, Princess Elizabeth who is now the queen of England visited the British protectorates. Among them was the Kenya colony. Julia was among the girl guides who went to The State House in Nairobi to welcome and entertain the princess. As Julia recalls, "We wore clean white socks, little navy blue dresses and gloves. We formed a guard of honor for the ever-smiling princess' inspection and later she left to have fun at the world's



famous tourist attraction site, The Treetops.” It was while here that the world greeted her with the news of the departed father King George VI whose death signaled the princess’ ascent to the status of Queen to the throne of England.

After these series of events Julia proceeded to form three but unknown to them, the struggle for independence had more tricks up its sleeves for the young students. Early one morning in March 1953, Julia and her entire school fraternity woke up to terrible news. As she recalls, some teachers had learnt from the community around the school about the horrible killings in the Limuru area, an incidence that would later on be called the Lari Massacre. Upon visiting the site, they were confronted by a very disturbing sight of babies pierced in the upper part of their bodies with sticks, and it is still a very horrible memory in her mind.

As a result, the women played their role in the search for independence, just like the men played theirs. Thus Julia realized that to play that role one needed skills, which would come through education. She remembers being regularly reminded while still at school that they were to be the leaders of tomorrow as the common phrase *Freedom is coming and you are going to be the leaders when the British go away*. They really believed in this pep phrase. Today such a phrase would make little sense to students but in Julia’s school days they knew that these words were very significant. Julia elaborates, “We were very sincere and focused to the extent that talks about strikes were never heard. Ours was determination to excel in exams and be the leaders of tomorrow.”

Having experienced what the journey to freedom demanded of those who are in search of its

almost elusive fantasy, the young girls of whom Julia was among struggled to revise for the final test of the secondary school examinations, the Cambridge School Certificate examinations. Although their lives were never to be the same again, the girls successfully completed their secondary school education in 1954. The young Julia was by then a mere 17 years old.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **PART TWO**

#### **HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORK EXPERIENCE**

##### **1. THE MAKING OF A NUTRITIONIST**

Towards the end of 1954 Kenya was planning for the establishment of university programs in the new University of Nairobi that had been upgraded from the status of a college. Therefore, a team of experts went round different schools interviewing the students to get their opinions concerning the type of courses they would like to pursue based on their interests. This was just before Julia finished form four. At this time, a number of students were exhibiting an interest in Home Science, a course that had not yet been introduced in Kenyan colleges. In fact, the country was still adjusting itself to the concept of women being educated beyond the level of primary education, which is if they were even lucky to get that far. As there were very few African schools for Africans in Kenya at that time, Alliance Girls High School, Loreto Convent Girls School, Limuru, and the Kenya High School therefore provided the catchment areas for prospective students in Home Science in the Royal Technical College, which was just taking root in Kenya.

After Julia completed her secondary school education she was appointed to be an untrained teacher at Friends School Kamusinga before the results were released. According to the examination regulations students had to wait for one year as the Examinations were being marked. Since she had excelled in biology at Alliance High school the Ministry of Education posted her to Friends School Kamusinga in Western Province to teach it to the form four students. She was also

expected to teach Agriculture in the school. This golden opportunity arose when the United States Agency for International Development, USAID decided to introduce agricultural studies in secondary schools in Kenya for experimental agriculture. One of the pilot projects was established at Friends School Kamusinga in Western province. Despite being a very petite and young woman, she was expected to teach form four boys who were so huge. Besides, the benches in the labs, which were so high, made it hard for Julia to reach the apparatus as she conducted experiments. Nevertheless the students would always give her a stool to kneel on. She would be elevated while titrating, as the boys laughed at the funny picture of their teacher standing on a stool. Fortunately her experiments never failed. She also supervised the students' agricultural projects very well. At the end of the day the students respected her as it became obvious to them that she had mastered the content and her teaching skills were amazing. When she set 6 am as the time to be in the farm, they would all be there with their hoes before she even arrived at the meeting place. Many of those who went through her class became scientists.

When the officials in the Ministry of Education saw that Julia's teaching skills were very impressive she was then dispatched to Vihiga Teachers College to participate in a program aimed at upgrading teachers from P4 to P3. This was because of her excellent communication and demonstration skills. Although not formally trained, Julia had in-born teaching skills. Thus she was expected to teach Biology, Needlework, Cookery, Foundations of Education and Teaching to P4 teachers thus helped to upgrade teachers from p4 to P3. Although Vihiga was quite far from Kadimbworo, Julia thought it wiser to commute from her parents' home to school as she did not want them to worry so much about her staying alone in a new environment. Therefore, she had to cycle the long distance to school. Waking up at dawn, she would prepare breakfast for her parents,

jump onto the bicycle and “eat” the distance between home and school “like candy.” After classes at four she would grab the bicycle again, and peddle very hard to get back home in time. She would be doomed if and when it rained, as she would be forced to carry her bicycle on her shoulders back home. By the end of this exercise, Julia’s endurance levels had matured to such an impressive level and in future she would not be easily worn out by the strenuous campaign activities. Among the students she taught are Grace Anyango, a daring woman with a very sharp wit who later became the first female mayor in Kenya and consequently the first female elected MP in Kenya. The other remarkable woman is late Bilha Wandera, who later became a senior social worker in charge of rehabilitation centers of the disabled persons in the Ministry of Social Services. Mrs. Wandera was also the head officer in the crucial Harambee program that was presided over by the retired president Moi, which saw the establishment of the National Fund for the Disabled.

Finally the results were announced and as it emerged, Julia had excelled with a second division in Needlework and Cookery. Following this Julia was granted an opportunity to study at Makerere University, but when she heard that Home Science was to be offered as a Diploma course at the Royal Technical College she opted for the latter. Julia says that she opted to remain behind and go to the Royal Technical College because there she would have the opportunity of pursuing what she loved the most. This is because she saw Home Science as a big opportunity for her to explore the potential in an area where her passion lay. She had seen her mother who was one of her role model excel in this field and she knew it had great opportunities for those who pursued it.

Having tasted the fruits of education, Julia developed the urge to get more experience. The two

stations she had worked in as an untrained teacher had exposed her to the different sides of education and she was now firmly assured that Home Science was what she wanted to study. Julia was exposed to the dynamics of Home Economics in its raw nature and this is what influenced her choice of nutrition as a course to study in college. On 26<sup>th</sup> April 1956, Julia joined the Royal Technical College becoming the first African female student to be admitted at the college. She was however the second female student at the college after Shada Sharma, an Asian student who had enrolled to undertake a degree in architecture. Together they became the first female students to set foot in the Gandhi wing of the now University of Nairobi. Incidentally, the following year would see her future husband, Hillary, graduate to be a medical doctor with a degree in medicine and another degree in surgery.

When she arrived at the Royal Technical College, Julia discovered that the new department was just being established and had only been given a room to set up its new working area. So being the first student naturally it was only Julia and the teachers: A Briton called Eva Rickets and two Australian teachers. Since she was the only student, her would-be teachers sent her to go and buy a pail, a duster, and a broom that she got from a shop along the Biashara Street. Thereafter she came back to school do all the cleaning alone. The following day was also a bee-hive of activity that saw the purchase of a sewing machine and material with which she and the teachers sewed an apron, which was then given to her. So officially, the new Department of Home Science was launched in its own unique way. A few days later a cooker and a fridge were bought at an Electronic shop from Muindi Mbingu Street. It was towards the end of the week, that two rooms were set up: one room with a cooker and a fridge for the foods and nutrition course, and the other room with a sewing machine for the clothing and textiles course. The Department of Home Science had to work

closely with other faculties since they relied on their laboratories. Despite starting small, Julia is so proud that she was the first in her department and has therefore seen Home Science in this country develop from the cradle.

It is during her first year at the Royal Technical College, that Julia received a letter from Hillary inviting her sister Rosa and her to attend his graduation ceremony in Uganda. The two women traveled at night by bus from Busia to Kampala and stayed with their friends Salome Mayanja and Joyce Masembe in Gayanza Girls' High School. They really wanted to witness the joyous occasion because Hillary had won a number of accolades including the best medical student award and the May and Baker award. On his graduation, an occasion that Julia remembers vividly, Hillary was awarded a distinction in Internal Medicine and a prize in Pharmacology and Therapeutics. In the evening after his graduation they all went for an evening party and they participated in a ballroom dance hosted in honor of the new graduates.

The two girls were really excited to have been invited to have been invited to attend the dance thus they felt that they had to spruce up their images. They took the money that they had been saving in order to buy nylon material and to pay a tailor who made their dresses. Julia was very keen about her appearance. She wanted to stand out from the crowd as usual. She wanted Hillary to really be proud of her. She wore a trendy ballroom dress and Hillary indeed was taken in by her elegance. He danced with her the whole evening. The party was a fairly new experience to Julia who was not a party-girl, thus it became a sort of adventure. But most importantly, it is during this party that Julia and Hillary advanced their friendship to such a tight union that would provide a strong foundation for their courtship and subsequent marriage. Later on Dr. Hillary Peter Ojiambo was

posted to King George the Sixth Hospital in Uganda for his internship. After working in Uganda for a brief period Hillary was transferred to Kiambu District Hospital on a two-year internship program. Following his completion of the internship program, he joined Makerere University's Department of Medicine as an assistant lecturer.

Hillary's advancement in scholarship and in his profession greatly excited Julia. She was proud to be excited by him. He excelled in the world of scholarship, becoming the first black African Cardiologist in Kenya and the second in Africa. Indeed when people in Samia speak of Hillary it is in glowing terms. His academic history is worth emulating. He inspired many parents from Samia where he hailed from to take their children to school. He motivated them to send their children to school not only to read, but also to achieve higher credentials and to excel.

Meanwhile, Kenyans were increasingly getting tired of being slaves in their own country. They desperately wanted to be independent. Racial segregation was at its peak particularly in Nairobi; Julia saw it conducted without any discretion. It wasn't out of the ordinary to see notices in entrances to social places reading, *Management reserves the right of admission, Africans and dogs prohibited*. This classification of Africans together with dogs deeply agitated the Africans. They were so angry that they could not wait to kick the white people out of their "God given land." As this was going on women were being increasingly recruited in the Mau Mau movement struggles. Young scholars like Julia were also eager to play a role in the struggle and become involved in the operations.

The nationalists like Tom Mboya and James Gichuru among others the adopted the strategy of



using university students like Julia as porters to ferry coded messages. This is because students were free to move with least suspicion. If for instance, Tom Mboya wanted to dispatch a message to Kaloleni, which was then the Nairobi area hub of the struggle, a girl would be called from the University College to carry out the task. Thus a seemingly harmless young woman in a little red college gown would make her way past police check points and go on to deliver whatever message was given to her. Therefore many of the college students became politically mature and aware of the obvious racial segregation that was all around them. They knew that they had no option but to be engaged in agitating for their freedom.

When Julia and her fellow students discovered that the Stanley Hotel would not serve Black Africans, all hell broke loose. They literally stormed the hotel premises as a protest against the management's decision to keep Africans out of this and other places branded exclusive for whites only. Armed with a little money, Julia and her fellow protestors went through the doors of the hotel, sat at tables and ordered tea. However, the waiters sought to ignore them. After a period of patient waiting they were ordered to vacate the premises. They obliged.

Aware they had to be more persistent in their quest, the students decided to be more persistent. They were not served at this time, too. It was then that they approached the politicians and the nationalists for advice. Following this they were given enough money that gave them a status almost equal to that of the white settlers. When they were again ignored, they decided to confront the management to intervene to have them served. Interestingly the waiters, despite being black, saw the students as a nuisance. They felt that they were a temporary disturbance to the traditional order of things thus they avoided them as the plague. Despite all this the students adamantly put

their feet down in a gesture of no retreat. With the stern expressions on the protestors' faces there was no alternative but for the hotel to give in and served them tea. On the surface it was a case of the Elephant conceding defeat to Hare, but underneath it laid a symbolic signifier of the coming victory against the colonial regime. All the Africans near the hotel applauded while the whites looked quizzically as the students basked with pride in their imminence success. Therefore, to gloat at the victory, the students took their precious time sipping tea, telling idle stories and chatting the time away. Finally they gracefully exited the hotel amid harsh stares from the patrons.

Not long after the Stanley Hotel saga, the British government sent Princess Margaret, who is Queen Elizabeth's sister, to Kenya to preside over the inauguration of the Royal Technical College as a full-fledged university. Being in the Home Science class Julia was among those who took part in welcoming the royal princess. So when Princess Margaret came to the opening ceremony, it was only natural that Julia would be the leading light in that activity. Julia had participated in similar events before, not only as a child under her mother's guidance, but also when Queen Elizabeth of England visited Kenya. During this visit, Julia as a girl guide had only played the role of a participant observer. However, this time round she was the hostess at the Royal Technical College.

Julia found the role of a hostess very involving, but she was able to put the skills taught her by her mother to use. As a child her mother had taught Julia that when visitors came, as a good hostess, she had to give them some water to drink and if possible a cup of tea. Tesera knew that before talking to visitors to put an idea across they had to be fed. Her mother always told her that one could not argue with a hungry person. Her mother showed Julia how to make drop scones, and how to bake cakes in a pot because there were no ovens during those days and how to feed and

entertain guests. Thus Julia knew from the word go how to interact with people and make them feel comfortable. She was thus allocated the responsibility of baking, icing and decorating the cake that Princess Margaret cut during the afternoon tea. Julia was also in charge of making the beautiful quilted patterned bedspread that was presented to the princess as a present prepared by the members of the department.

In 1958, Julia completed her studies and graduated with a Diploma in Home Economics from the Royal Technical College, Nairobi. In 1959 she went back to Friends School Kamusinga. She taught among others Japheth Lijoodi, who became the national treasurer of the ruling party the Kenya National African Union (KANU); Andrew Ligale, who became a cabinet minister; Chris Kirubi, the well-known industrialist; and the late Professor Kisilu, an ardent scholar. Later on she was posted to her former school Butere Girls' High School to teach her two favourite subjects: Biology and Home Science. She also had the rare opportunity to interact with Miss Mary Okelo who taught Art, who is also the owner of the Makini Schools, Lady Justice Effie Owuor, Lady Justice Joyce Aluoch, among other outstanding ladies in Kenya.

While at Butere, Julia had to live with her parents. Even though Butere was almost fifty kilometers from Kadimbworo, she never missed a day of teaching. The trips to Butere had their own thrills as well. As Julia elaborates,

“During this period I even encountered night runners in various degrees of nakedness at dawn, retreating to their homes. They would run across the paths and through clumps of trees holding flaring embers and other tools of trade. They were a mischievous bunch, these people. Some would even throw stones at me while partially hidden behind bushes by the roadside. The trees were also

homes for wild animals and I must admit that at times it was very scary.”

Julia now appreciates the experience she gained those few years at Butere. Although they were very demanding and challenging, they taught her a very important lesson, resilience, which came in handy during her later years.

However, tragedy struck when Julia’s father was diagnosed with cancer of the throat. In a rush of panic his family took him to various hospitals, only to have their hopes shattered with the doctors’ confirmation that the disease had greatly advanced. When the situation got worse, his family took him to King George (IV) hospital in Uganda, where Julia also went to take care of her loving father. While at the hospital Julia put all her efforts, knowledge and skills into practice by preparing her father highly nutritious foods to boost his immunity. Julia recalls one particularly agonizing time when she went to visit her father who told her to sit down and he told her, “Child I have nothing to offer you or leave behind but I tell you one thing, let the sky above you be the limit in your quest for knowledge.” He then requested her to go to Samia and summon her elder brother, David. Little did she know that this would be the last time she would see her father alive. Later on, like someone in a trance, Julia listened to her elder brother inform them that their beloved father Saulo Okello Majale’s soul had finally proceeded to glory. Her father’s death greatly devastated Julia. As she says,

“My greatest wish had been for my father to have lived a little bit longer to see how his children did well in their lives. My father played a great role in my life both as a father and as a spiritual leader. His passing left me so devastated that I developed a serious case of stomach ulcers. So during his burial ceremony I had to be ferried by an Ambulance to Butere Mission Hospital on a stretcher. As it were I had become so weak due to a bout of sickness that had attacked me after

losing one of my two mentors and best friends”

After the sad phase of mourning was over Hillary proposed marriage to Julia and she accepted. She accepted his proposal because she saw that Hillary was an amazing man. To date, Julia affirms that she has never regretted this decision. As she wanted to have an amazing wedding like that of her childhood dreams, Julia immediately started to prepare for the grand day. Julia decided to stop teaching so as to have ample time to prepare for the wedding. This was however not an easy decision, as it became evident during her fare well party. Although she was a great asset to Butere Girls High School, Julia also realized that she had to lose some battles to win others. She was therefore aware that it was mandatory that she leaves Butere as the next step in her life, becoming a wife and if possible a mother, would be a defining moment in her life.

On the anticipated day, the ceremony turned out to be very colorful and Julia was glad that she was marrying someone whom she deeply loved. The wedding ceremony was one of its own kinds and was dubbed ‘the wedding of the year.’ It was an interracial and international affair, with all creed and color represented. To begin with, the church service was presided over by a white reverend Peter Nicos. To make it even better, Julia ensured that her bridal party was consisted of a variety of nationalities. Her chief brides’ maid was Virginia de Silva originally from the Seychelles Island, who was her former classmate at the Royal Technical College. In addition, her second Brides Maid was Salome Mayanja. The latter was a Ugandan from Gayaza Girls High School in Kampala, Julia’s former teacher, colleague and friend whom she met through the exchange program between Butere and Gayanza Girls’ High Schools which were both under the patronage of the Anglican Church of Kenya between the years 1956-1961. The rest of the bridesmaids were Ugandan, Goan

and English. Her flower girls were also British and Africans-family, friends, and others from the Butere Community- children that she had grown fond of. The groom's party on the other hand also comprised people from different races with the best man being Sandru, a Goan. Thus the ceremony served the dual purpose of uniting the different races and creeds present in Kenya at the time and also tying her in holy matrimony to the love of her life, Hillary, after a courtship period of eight years.

The wedding dress was the show stopper. With the help of her friends from Butere Girls High School, Julia created a breath taking and very trendy lace gown which allowed all the people who attended the ceremony. Her husband said that it was the most beautiful gown that he had ever seen. It was befitting the most beautiful bride of the year. The ceremony was organized by the Royal Technical College Department of Home Science in conjunction with the United Kenya Club. This was a bonus for Julia's immense contribution in the nutrition department. It was also in recognition of her being one of the first graduates in the Department of Home Science. It was therefore in high spirits that Julia and Hillary began a new phase of her life. As Julia puts it, "I knew the future would be uncertain but together we would cross all the mountains together." That was in the year 1961.

At the time of her marriage, Julia's beloved husband Dr. Hillary Ojiambo was working in Uganda. Because she wanted to live with her husband she decided to move to Uganda. As she elaborates, "There was no way I was going to be left behind. Like Ruth in the Old Testament, I had long decided that wherever my husband went I too would follow as the good wife." Therefore, Julia packed her bags and left for Uganda. After settling down to a new status and environment she

began to look for new avenues of getting involved in the communities in which she lived. She wanted to be of help to humanity and finding out that many children in Uganda were suffering from malnutrition and other family health issues provided her with a niche to fulfill her desire. Coupled with her interest in the field of nutrition, she gladly volunteered to assist the researchers in this area. As a result, Julia collaborated with Professor Jelliffe and Dr. Ward of the Infantile Malnutrition Unit at Mulago Hospital.

Following this, the research team performed a series of experiments in developing and production of the biscuit from local foodstuff. Together they produced a groundnut-based protein rich biscuit for children afflicted with Kwashiorkor<sup>5</sup>, a nutritional disorder. The project turned out to be time and energy consuming, but nevertheless very fulfilling emotionally and intellectually. It is this project that was the inspiration behind her winning a United Nations/FAO/UNICEF Fellowship to study Community Nutrition in London University. Winning this fellowship gradually increased her interest in nutrition as she embarked on studies that eventually enabled her to attain a Bachelors Degree in this field. While still at Uganda she later on got a job at Mulago hospital attending to expectant mothers and advising them on how to take care of themselves and their unborn babies.

Unfortunately, Julia did not stay in Uganda for long. As it turned out her husband was granted the opportunity to pursue a post graduate medical training at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Though the news was great, Julia was confronted with the possibility of separating from her husband. Coincidentally however, she too won a fellowship to study Community Nutrition in London. This was to her a blessing in disguise. For a long time Hillary had been encouraging her

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<sup>5</sup> Kwashiorkor is a nutritional disorder caused by lack of proteins in the diet and body especially in children. The common symptoms are a protruding stomach, and generalized Oedema.

to further her studies, which had prompted her to apply for funding from various organizations to meet her tuition and upkeep.

Having foreseen extra expenses, Julia had initially applied for a Higher Education loan. Following this, her teacher and mentor Dr. Gikonyo Kiano had quickly helped to process the loan. One day she saw a convoy of several GK vehicles drive into her compound and she panicked, wondering if she had committed a felony. However when looked through her window she saw a familiar face and she relaxed, just a little bit. It was Kenneth Matiba, the Permanent Secretary to Ministry of Education. She remembered him, from their days at the Alliance High School. From what Julia had gotten wind of, he had married Edith Gitau, the younger sister to Julia's favorite teacher Joan Gitau. Julia was excited to see Matiba. However she was very shocked when he walked into her house house which was situated below the then Police Dog Section next to King George IV now known as Kenyatta National Hospital and in a no-nonsense voice he declared, "No married Kenyan woman goes out of Kenya to pursue formal education" And just like that, he went away.

To say that Julia was perplexed would be an understatement. As she stood there she wondered if that was a joke, because if it was, then to her, it was definitely not a funny one. That was the first time that Julia had come face to face with intimidation, and from someone who knew her personally! She stood as if in a trance wondering if the events she had just witnessed were part of a bad dream that would soon end. The man had not even bothered to exchange any pleasantries, and he had acted as though Julia was an enemy of progress or something! She made a resolve to get to the root of the matter and what she unearthed sank her hopes of getting any funding from Kenya lower and lower. Apparently the only opportunities available for the married Kenyan women going



to London under the British Council Bursaries were for those who wanted to go to study courses on how to be good hostesses. These would then come back to be good housekeepers and housewives to their husbands who were also going to London in big numbers at the same time. Julia said strongly that she had not come this far only to have a Permanent Secretary cut her dreams short. She swore out saying, "I will still go. We are in a new Kenya and I have a right to a good education!"

Luckily for her, Hillary was a good husband who always supported Julia when she really needed him. So when he heard about his wife's good fortune and subsequent hitch in the Permanent Secretary's assertion, he stepped in to save the situation by pooling his resources to meet Julia's travel expenses and the initial expenses as she settled in England as he sorted his finances. Incidentally, Julia had just given birth to her first born child, a daughter called Josephine. Therefore they had to leave for England with a beautiful baby girl in tow. Being the first time that she was traveling abroad, naturally Julia was anxious but at the same time excited. Despite all the doubts vying for prominence in her mind, she enjoyed the trip all the way.

Hearing that her nation Kenya would soon govern itself Julia worked even harder to be part of its work force. Like many other educated Kenyans, she realized that going through school would offer a warranty for employment opportunities back home for those fortunate to possess education. Consequently Julia enrolled for a Bachelor's Degree at Queen Elizabeth College, Campden Hill, Kensington High Street a college that was later merged with the King's College of Science in South Kensington near St. James Park. However, the couple was not able to live in the same town as Hillary was in Edinburgh University in Scotland. As a result, she moved from North West

London to 9 Clarendon Road in Holland Park, which was closer to Kensington High Street thus near Queen Elizabeth College at Campden Hill. With the help of the British Council, Julia rented a beautiful and spacious apartment at No.9. This house had a beautiful, cool and quiet backyard. The house had belonged to a former senior family and it bordered St. John's Park and Princess Margaret's garden, where she lived before she married Lord Snowdon.

On her arrival in London, Julia realized she had greater issues closer home to deal with as her baby Josephine was too young to be left on her own. Thus the young mother was worried about who would be taking care of her baby when she went for classes. She however soldiered on amid this chaos and life was one long trip to the well for her. Her first month in school was complete torture, as she could not even relax at school. She practically had to leave Josephine sleeping in order to rush to attend classes hoping that she would still be asleep by the time she arrived home. This was the lowest moment of her time in London. Julia found herself in a situation that forced her to betray her loyalties to her most prized possession, her child. She would constantly ponder as lectures went on, "What if my baby fell? What if she woke up immediately I left and started crying?" These worries increased to the level of paranoia. So once again the British Council came to her aid by making a temporary arrangement for a foster mother while Julia looked around for help. This was in the person of a wonderful woman who was found in Dartford Kent, with whom Julia shared the responsibility of caring for her baby for six agonizing months.

Although this made her learning much easier she felt deprived of the right to her baby. Many times she would miss her baby but she would remember the excellent support she was receiving from Dora in Dartford thus she would stop entertaining any thoughts about quitting the race for

knowledge. Therefore she soldiered on, knowing that the goal she was pursuing would liberate them from worse shackles at a future date, shackles brought about by not having an education. However, a ray of sunshine presented itself when later on Hillary moved down South. Even though his going to London was for him to pursue further studies at Hammersmith Hospital and at the Heart Institute, he would also be with his family although for a short while. Thus he enrolled at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School in Hammersmith, London, specifically at the National Heart Hospital and the Institute of Cardiology, Westmoreland Hospital.

But apart from this lady, Julia also derived immense support from a friendly social network. This was in the person of a young lady called Jane Ndisi, who was training in hair and beauty therapy. Jane had a sister called Grace Wagemba and together the two ladies who were old friends of Julia's family re-ignited their close friendship bond. In the years to come Jane married in Reverend Ndisi's home, a friend of Reverend Saulo. Their friendship in fact went a long way back, in that Grace had been Ruth, Julia's sister's Best Bridesmaid. Over the weekends Jane would visit Julia at her Holland Park residence, taking the opportunity to practice on Julia's hair.

As Julia found out in the course of time, life in a foreign country was very tough more so in London where different seasons necessitated a change in not only clothing but also diet. She constantly found herself in desperate need of money to pay bills, to buy extra food and meet other expenses like purchase of clothing. Her husband, who was also in England helped out when he could, but the cost of living was too high because even the little money he could spare for them was almost immediately gobbled up by the endless stream of responsibilities that came with parenthood. Even though she was on a good United Nations Fellowship, she discovered that

without money one would live like a destitute. It was under such circumstances that she learnt through the British Council that BBC had a vacancy. Julia was encouraged to apply and appear for the interview which she did, going through all the radio tests that she passed. BBC was looking for an African woman to address the issues affecting Africans at the BBC World Service which would be achieved through a radio intended to serve the Eastern Africa region listeners.

She was therefore employed as a broadcaster on the special East African channel. This program aired a question-answer segment with interludes of Eastern Africa music. She found this part-time job very interesting and informative and it managed to kill her nostalgia for home a little bit. She felt like the proverbial lion, which is believed to eat grass when it cannot find meat to eat. Being in the Diaspora equipped her with the technique of grabbing whatever snippets of home she could get and being content with it. On a lighter note however, this job supplemented her income with an additional 21 guineas<sup>6</sup> per week that enabled her meet some of her financial deficits. The most important lesson she learnt from the program however was, Africa was yearning for good governance by the Africans themselves. This was an eye opener as she learnt so much about Africa that she would put to use when she finally joined the big bad wolves in the arena of politics.

As a student in London Julia also took an interest and participated in matters central to Kenya's developmental concerns. For instance, she was nominated to represent Kenya at the All Country Women of the World Conference hosted at St. Albert hall in South Kensington. She therefore stood as the MYWO representative at that conference. Julia was already an active member of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake, which is an Organization that aims at empowering Kenyan women and

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<sup>6</sup> A Guinea is a British coin, originally worth one pound sterling and equal to twenty shillings. The name came from the Guinea region in West Africa where much of the gold used to make the coins originated.

Julia had even participated in the election of its chairperson Phoebe Asiyo.

As all this was going on the bulk of East Africa's children was withering under the rising protein/calorie malnutrition disorders. Being only too well aware of this, Julia was on the lookout for ways in which she would get involved in the process of getting a remedy for this. She learnt that a series of conferences were to be held to come up with possible cures to these diseases. The first of these conferences was held in Edinburgh, its main Agenda being to discuss the protein nutritional disorder whose symptoms were among others: protruded stomach, scanty and brown hair. This nutritional disorder was called Kwashiorkor, a Ghanaian name given to the syndrome of protein calorie malnutrition, which was at the time one of the major causes of infant mortality. Having been one of the pioneers in this field in Africa Julia was nominated to represent Kenya at the first intervention conference on nutrition in 1992/3. She found this conference an eye opener, a boost for studies in Nutrition Sciences, and also a source of information in an area that she had earlier on researched in. This was in 1962, the year that also marked Mzee Jomo Kenyatta's delegation to London for the second Lancaster house Conference to negotiate for Kenya's Independence. Earlier on the otherwise immaculate streets of London had been littered as angry mobs threw rotten eggs and tomatoes at the Kenyan emissary. This, as Julia saw it, was an attempt at mockery of Kenyatta and his efforts, as well as the activities of the Mau Mau back home in Kenya. Luckily the diplomatic Dr. Njoroge Mungai, who was later to become the first Minister for Defense, saved the situation. This he did by quickly soliciting the support of fellow Kenyans who were in England, to give moral support to their fellow countrymen. On this occasion Julia was one of those who turned up in large numbers in the dreary streets of London to cheer their heroes. Kenyatta did not disappoint his fans as he turned up with his flywhisk, waving it from side to side.

He wore a permanent smile on his face, unperturbed by the jeers that accompanied his slow progress along the streets of London's Marble Arch to Lancaster House in South Kensington, where the conference was to be held. As Julia explains, "Our cheers gave Mzee Kenyatta the much-needed confidence to tackle the issue at hand, which he did without mincing his words. He told the colonialists that their time was up and Kenya was ready for self-rule."

## 2. FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Towards the end of Julia's third and final year of studies, a member of the University of Nairobi was sent to London through the Kenya High Commission office to interview her. She was also to be presented with several employment opportunities to choose from. Her teaching, research, welfare and administrative skills were already well known in the colleges back home and also by the government. This gave her an added advantage and leverage with which to negotiate. The University of Nairobi wanted to employ Julia as the first African woman teacher in the position of a Tutorial Fellow but she declined, because as she puts it, the pay was bad. She felt that she had not worked this hard just to earn peanuts. Besides, memories of the harsh encounter with the extremely cold temperatures of London and England at large and her dilemma with baby Josephine further justified her demands.

Seeing that she was very serious in her demands, Julia was added the position of warden of the women's halls of residence. This then prompted her to accept the positions that would then result in her being the first African woman warden at the University of Nairobi, which during those days was a very prestigious post. Now she can afford to say, "You know the good thing about being well educated is that it gives you a choice to say no where need be. My Curriculum Vitae was by now very colorful and I knew that I would land many prestigious positions that I would have liked."

Unknown to Julia, completing her Bachelor's Degree in Community Nutrition from London would

later open doors for her to pursue a Master's Degree at Harvard and a PhD at the McGill University in Canada having once again won academic fellowships on merit.

When she finally arrived in Nairobi, Julia went straight to the women's hall of residence to take up the position of Chief Warden and also Assistant Lecturer at the Faculty of Education, Department of Home Science. These two posts gave her the much-needed experience in administrative duties, sports, research and teaching. For instance, being the Chief Warden also meant that Julia was in charge of sports in coordination with Mr. Cooper, the then Chief Sports Officer. Julia found herself among some of the great educationists such as: Mrs. Eva Ricketts, and Professor Indire, among others. Her affiliation with the university fraternity also provided Julia with the perfect platform for her to come into contact with prominent personalities, who enriched her view of life and gave her a wealth of advice in different areas of life. Some of the people who she met that shaped her development agenda were Kenyan women such as: Margaret Githinji, one of the first women Permanent Secretaries in the government; Christabel Ouko, wife of the late Kenyan diplomat and Minister of Foreign Affairs the late Robert Ouko; and Mrs. Nyiva Mwendwa, Kenya's first woman cabinet Minister; among others.

An observant person, Julia noted with amusement how the women's hall of residence was run like a 'Five Star' hotel with the majority of the residents being Europeans, Goans, Indians and very few Africans. She was fascinated to see that students enjoyed personalized table service and an a la carte menu, and on weekends they got a chance to savor real English high teas. Everyday there was the high tea during which chief guests would be invited, and two students invited in advance to be able to prepare to sit at the table with the chief guests. Although aware of the few number of Black



African students in the university, she was not so blind to see something good from the whole scenario. For example, she knew that these functions gave the students the opportunity to experience the life of the gentry, however few their number. But then these two roles that Julia played at the university often left her very exhausted. They took too much of her time and energy and so that when the University decided to hire an Assistant Warden she gladly received the news. Ms. Wangari Muta Maathai had joined the Royal University College for purposes of research in Botany and Zoology at Chiromo Campus. That is how Julia got to work very closely and be friends with the Professor Wangari Maathai. At that time she was not married thus she went by her maiden name, Muta. She was however engaged to Mr. Maathai, who was later elected as the Member of Parliament for Lang'ata.

The two women -Julia and Maathai- had very busy research agendas, on top of ensuring that everything ran smoothly in the halls of residence. According to Julia, this required a high degree of energy to deal with field research and mischief from some of the students. She exercised her leadership qualities in this position for a period of three years before resigning from this post to go to Harvard University, USA. In the meantime, having come back home from Britain Hillary had rejoined the Kenya Medical Services having been appointed as a Physician to the Central Province based at Nyeri in July 1963. By 1964 he was promoted to the rank of Consultant Physician and Cardiologist to the Kenyatta National Hospital then in 1968 he was appointed Senior Lecturer in Medicine at the University of Nairobi. He then won the then prestigious Commonwealth Scholarship to do his post-doctoral degree in Medicine at McGill University in Montreal, Canada.

Despite having what many would consider a good life: a wonderful husband, two beautiful babies

and another on the way, a wonderful career as a university lecturer, and having initiated a very popular Science Degree program that had attracted students from Uganda, Tanzania and even Rwanda. Julia still felt that something was missing in her life. She had this constant nagging hunger for more education that would not just abate. While she craved for more education she was at the same time aware that her children would be deprived of her attention once again. This thought almost made her change her resolve about furthering her education. But then, deep within her was the knowledge that if she didn't fulfill her deepest desires then she would terribly regret her decision for the rest of her life. This realization was a great inspiration and a greater push to achieve success.

Therefore, Julia made a decision to look for scholarships to pursue further studies. She made fifty-two application letters to all the US state universities seeking admission to a Masters program. As Julia explains, "I had done my library research and had gotten all the addresses and phone numbers that I needed. I had been saving some money to be able to post out all the mails by express airmail and also to make follow-ups by telephone." As the replies started to stream in most of the universities sent return mails enclosing application forms and necessary entry tests since not all questions could be handled on phone. This meant that for nearly three months, beginning February to May Julia was very busy writing replies to the mails she had received from the different Universities. As a result, Julia found herself occupied up to her neck in the library reading each University's history. She also wanted to be up to date with her own subject matter, Human Nutrition, to be able to answer any questions that could be raised. At the same time, she was doing her community nutrition research among the pre-school children in Karai area of Kiambu District—a survey and research that would later form a basis for Julia's PhD thesis research.

At the beginning of July, Julia began to receive a stream of replies. While some were polite rejections saying that they did not have the kind of program that she wanted, others were willing to offer her an admission. But then, a majority did not offer her the financial aid that she needed for her studies. Moreover, some institutions did not offer the accommodation that she would most definitely need. Nevertheless, Julia was happy that had gotten replies from most of the Universities she had applied to. Amid all this, Hillary was again awarded a commonwealth scholarship to go to McGill University in Canada to pursue a Doctorate of Science Degree in Medicine. Julia was horrified by the thought of being separated from her husband once more. However, this was soon to change. One morning Julia received an express mail. The stamp on the envelope read the University of Los Angeles, Berkley University campus. The letter confirmed that she had been offered an admission in this institution. There was a celebratory mood in her house that day. But that was not all. Her heart almost hit the roof when that same afternoon Julia was handed another mail offering her admission to the most coveted and prestigious Harvard University School of Public Health. Julia's admission had with it a fully paid WHO fellowship, air tickets, full subsistence, lab coats and books as well as health insurance. The best was yet to come. Upon closer reading she saw that all the conditions that she had requested to be considered had all been catered for in the form of an admission letter, a full fellowship, and accommodation for her family. As if that was not enough, she had also been provided with air tickets not only for her, but also her children.

To make things easier for her Hillary offered to cater for Julia's house help's return ticket and her subsistence allowance. He wanted to ensure that this time round she wouldn't suffer the psychological trauma she had earlier on undergone. The house help's name was Beatrice Aleyo, a

young girl from Vihiga. Julia was exhilarated, and things couldn't get any better. It was then that Julia realized she was one lucky woman whose hard work was pushing her to greater heights.

Therefore, both Julia and Hillary left the country in September 1968 to their various destinations; Julia to the USA, Hillary to Canada. According to Julia, everything was going according to plan. Their son Jack was born on 24<sup>th</sup> of July, five weeks to the beginning of the semester at Harvard University. Julia had wanted to arrive one week before the registration to be familiar with the new environment. As a result, she had been very busy packing and making travel arrangements when her new baby arrived.

When Julia arrived at the USA she quickly settled down with the help of Hillary before he proceeded to Canada. Hillary commuted between Montreal and Massachusetts every weekend to help Julia and the family. But when she reported to school, she discovered that things would not be as easy as she had imagined. The class that she was going to was mainly comprised of postgraduate medical scholars most of whom had come to do their Masters of Science degrees in Public Health, while others were pursuing pure Masters of Science research Degrees in various sectors of medical sciences. All these were considered crème de la crème from where they had come thus it would be a cat and dogs fight for the position of valedictorian, a chance she didn't want to pass her by.

However upon admission, after considering that she was still breast feeding her baby and that she also had two other children trying to settle in the new environment, her professors proposed that she should first enroll for a Postgraduate Diploma program and not a Master of Science Research

Degree in Nutrition. Although this news came as a great disappointment to Julia, she had no alternative but to agree to it on condition that this would be a temporary arrangement open to reversal based on an assessment of her performance after the first semester exams. It was therefore agreed that if she performed exemplarily she would be able to join the other masters' students, thus she took this as a challenge. Laughingly she says, "I am sure they thought that I would probably not make it, but they were dead wrong. I passed very well, even stupefying the professors so that when the next semester began I joined the masters program. This was tough as everyone who came to Harvard did so on Intellect and merit alone, meaning that they were all good on their own right thus there was no escape from working hard and being smart."

During Julia's Masters Degree program, Beatrice proved to be very handy and Julia discovered that she was an amazing person, assuming total care of the three children and their mother. She saw to it that the children were properly fed, clothed and that they attended their schools at the Shattuk House in the 24<sup>th</sup> Park Street, Bolton, Massachusetts. She would also be there when the children returned home in time to do their homework and still have time to watch their favorite TV programs.

Between 1968 and 1970 Hillary worked at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, a period he mainly devoted to research. In 1971 he was elected Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Glasgow (F.A.C.C.) Thus the last academic honor, the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (F.R.C.P., Edinburgh), was given to him by the Edinburgh University in 1976. During this time, he would juggle his attention between home and school finding time occasionally to fly to the USA to see his young family. Even though the visits were short, like a

taste of the forbidden fruit, they were definitely the sweetest. During this time the couple learnt how to cope with the strains of a long distance relationship, and how to better communicate both verbally and non-verbally.

Thus as Julia discovered, being in a foreign land with a very young family was the best thing that could have happened to her. As she explains, "Hillary would commute from Montreal to Massachusetts during the weekends to be with his loved ones. It was very heartwarming to have somebody who cared, visit us. My husband would take his time to take me through my course work especially in the areas of Human Physiology, Microbiology, Biochemistry, and Epidemiology which he had an edge over me. I also taught him on relevant clinical work related to nutritional conditions. He was totally committed to my success as I too was concerned that he should excel in all that he was doing. We supported each other fully. We read common textbooks and we tested our knowledge on each other." It is amazing that in a society in which many a couple would be intimidated by their partner's interference in their personal work, theirs was a match not only of the body and mind, but also temperament. Julia was well aware of this and she never took it for granted.

The Professor of Nutrition, Professor Stare, and Julia's personal professor and tutor Professor Robert McGandy at Harvard were her best lecturers of nutrition. They had a way of tackling complex concepts on nutrition with such prowess that the content got into the students' minds and established roots. The entire course took eighteen months. During this time Julia learnt so many things that changed her life for good. When she completed her course her husband was still studying for his Doctorate Degree and so she decided to proceed to Canada, where she applied and

got admitted to the McGill University to pursue a course in nutrition. Interestingly though at first her sponsors thought that she would not manage to juggle between school and her family that had now increased as she had given birth to another child. But once more she proved them wrong as she managed to go through her pre-doctoral research and theory and qualified to submit her proposal and was admitted to the Ph.D research program.

Julia returned home before the end of her studies as her husband had completed his doctorate degree and he had to return to Kenya. With this new development, Julia decided to return to Kenya to be able to give her children paternal love and familiarity with their father, aspects that had been difficult to achieve while they were abroad. Fortunately though, her university allowed her to complete her program at the then new Medical School at the University of Nairobi where she completed her studies and got a PhD from the faculty of Medicine, becoming the first student to attain a PhD in the Nairobi University Medical Faculty. She felt that she had accomplished her deepest desires in the field of academics thus she was ready to dedicate her full attention to her country and family and strategize on how to grow in her career.

Upon completion of her studies Julia continued to work as a lecturer, a researcher and publisher of papers written on different areas of research both at the national and International levels. Some of her published works include: *Nutritional Problems in Kenya*, a report launched at a seminar organized by the German Foundation in conjunction with the Food and Agricultural Organization, (FAO) in cooperation with Justus Liebig University at Giessen in Berlin Germany, during an event held from 10<sup>th</sup> April 1966. That same year she also conducted a background study of the Abasamia people of Busia District and published a paper in *Nutrition* journal in London, Great Britain. In

1967 she further did a research on the Maternal and Infant Dietary Practices of the Abasamia of Busia District, whose report was published in the *East African Medical Journal*.<sup>49</sup> (6) In conjunction with Eliot I.J and Ross C.S., she also researched on the Nutritional Value of Milk Yeast Barley mixture, a report that was published by the *East Africa Medical Journal* 49(6). Further, she carried out another research as her PhD thesis on the Trans-methylation Activity in the liver of rats fed on milk, yeast and barley diet carried out in 1972. This thesis was also published. During that same year, she also did two book reviews: one in the East African medical journal, Volume 49 published in 1972, and the other one a report of Food and Agricultural Organization, FAO/World Health Organization, WHO on group requirements of Ascorbic Acid, Vitamin D, Vitamin b12, Folic Acid and Iron, in the East Africa Medical Journal. But the best of it all was an award that she won as a researcher thereby giving her the opportunity to attend a workshop in Berlin, Germany, sponsored by FAO/UNICEF on Nutritional Problems of the Developing Countries. While in Berlin she had an opportunity to briefly work at the Max Plank Nutrition Laboratories and also at the Faculty of Nutrition at Giessen University, in the year 1967. As Julia says, "These activities and experiences increased my desire to gain more knowledge in the subject matter of nutrition, one of the things that I learnt being, we become the food we eat."

To top it all up, while holding a high academic and social profile in Kenya, Julia's leadership and administration skills were also put to good use. For example, she was elected the Vice-Chair of the National Council of Women of Kenya and later on she was also appointed to lead the Kenyan delegation to the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the USSR. This event attracted very many people to the Soviet Union and it was aired to viewers across the world. On this trip, she got the opportunity to visit Moscow, Afghanistan, Tashkent and other regions around the USSR.



Together Julia and Hillary were blessed with four amazing children: The first-born is a daughter called Josephine, the 6 month-old baby that Julia went with to London during her Health Sciences (Nutrition) course at King's College in 1961. She was born in Kenya, and the playful little girl grew up to be an ambitious professional. Like her mother she grew up to follow a medical career, specializing in Public Health. After her Undergraduate studies at the University of Nairobi she went to Israel for her Masters Degree in Medicine; her second born is also a daughter called Tesera, named after Julia's deceased mother and she is fondly referred to as Tessy. She was also born in Kenya and she grew up to become a lawyer. She has amazing leadership and management skills that are much admired and respected. Her presence is commanding and reassuring, her problem-solving and organizational abilities having solved gridlocks at work and other places. She studied for her Law Degrees in Britain where she won the Student Leadership Award of the International House and earned accolades. Students from outside London were glad to have her as a decision-maker and able leader; her third born is a son called Jack, also born in Kenya. He is also a London-educated Advocate of the High Court of Kenya; the last-born is also a daughter called Sanda, a young lady who has majored in Economics and Policy Analysis. Julia says her children have earned their successes through the work of their brain and hand. She is very proud of them.

But once again, the young couple had to sacrifice their time together as Hillary had to travel to Lusaka, Zambia in 1974 for a short while before returning to Kenya to support his wife's election to Parliament.

### 3. PIONEERING DEVELOPMENT

While still a student of Education at the Royal Technical College, Julia had gone all over Nairobi to demonstrate to different households how to use new appliances. This was a way of preparing Africans for the big shift in leadership from colonial rule to African rule. She therefore toured Shauri Moyo, Makongeni and Kaloleni Railways. As a result she got well acquainted with demonstrations as a method of teaching. She also got the opportunity to interact with the Nairobi community in the process. This excursion had come to being when she was contracted to teach people how to use electric cookers and changing a plug. The Kenya Power and Lighting Company, KPLC, which was funding the project, had chosen her as she had studied physics as part of her course.

Later on Julia and her colleagues also went round the villages doing demonstration of new foods like the Nile Perch, *Mbuta* and Kales, *Sukuma wiki*, which had just been introduced in Kenya. Thus Julia and her colleagues had the role of doing the acceptability tests so that the local people could adapt these foodstuffs. The class of 58 or 59 participated in the introduction of Nile Perch into the fresh water lake and consequently the Kenyan diet, under the leadership of Professor Mohamed Haida. The students' role was to introduce the Nile Perch into the diet of the people to supplement other sources of protein seeing that Tilapia was getting radically depleted from the fresh water lakes. Julia is aware that many people take these foods for granted while assuming that they have always been there, but she treasures them, as she was a part of the researches that introduced them to Kenya from the start. Thus she knows the amount of money, time and energy

that went into the projects from them to be what they are today.

Due to her keen interest in the welfare of housewives, Julia became the first African woman chair of the Kenya housewives consumer organization that had been previously dominated by whites. She saw the need for people to understand consumerism as an aspect of development, having been a housewife, and mother. After taking over its leadership she proceeded to convert it from an all-women organization to the all-encompassing Kenyan Consumer Organization to give room for men to come in. Therefore, the consumer movement in post independence Kenya was converted from the nucleus housewives movement to accommodate the larger Kenyan population.

In the course of teaching at the University of Nairobi, Julia also realized that the number of female students in the university was very low. She therefore felt the need to encourage other female university graduates to come together and act as role models to other young women. As a result, Julia and fellow women graduates started the Kenya University Graduates Association and elected her as the founding chair person. Its intention was to make people realize that women were coming up, graduating and taking part in development but beyond that they could also be role models to young girls in education. She was therefore at the forefront of its establishment and she was consequently elected its chair.

At the same time Julia was also in the outspoken Maendeleo ya Wanawake organization, National Council of Women of Kenya, YWCA Teacher and Training, and was also a girl guide. Through all these partnerships she was learning very fast about leadership and accumulating a lot of knowledge. So when the women movement was initiated as well as the East African women conferences in preparation for the East African nation states, Julia was elected as the secretary and

one of those leading the girls. Similarly, when the wives of prominent African leaders like Milton Obote of Uganda, and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania among other presidents came visiting Kenya, she was the one who acted as their tour guide. Once on a conference visit, Mzee Kenyatta allowed them to be hosted at the State House, saying "*Achia akina mama nao wajue utamu wa kukaa kwa state house.*" (Let also the women feel the sweetness of staying in the statehouse). These experiences were in a way preparing her for the busy life as a politician, although she was not yet aware of that.

As time went by, the number of students enrolling at the department of Home Science grew in direct proportion to its fame. It was being sought out like hot cakes! But since the premises at the University of Nairobi were not growing as big as the number of students, it became obvious that the department had to be moved to a bigger area. However, there were no vacant premises at the main campus. A new place had to be found. Professor Indire, the chair of department then suggested that they move to Kahawa to what is now known as Kenyatta University. At the time the place was not only an army base but also housed a High School. It is the school premises that were to later house the college. When Professor Indire asked the Departmental members to move, they were all afraid. The staff feared premature death due to possible explosions, as Kahawa was an army base rumored to be a mine of explosives that could go off any time.

One afternoon, Julia felt very depressed, working from the faculty of Agriculture which had become congested. At the spur of the moment, Julia called for a vehicle, packed it with her books and drove to Kenyatta. When she arrived there she threw the books on the ground, thereby opening the campus. So when other people ascertained that nothing had happened to her, they also started

to move and the rest is history. Having settled at the Kenyatta University Campus and taught a little, Julia was gradually getting restless as she wanted to see certain things happen. It was then that she came to the realization that being just lecturer would never be enough for her. She knew that she had to move from the classroom into politics in order to help change the manner and pace at which things were being done in the country.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## PART THREE

### LIFE IN POLITICS

#### 1. THE FIRST PLUNGE INTO POLITICS

The year 1969 is one that not many women familiar with Kenya's political history can easily forget. It is during these elections that Grace Onyango got elected to parliament therefore becoming the first African woman to venture into politics and topple a man in the political arena. It is also thanks to her that people began to buy the idea of women as potential leaders. Seeing these, the once conservative Kenyan people began to encourage their daughters to go to parliament. At that time, Julia had just spent over a year at Harvard University in the USA, studying her Master of Science Degree in Public Health. But then, Julia's venture into politics was not ad hoc.

Despite the fact that her people were the ones who had approached her with the idea of being their leader, she had previously toyed with this possibility. In fact, she had grown up seeing how political matters were conducted in the community through the socio-political institutions that Julia had grown up under, especially the church. In fact, the Church in its own nature was a Pseudo-political organization. This is because just like in the British Empire, the church in Julia's society and the other social activities were not separated. Thus a church elder like Julia's father automatically became the leader of both the social, political and economic activities of the community by virtue of being a clergy. Thus Julia saw her parents' battle with what today people call big issues of discord in the community such as one sub-clan fighting with another, today called

ethnicity, and they handled them so well. Her parents would sit the warring parties together and developed strategies or formula for solving their problems. This they did through the church, which was an institution for peace making just like the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, has done in Rwanda.

Julia also saw her parents develop policies, as well as their own legal frameworks and institutions that provided them with governance structures to govern their people. All these events unfolded before Julia's own eyes. Her parents also had to deal with issues beyond their borders, which brought from time to time into their home leaders like Masinde Muliro of the Bukusu and Oginga Odinga of Central Nyanza. To add on that she saw the Gikuyu during the pre-independence period, hatch the ideal of 'our land' that the white man and the white culture had invented. Her father also travelled all over the country, visits that also saw his friends come to their Busia area in exchange visits that were peace negotiations and strategic forums for international co-operation. When she was growing up she also saw her mother juggle between the different roles as a home economist, a social worker, a marriage counselor, an evangelist, and a peace-maker. Julia also saw her mother in the role of a teacher. Together they would go to the village to teach mothers how to wash and clean babies, house-keeping, spring-cleaning, daily sweeping of the house and the compound, disposal of refuse, serving of food. These experiences furthered Julia's ambitions of becoming an exemplary leader to her people, just like her father and mother had been.

Julia had grown up aware that her father was already gender sensitive and that he had identified her from his family as a potential leader. Thus she believed in his vision for her. Julia recalls, "In our family I had been identified and my father used to pray saying, 'you know you will lead

others,' and he would put his bible on my head as his stool of trade while he was reading. And when visitors came to visit he would say, "Auma, come lead the others to serve visitors," and they ran. I think all that had put strong leadership shock absorbers in me." Julia also remembers learning from childhood that grabbing other people's property, stealing and acquiring anything through corruption was not proper not only to God but also for the good of humanity. The Christian teachings that she was brought up under laid much emphasis on doing to others what you expected them to do to you. She recalls,

"In our community, if a child stole from their parent's stewpot, such a child's hands would be tied together with dry grass and set on fire. Stealing or grabbing or employing other measures to exploit other people's property for the community did not therefore allow one's personal gain thus, it was a heavily punishable offence. Thieves had their hands dismembered, some were beaten or even speared to death."

She therefore felt that she owed it to her people to ensure that the welfare of their children was well catered for. She also wanted to ensure that the community gained the hope, which it had lost during all those years of impunity brought about by the then reigning Member of Parliament.

Way before she ventured into legislative politics Julia had the tendency of visiting her village thus travelling all the way from Nairobi to see her people and enjoy the tranquility of village life that she loved. As usual her family was always happy to see her but during this particular visit things took a different turn when the following day they were visited by a group of elders. Such a visit was a rather unusual occurrence. She was informed that the elders had come to the conclusion that they wanted change in their community's leadership, which they thought would come in the form of their own daughter. Therefore, they had decided to endorse her as their official candidate for the



upcoming general elections. She told them that she did not have any political experience they assured her that they would teach her all that was required because she was a very fast learner. Julia explains, "Apparently everyone was dissatisfied with the sitting Member of Parliament because not only was he opposed to women and girls getting an education, but it was also rumored that he had made a few primary school girls pregnant. Furthermore, his development record was very poor."

So when the elders assured her that the community would take care of her and make sure that she went to parliament, Julia willingly accepted to be their ambassador. But it was not easy. She was invited by the community into leading them by virtue of her participation in various things in her community and she says that she accepted because she felt that even sitting in the classroom was now no longer useful. "I was doing well as a trainer and researcher but when they came and asked me to be the role model for the girls in the community, I knew that I had to change my career. The people wanted a woman MP who could stop men from abusing their young girls." By the time the people were approaching her it was already June 1974 and she only had six months to the elections. Therefore her campaign season started in July.

All factors considered, Julia was at the same time conscious of the gravity of the task at hand because the man in question was not just a seasoned politician and a freedom fighter but he was also a very vocal and active trade unionist with a lot of power at his disposal. At the same time he had initiated the afforestation program on the Samia Hills that had endeared him to the people. In short he was a force to reckon with. But then as she later on discovered to her advantage, that this project had a twist to it as some of the people felt that it was a scheme to grab their land and hills.

Furthermore, it is at this time that the people also saw the need to do away with male dominated leadership, and for a change, to choose a woman leader for their constituency. They felt that Julia was someone who was committed to achieving economic and social development.

So going back to the city Julia found out that she had a lot think about. Being a lecturer had enabled Julia to forge strong friendships with many would be politicians and had met the likes of Dr. Robert Ouko describes him by his professional credentials at the time and Engineer Githinji. Her husband Hillary was also a great friend of Tom Mboya, Barrack Obama Senior, and Argwings Kodhek. Also while at Makerere they kept company with then teachers Mwai Kibaki, Bethwel Ogot, David Wasawo, Joseph Mungai and many more other influential people. These associations allowed her to meet prominent people that she would from time to time on issues affecting people in Kenya. It was from them that she learnt about the social and political leadership. In addition, the numerous trips that she had made to Germany, the USSR, Tashkent, Afghanistan, Tanzania, Britain, Uganda and also working with women from the East Africa region had served to ignite a latent talent in leadership lurking deep in her.

Julia found herself in a dilemma. On one hand she had the luxury to relax and enjoy life without straining unnecessarily. She had a great career as a senior lecturer, whose career growth was not in doubt. Julia reminisces,

“When we got married my husband and I decided to support each other to pursue our respective careers. So when he was pursuing his postgraduate studies in Medicine, I was a high school teacher. When he started teaching Medicine at the University, I was also a Home science lecturer at the university!”

Obviously, Julia and her husband despite not being rich, had enough money to allow them to live a comfortable life. But on the other hand Julia still wanted to move on and achieve more. Therefore, she became very restless.

After a long period of contemplation Julia finally decided that she wanted to be like Grace Anyango, her role model, who had stunned many people by becoming the first lady mayor of Kisumu and also the first elected woman MP. Having Followed the trail Grace Anyango's success, Julia decided that she would emulate her predecessor thus not disappoint her people and that would go for the post. She knew that to vie for a political post, one needed a lot of money. She was nevertheless aware that she did not have a very strong financial background to finance an election campaign. Coupled with her loving husband's promise to be with her all the way, Julia went ahead to inform her colleagues about her decision to depart from the academic world in order to join elective politics. This news was received with a lot of mixed feelings. Some people made overtly skeptical observations, but others being very supportive. But all factors considered for Julia this idea was a solid venture worth investing her time, feelings and money into.

Following this Julia sat down and made a work plan, being only too aware that immersing herself into the turbulent waters of politics without a tangible plan would be similar to self-annihilation. The first part of her strategy being to make a formal and dignified exit from the university, Julia packed her academic files and proceeded to Harambee House. This was then the President's office where he regularly worked. Earlier on, Julia had booked an appointment with the then Minister of State in the Office of the President wanting to hand her letter of resignation to the president who was also the Chancellor of the University. This was before the decentralization of universities'

leadership when the president was the Chancellor of all universities in Kenya. With her appointment scheduled for noon she arrived earlier for the appointment thus had the opportunity to talk to various people who had come to see the president.

Finally when it was her turn to see the then president Jomo Kenyatta, Julia confidently walked in and informed President Kenyatta that she had come to tender her resignation as a lecturer to join elective politics. He gave her a long appraisal that would have scared a coward after which he finally asked, "Which constituency?" To which Julia replied, "Busia Central, your Excellency." He then proceeded to ask for the name of the sitting MP. When Julia mentioned Arthur Ochwada, Mzee laughed heartily then said that the MP was a close relative of his family! He then asked Julia, "What do think will happen to Mzee's grandchildren should the MP lose the seat to you?" As the ice had now been broken, Julia firmly but politely proceeded to tell him that the people of Busia Central had approached her and expressed their interest that she becomes their next representative in Parliament. Upon this pronouncement, the President gave her a critical appraisal that signified a newfound respect for this petite yet courageous woman. For the first time, he treated her with utmost respect as he saw a fierce glint of determination in her eyes.

As a piece of advice, however, the late President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta told Julia that the said MP had been a freedom fighter. Therefore, he cautioned her not to expect a campaign that would be a smooth ride. Seeing an opportunity to present her case Julia further requested Mzee not to allow the GSU to aid the MP in his campaigns. She was aware that as the very MP was also an Assistant Minister of Forests and Wildlife, and had the opportunity to use state resources in his campaigns. Fortunately he agreed to honor Julia's request. He then called two ministers: Mbiyu Koinange and

James Gichuru, both of them in charge of the police and the GSU respectively and repeated to them what Julia had requested of him. To her greatest surprise, the two ministers gave her the green light to go and do her campaigns saying that they would make sure no state security agents would come to harass either her supporters or her, as they were all aware of the violent nature of the sitting MP. Thereafter the president gave her permission to leave. He however made it clear that if Julia were unsuccessful in capturing the seat, he would not give her job back. But at the same time he reassured her that if she was successful he would allow her to come back and lecture as many times as possible.

As Julia left the former president Mzee Jomo Kenyatta's office, she was ready to battle with the sitting MP even with the knowledge that it would not be easy. But then she was confident that with determination and support from her friends and family she could make it. This did not however make her blind to the threat posed by the sitting MP. With the little information she had sourced about the nature of politics in Kenya, Julia knew that it was all about strategy and keeping one's head above water, otherwise you lost out. She also understood that being a public figure meant having as many friends as one's fame gained momentum. But as she later on learnt, just as she had anticipated, "These friends took from me, pushed me to support them but when it got tough, they took off and the only people that remained with me were my children!" This means that no matter how big someone is, nobody must be allowed to come between you and your family, whether you are a king or whatever.

When Julia finally began her campaigns for the parliamentary seat she met immediate challenges. To begin with she only had one asset that was a car, which she bought from the retirement package

given to her by the university. This total sum of seventy thousand shillings she used to put a deposit on a small car, a Datsun 1200, with an engine capacity of 1100cc. That is all she had, the car that she was to use for her entire campaign period. Although her husband had a car of his own, she decided to stick to her Datsun. Therefore that was the car she would campaign with. Thus from the beginning the playing ground was not level because whereas she had a car, her opponent had a fleet of Audis, Mercedes and Lorries. In comparison, Julia's one Datsun that was a four-seater looked like a toy car. But despite the fact that Julia had not material resources to campaign with as compared to Arthur Ochwada, she was not at a disadvantage as she had something more valuable, which was the loyal support of her people. Her friends and Hillary's friend had pooled their resources to ensure her success but Julia had politely declined the material things that would have made her campaigns easier. Instead she chose to conduct her campaigns with simplicity. She wanted to offer an alternative model of campaigning where the people would choose their leader based on their development agenda rather than material flair.

However, there was hope and determination in her and in her community as they were ready for the idea of Julia being their leader. But then although the community really wanted change, her greatest opponent Arthur Ochwada also had his own friends and very powerful ones for that matter who were constantly lining his way with the carpet of ease making his campaigns a smooth ride. The latter was married into President Kenyatta's family, and so you can imagine what kind of influence he already had by virtue of being associated with the first family. To add on that he was a member of parliament and an Assistant Minister, thus he had government cars and security officials at his disposal. He could commandeer these at any time. In fact as an Assistant Minister, he could have ten official cars in a convoy while going on a campaign tour. He also had a

watertight security team to guard him at home and to follow him around wherever he went with firearms ready to attack an offender.

Just as she had earlier on feared, Julia was slapped with a wide array of hostilities on her face, all of them propagated by her chief opponent Arthur Ochwada. These attacks came from people allied to Arthur Ochwada. To many conservative traditionalists, they had not yet accepted the fact that a woman could become their leader. They felt insulted that a woman could think about becoming their area Member of Parliament. Arthur Ochwada was one such traditionalist. He mobilized the police around him yet his opponent Julia didn't have any specialized security. So when the campaigns hit the boiling point the police, youth and ruffians carrying axes and *pangas* who were in support of Arthur in broad daylight committing all sort of atrocities. They roamed the entire Samia area maiming Julia's supporters in order to intimidate them. Thus whenever they found the little boys and girls on the roads chanting Julia's praises they went into a murderous mood, chopping off their ears and curving out chunks of flesh off their bodies without any remorse. She remembers those bleak moments with a touch of sadness and she says, "Were it not for my inner determination that gave me the strength to carry on I would have given up," inner strength is a quality that is inborn. Nobody will give it to you as you don't pick it from anywhere."

Most importantly though she learnt many lessons she would like to divulge to fellow women venturing into politics. Among them is that it is only the woman herself who can stand up and say, "I am going to do this."

She has to feed herself and gain strength, cultivate her mind and decide to push on. She should say to herself,

“I am not failing,”

even when the future seemed bleak. That is where Julia’s strength came from. That is what encouraged her to make accurate decisions and retain consistency in her decisions.

Hitting Julia below the belt, or so to say, Arthur incorporated in his campaign team all the virulent women you could think of. He handsomely paid the entire village’s prominent singers and dancers to compose songs about her, and vulgar songs they were. As if not enough they would demonstrate all the most vulgar acts on stage to intimidate her during the political rallies. They would do the most horrible things. For example, men would strip naked before Julia and proceed to demonstrate how they coupled with their wives. They would then shout out that she would be met with the same fate if she did not relent in her political exploits, all this in front of her elders, uncles and parents-in-law. In those days all rallies in the same constituency were staged at the same venue and time so that all aspirants took turn at the podium to address the same audience. She was even called *Ochondororo* (which means prostitute) wherever she met her opponents’ supporters but her father-in-law advised her to ignore those provocations, as he was aware the accusations were baseless. He also assured her that he knew her too well to take any insults thrown at her in his presence or absence with even a pinch of seriousness. Recalling these incidences she remarks, “There is nothing I haven’t seen, no challenges I haven’t been through.”

At that time nobody protected anyone against such acts of intimidation. Therefore, all Julia had were her youths, who escorted her everywhere protecting her, the church elders and members who encouraged and prayed for her, the community elders, who went on the plat forms ahead and introduced her, and those young men and women, who came out in thousands and thousands and



surrounded her on the platform in a blanket that acted as a protective cover against the objects being hurled at her and the angry mobs that wanted to sink their claws in her flesh. Elaborating this instance Julia recalls, “When they wanted to cover me they did so with their bodies, and you would not see me. Nobody would know where I was in the thick crowd of bodies. When my car got stuck in the mud they just carried it. There was nothing like carrying spanners. They just carried the thing and we went along. They were very agile.”

Julia vows never to forget the immense support her people gave her during the extremely trying times. The elders literally camped at her home while developing campaign strategies till late in the night to see her sleep advising her to leave her door unlocked to ensure she was safe. To lend a supporting hand, Julia’s mother-in-law always woke up discreetly at 5 am to make early preparations for Julia’s welfare. She would first prepare a strong cup of tea, which she would put in a thermos flask and creep in Julia’s bedroom to put it under the bed while Julia slept. Since there was no door to the bedroom, just a curtain, her mother-in-law would never interfere with the sleeping one. Following this she would cook some Ugali made from sorghum flour, which she would wrap in banana fiber to keep warm. She would then put it under Julia’s bed so that when she woke up she had something to eat. Come morning, Julia would get warm water with which she would quickly groom herself then eat the Ugali. Hillary’s mother did all the cooking for her daughter-in-law, as she never trusted anyone to do that for Julia. Those were the strengths, role models and proper foundations that she was fortunate to have, which built up her strength.

The young daughter of the Abasamia had now fully matured, having had all the preparation, community experiences, and all dedication given to her by her people. Julia had a symbiotic

relationship with her people, who owned her and gave her their blessings to go ahead and pursue their dream. Unlike Grace who was in Kisumu that is an urban area, Julia was in a deep rural constituency where nothing like female leadership was expected or tolerated. In fact it was like she was breaking the norm once more only that this time, it was her people who had commissioned her to do so.

Hillary's home was four kilometers from Kadimbworo, thus technically he and Julia belonged to different clans. However the couple had practically grown up together under the hawk-like observation of their people. They had seen them grow from infancy to adulthood. They had seen them grow into accomplished academicians and professionals. They had seen the positive value the families of both Hillary and Julia had given to them. Therefore, the community was more impressed rather than intimidated by the prospect of being led by a member of a family that was development-oriented and would in turn take them to different, probably greater, heights.

To show their support for their daughter Julia, the villagers played different roles. For a start, the elders had allocated themselves various areas to survey the activities of her opponent during the night. This they did, as they were aware that he was a very violent person especially with his people carrying axes and *pangas* ready to cut into pieces anyone they thought was their enemy. So to ensure a systematic way of conducting things, by morning they would come together to give Julia a report about the security situation. As they had already mapped the entire locality, they then briefed her on the route they would have identified, which she would then take when going to the meetings, a route where their enemy would not be at that time. They had severally observed Arthur Ochwada's supporters wait for Julia along the main road or a familiar route whereas she had

instead taken the *panya* routes. They would be relaxed seeing all these young people dancing there the whole morning but unknown to them they would be camouflaging any activity from outside knowledge. This is because as the youths' dancing gained momentum Julia would now be whisked away escorted to the arena as they all danced. Thus there was no way anyone would know the route she was passing through and everyday they took a different route.

The mapping of the area was a necessary precautionary measure after some of Julia's supporters had occasionally had their ears chopped off, and others maimed during the campaign time that took six months. The elders also identified key areas for her to address and made short notes touching on areas requiring development and suggested probable solutions to them. So waking up at 5am Julia would find the church elders already seated at the doorstep to her mother-in-law's little two-bedroom house where she was living at the time. While she was occupying one little bedroom, which was barely furnished with a bed, Hillary's mother was in the other bedroom.

After grooming herself and taking her breakfast, Julia would then sit down with the elders for the traditional briefing her on her campaign progress. Together they went through the day's plans and the speeches that had been drafted. She would then share with them her opinions on the speeches to which she would add points she felt were crucial but had been overlooked, or remove what she didn't think was possible. The campaign team was very accurate such that when they felt that they needed to address issues pertaining to supply of water, they already knew where they were going to place a borehole, piped water, UNICEF pots, and metal tanks. They were very specific. Similarly if they wanted to address issues pertaining to education or agriculture they would have also marked out areas where they wanted to put up cotton, sugarcane, beans, potatoes, poultry

projects, goats, exact places near the lake where they were going to put up fish ponds, or direct fishing from the lake. They had also identified which groups were going to be allocated each project.

Julia's campaign planners were very keen and ensured that they never left any minute detailed untended. The planners included educationists, health workers, business people, administrators, security personnel, women and youth groups' leaders among others. The elders assigned themselves different roles as mobilizers so that when she finally stepped on the podium the crowd was ready for her. To begin with one elder called Lino Odipo, would jump to the stage and sing about Julia, the Epic of Nadongo that he had composed. His music was just heavenly. He had seen Julia develop from a young ambitious school girl to an excellent teacher as well as a competent mature married woman. After him another man called Slater, a social worker, would jump on the podium to give an introductory talk telling the people about the dangers of violence. He would pick up positive peace themes to talk about and lighten the people's moods. Thereafter, the clergy would step on the stage and hymns then say prayers so that eventually, Julia would get her turn to speak about politics.

As all the contestants shared the same stage, the other opponents would be seated there waiting to hear what Julia would say. As they shared the same microphone, Julia would be at times rudely interrupted or even publicly harassed. Julia recalls, "Sometimes they refused to give me a microphone. Even when we carried our own microphones and when we set up the microphones they would cut up the wires." On the other hand, Arthur Ochwada came with very powerful microphones that Julia could not match, yet even the little she had was interfered with. However,

she was not deterred. When Julia stepped on to the podium the youths ensured that they guarded every point of the cord running all the way from the podium to the generator so that nobody interfered with it while she spoke. In order to powerfully acknowledge Julia's speech, the youths strategically placed themselves at every point around the arena. Thus a round of ululations, claps, horns, and drums accompanied each point she raised. Thus she was congratulated for every word she spoke because they were facts. The youths made Julia's campaign so much fun and memorable.

Julia also realized that politics was indeed "a dirty game." In this part of the world, defamation of an opponent was seen as a campaign strategy, which nobody questioned. She was taunted with a series of insults. She remembers being publicly humiliated by some of her opponents during a rally in which the six of them were addressing the public when one of them said, "Look at her. Look at how stupid the husband is. Look at how we are going to mow her down. She hasn't got money and lives in her mother-in-law's house." These were just a few of the insults thrown her way. On her part, Julia harshly condemns these utterances as she says that contrary to people's expectations she had a valid reason to live with her mother-in-law. As it turns out she really needed the comfort she was being offered. This is because her parents had just died and she had nobody to reassure her, especially having been brought up very closely by her parents. Julia explains, "I was very lonely and they adopted me so well. My father-in-law literally filled the gap of my father while my mother-in-law filled the gap of my mother and I was like their protected last-born baby." The people who mocked her did not understand the special relationship she had with her husband's parents.

Having discovered that their trump card lay in Julia having the last word, Julia's campaign organizers always ensured that she would be the last person to address the public. Therefore they would sit there patiently waiting until the end when everybody had gotten to the podium then Julia would be the last to address the public and leave a lasting effect. In 1974 there were six contenders for the Busia central seat out of which five were men. As a result she was usually the sixth speaker. However, all the other speakers who preceded her on stage would abuse her, almost spitting on her face. In the meantime, she would be calmly seated there patiently waiting for her opportunity to address the public. When Julia got on stage she would not return the insults thrown to her by her opponents. Instead she would focus on her development agenda, delivering her points one after another with a clear precision. In fact she failed to mention any of the uttered insults, choosing to completely ignore them. The end result was that she would end up with people clapping for her, admiring her speech and hailing her strength. Her campaign team normally went through a very tiring day, so that as soon as she got down the podium her teams would say, "Take off." But whenever they left there would be a huge gap left in the field because her crowd was usually so big and the euphoria, which they brought to the rallies, would pull the crowds with them. So when they deserted the arena they left Julia's opponents almost nothing to gloat in. From there she would dance headed back home in the company of her team. Since she was unable to procure enough lorries to carry her multitude of people back home, the majority would go back home running with twigs in their hands as they chanted, and it didn't matter how far they were going. What mattered to them was that they were headed home.

As the campaigns neared the end, the campaign team had to constantly go with one meal a day. This was because they were too many to feed more than once a day. But supposing she even had,

the team would still not have carried it with them as they had to move from one place to another while creating awareness campaigns, thereby living like nomads. Therefore, they lived simply, eating fruits especially mangoes and oranges that they could find on the way. They also had to survive on roast maize, porridge, and occasionally *maandazis* whenever they got the chance to inform the women in a place they were going to visit in advance to cook for them. During such occasions the women would prepare the *maandazis* and put them in baskets. Despite the obvious fact that they had little or no food, the youths never complained. They understood that they were struggling to make their lives better, thus whoever got any food would gladly share it with the others. Fortunately for them, that year the mango trees yielded in abundance and there were mangoes everywhere, which they practically lived on. In the evening before the main meal they would roast maize on the bush fires they had set up all around a new camp, then drink water after their main meal before they would retire for the night. But conscious of the rampant insecurity the boys would sleep in turns. They considered Julia their queen bee and they were the ants and bees in a hive around their queen. They made it their job to protect her, and they would sting anything that came near her. Thus they offered to protect her at whatever cost. In the morning the entire campaign team, Julia included, would order porridge for breakfast. The village women supporters cooked porridge at night and ensured that all of them would have at least a mug. Water was scarce in the area and so their skins were always dry and hard because of the dehydration. They did not even bath regularly because of the inability to find water on a daily basis, sometimes even a week.

After a long campaign period stretching to six months, Julia's campaign team would eventually get home, tired to the bone with their eyes drooping and hungry. So the youths would just get Julia into the house to make sure that she was safe then take their bicycles and rush to fetch water.

Similarly, others would run to collect firewood, as the rest of them ran to pluck cow peas leaves from their gardens because they did not have any money to buy meat. Meanwhile, others would have gone to the village shopping center to grind maize into flour, while at home there would be water boiling in time to cook Ugali. Finally when the Ugali was cooked, trays would be loaded with mounds of Ugali and vegetables and the people would share a meal.

As all this was going on, Julia was giving a lot of attention to the nomination process. At the same time, violence in the Samia area was escalating. There were even rumours about candidates being hijacked as they went to present their papers. Thus it became problematic for Julia to take her nomination papers to the DC's office in Busia. Therefore, for Julia to move from Samia to Busia to arrive at the DC's office, usually a simple affair now became a matter that required a carefully planned strategy. Thus Julia's team planned that she would go through Bunyala, then Southern Busia to arrive in Siaya in Nyanza province after which she cut back to Marachi, went up to Teso where she spent the night. She had a long time friend called Dr. Otsula at the Alupe Leprosy Hospital in Teso and it was there in his house that she spent the night. So, nobody ever knew where she actually was.

On the following day Julia's people quietly gathered in Busia dancing from all directions and camouflaging all the streets so that nobody could tell exactly which group Julia was in. As the noise rose to a crescendo she finally slipped into one of the groups and dance around with them as they moved towards the offices. Julia was covered in a piece of cloth and when she got to the door of the DC's office, she was whisked into the DC's office in the blink of an eye. The whole plan was so well orchestrated it was only when she came out of the building housing the DC's office



that many people realized that she had actually handed in her papers. This disgusted her opponents who had hoped that Julia would be technically knocked out by failing to deliver her papers to the DC.

In the subsequent trips Julia succeeded despite their various attempts at hijacking her on the road or blocking her path or even pushing her to Uganda. In fact, she herself occasionally went to Busia via Uganda then come back to Kenya. Julia went through this experience thrice. This is because for Julia to collect her papers was one day, to fill them and go back to present them to the DC was another day, then they had to go back and plan for their polling units and agents. Thus every aspirant was expected to tour the DC's office at least three times before the voting day. In an interview with the *Kenya Times* correspondent on Friday, November 5, 1999 Evelyne Kwamboka reported that Dr. Paul Ogula of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa said that Professor Ojiambo almost lost her life during one of the campaigns when the violent Ochwada campaigners attacked her.

The day that had been long been awaited, the voting day, finally arrived. Following this Julia and her aides were stationed at strategic points to oversee the voting was conducted in an orderly manner. Each contender had their agents standing behind the ballot boxes that were imprinted with their portraits. This means that the voters had to queue in front of the ballot box bearing the picture of the person they were going to vote for. Therefore, on-lookers could easily know who stood better chances of winning in a polling station. On this occasion the voters in support of Julia were more than those in support of her opponents in every polling station. Her chief opponent must have gotten wind of the situation because soon he became agitated and started moving from one station

to another to confirm his suspicions. By midday he was practically raging mad, and literally looking for Julia in order to deal with her. His intention was to finish her while mumbling that he wanted to do nothing else but to kill her. This is what Julia was later on told by the spectators at Namisi, which was her home area polling station. When many people now realized that Arthur Ochwada was seriously out to kill Julia, they quickly warned her. As her husband had left earlier, she thought that he was with his family and hoped that maybe they were also protecting him enough. While the anxious observers were all worried about Julia, unknown to them, Arthur was after her husband Hillary. As it happened, when he was unable to locate Julia who was his primary target, he decided that her better half was as good as her thus he started chasing after Hillary. At about three o'clock Arthur Ochwada and his men caught up with Hillary after a wild chase along a rough road with the cars leaving behind them a cloud of dust. When they got to him round a corner where his car could not move to escape its pursuers any more, that is when they surrounded him. As he could not get out he frantically secured all the doors with locks then attempted to move to the farthest corner of his car. But undeterred, his attackers began to dent his car with machetes and axes until they got to him.

That is when Hillary was dragged from his car and dropped to the ground like a sack of potatoes, oblivious to his anguished cries. Arthur and his right hand man Obwora then took over, in attack that left him his body with cuts as blood gushed from the exposed wounds in several parts of his body. But when his screams grew louder, his attackers feared being found in the act thus they escaped, leaving him at the brink of death. When the security forces heard about it they rushed around looking for Julia and when they caught up with her they simply told her that her life was in danger and that she was being taken into police custody. Nobody told her where her husband was

or what had happened to him. She was simply bundled in to a car, whisked out of that place and taken to Kisumu police Station where the Provincial Police Officer was told to put her up for safety. At that same time her husband was picked and taken to a Nangina Mission hospital as a plane was being summoned to take him to Kisumu. Arthur Ochwada was also arrested but nothing could have made the situation better. It was horrible having to guess what was going on but not being able to know the details. Meanwhile, the long voting process continued but Julia was not on the ground to oversee it to the end. When the voting period finally came to a close at five o'clock and the polling stations closed, Julia's people automatically took over to oversee the counting process. Julia's people were so dedicated to her due to the torture they had gone through in the hands of Arthur Ochwada. At least they were now slightly comforted that he had now been arrested. Julia's agents showed what exemplary commitment is all about. Julia says that there was even a nine months pregnant woman, Mwalimu Anakalera Were, who volunteered to be a poll agent when she heard what had happened. She picked up that ballot box from the station that Julia was in charge of and left with it to Busia. She kept vigil over it for three long days and nights in the counting hall because she knew that counting had to be done in Julia's absence with only her agents to oversee it all. The agents from every station vowed that Julia had to be pronounced the winner, even if she was dead. As they had seen the voters who had turned out, they were sure she was winning. Anakalera gave birth soon after the results were announced, and named the baby boy Hillary Ojiambo.

Julia was away for two days locked up in Kisumu under police protection unaware of what was happening concerning her husband or the results of the voting process. In fact, votes were the least of her concerns. On the third day she was however informed that her husband had been injured and

would be transferred to Kisumu Provincial General Hospital. However, she wasn't allowed to see him because they thought that upon seeing his mutilated body she would break down. So when Hillary was brought to Kisumu Julia was transferred to Kakamega Police Station. She remembers the trying moments saying, "I was very worried and anxious for my children who I had left in Nairobi as they too could have been victims. It was a very difficult time for me especially those three days." But on the third day when counting was concluded she was told by her custodians that she was being taken to Busia under very tight security so that she could listen to the announcements about the results of the elections.

Julia was taken to Busia from Kakamega in a convoy with the GSU police at the front, the sides and the back of her car just as it had been rehearsed. The police assured her that they would offer her security to Busia and wait for her as she listened to the announcements then take her back to a safe destination. Nevertheless, Julia was not paying much attention as she was very anxious about her children. When they got to Busia county hall Julia was like a dead man and today she can't even describe how the inside of the hall looked like. She felt like she was seeing butterflies but she was unable to translate their colors into anything. At that point Julia didn't even care what the results were going to be. Julia was later on told that the police also brought in Arthur Ochwada in handcuffs but Julia did not even see him. Her body was numb. She was listening to the announcements but not hearing them. Her people later informed her that Arthur Ochwada had been in the hall all the time with cuffs around his wrists with police officers seated on his either side. When it was announced that Julia had won the elections that was the only time anything penetrated her ears. Suddenly Arthur Ochwada's supporters disappeared into thin air and left the hall.

Hearing that she had won the elections should have been the happiest moment in Julia's life. Her supporters would have been happier if she would have jumped up in joy raising her index finger in the air, waving it in the KANU fashion with a triumphant smile on her face, for once again she had done her name justice proving that indeed she was *Nadongo Ofwokha Syongo*, the fierce petite woman who was not deterred by any situation good or bad, but sadly none of this was to happen. But the happiest moment of Julia's life had sadly turned into her greatest nightmare such that she was now a deeply troubled woman full of worry. She had no information about her children's safety and welfare, or how her husband was faring. She had only been informed that he had been brutally attacked by her opponent and left to die. Although she was aware that he was in a hospital somewhere battling for his life, she was not given further information on that issue. In fact, everyone she asked about her husband seemed to hedge around the matter like a professional fencer in a battlefield. Thus even that pertinent information had been expertly concealed from her. That is why amid the wild jubilation going on around her she simply sat there in a daze watching numbly as a mixture of actions elicited different reactions from the community. All this was taking place in the Busia county hall in which Julia Auma Ojiambo had just been declared the winner of the parliamentary seat for the Busia Central constituency, becoming the first woman ever not only in her constituency but also in the entire Western Province to have achieved that unimaginable feat in an area where women were only to be seen and not to be heard. It was, simply put, phenomenal. This was in December 1974 and Julia was only 38 years and already a wife and mother of four; three daughters and a boy.

After the announcements were made, Julia was escorted home amid a wild euphoria in the biggest escort. She was driven between dancers who had flooded the roads all in one camp dancing and

running for a distance of about forty kilometers. As she had no money on her to hire any transport for them, it therefore took them approximately three to four hours to arrive in her mother-in-law's home in Namisi. So when they got home they just fell to the ground out of exhaustion, hunger and lack of sleep. The strain of the busy campaign period, which had been gradually accumulating, had finally caught up with them. She reminisces, "They had been camping there for three days and I don't even know what they had been eating during all that time. They just lay on the ground while I just flopped on my mother-in-law's bed and we all slept."

But this time they were not worried about their safety as they had the GSU patrolling and surveying during the whole time she was going to be in the village until she left for Nairobi. It was the first time she was sleeping on a bed, eating a bowl of warm porridge and then Ugali with vegetable stew prepared by her mother-in-law whom she so dearly loved but has since passed. The vegetables, cooked in a pot, were flavored with sour milk. She really loved this meal.

Despite the momentous achievement she had attained Julia was nevertheless hit by a wave of disappointment. This was because her parents were not there to witness her greatest achievement, what they had been preparing her for her entire life. Rev. Saulo had passed away in 1959 and her mother Tesera had followed him in 1965. But Julia had finally given her people what they had wanted and fulfilled her innermost desires; to be their leader and their legislator. However, all that did not make her entirely happy. She felt that a vital part of her, her parents, were missing out on her life's greatest achievement. She could not help but remember the irony of life: that the most important lessons in life are learnt in the hard way through experience.

After spending three days at home she was informed that her husband was improving and was out of danger and that she could pass through Kisumu to see him. Alternatively, he would just be flown to Nairobi so that Julia could meet him there before he would be flown to Nairobi for further specialized care. She decided to pass through Kisumu to see him before proceeding to Nairobi to see her children. When Julia saw how severely he had been cut near the salivary glands as well as the stitches he had received to help patch him up, she broke into tears. She thanked God, however, that his skull had not been broken. It was one of the most trying moments of her life. The worst of the experience is that all this had been done to him by her opponent Arthur Ochwada and his Chief Campaigner Obwora. Since her husband was very ill he had to stay in Kisumu for another one week being nursed under the care of the then Provincial Police Officer of Nyanza Province and Mrs. Mwama's family. "They were gracious. May God greatly reward them in this life and even in the next one," Julia adds.

After the events had simmered down and her husband regained his strength Julia filed a case in the Nairobi High Court. After a long and painful battle, the wheels of justice rolled in favour of Hillary. The judge further ordered Arthur to pay Hillary for damages done to him failure of which would see him face a term in prison. However Hillary opted to forgive him instead, as he felt that Arthur Ochwada didn't know what he had been doing. He said that as a physician he had never seen anybody behave so savagely. Although Arthur Ochwada was to pay the court costs and pay damages he didn't have any money. The court even contemplated having his property auctioned but her husband said that he was not for that idea, and that neither he nor his children would eat any proceeds from Arthur's property. He put his foot down and said that he didn't even want to lay his eyes on that money. According to him, that money didn't even compare to the life of a person.

Therefore, Julia gave in to her husband's wishes and agreed not to take any compensation from Arthur.

It was then that Julia recalled what her father used to tell them while they were still young. Julia elaborates, "My father used to cause a lot of laughter whenever he quoted from the Bible on the need to offer the other cheek if somebody slaps you on one cheek. I would voice my curiosity of how one would offer the other cheek if the first slap was very painful!" Little did she know that this piece of advice would come in handy at some point in her life as if her father had gotten a sneak peek into his daughter's future.

Later on Arthur Ochwada was remorseful, and to show him that she harbored no hard feelings for him, Julia offered him her hand in a gesture of friendship. So she sank a borehole in Arthur's father's compound. Later on she embarked on another project, this time refurbishing the church at Namboboto from which her father had been chased. It was thereafter elevated to the level of a parish. The school affiliated to it was also renovated then upgraded to secondary school status from the level of a primary school. It is now the famous Namboboto High School. Thereafter she went to her sub-location where she set up a village polytechnic now known as Nangina Polytechnic. Her people appreciated what she was doing for them but they also wondered how she could do anything for Arthur Ochwada's people after all the torture she went through their hands. Julia further put Arthur Ochwada's clansmen in all the committees. She made his clan's leader, then senior chief Kanoti Okwaro, the head of their constituency development team: His closest friend called Daudi Agongo, then a social worker, was made the community development officer. This move put her opponents at the head their community's development team, set in place



through all the committees. Later on when Julia was made an Assistant Minister she invited Arthur to her home and cooked him a meal.

Julia remarks, "When some of Arthur's virulent youth who are like the *mungikis*<sup>7</sup> of today saw what I was doing they just wanted to skin me and nothing more. Some of those who are still around, and they are in minority, still sneer at me even today but my youths who are alive today and now elders and are still with me." Although some of them are now old, they are still her strong supporters and they have been willing to support her all these years. She never lost any of her genuine supporters. However as time went by some of them died, others moved out of the area, and others still grew old and have mature children.

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<sup>7</sup>The Mungiki is a sect that has been declared illegal in Kenya due to the activities associated with them that have been seen over the years as inhibiting human rights.

## 1. A LEGISLATOR WITH A DIFFERENCE

After entry into parliament, the Samia people's attitudes towards Julia started to change. Little by little, they began to like their new leader and saw her as their role model. But since she was aware that any slight overt attempt at usurping the common order of things would make the Samia people revolt, Julia decided to rule with them rather than act as an autocrat. Thus they made most of the decisions pertaining to development together. To begin with they set up different committees to oversee the implementation of projects such as: education, farming, health, and religion. To ensure that all the people had a sense of responsibility towards these projects, the entire community was involved both in the planning and implementation stages of the community projects. So that they while they raised funds for funding the projects, Julia solicited any government funds to supplement any deficiencies in those projects. The main method of fund-raising that they appropriated became Harambees (A name given by Mzee Jomo Kenyatta to the pooling of resources together in order to implement projects). After every fund-raising the money was deposited into each committee's accounts, which had been opened when Julia came into power. When any committee held a Harambee, everyone participated. Similarly the entire community was encouraged to attend all the activities and ceremonies that were important for their community's progress. This strategy must have worked because even up to now, the programs that Julia initiated between 1974 and 1979 still exist.

For Julia politics is a profession that adds value to leadership as it incorporates the values that she acquired through education, her father's nurturing and lastly but not least, her talent as a leader. That is why even after her terms in parliament Julia uses her knowledge to develop her community in terms of education, financial empowerment, and health. Her reasoning is that as a leader you

must lead your people out of knowledge and if you are brave then fight for them out of poverty, floods, insecurity, and raging animals. She does not see what can stop a leader from going to the front and telling others to come along with them to attain the greatest heights. That, to her, is what politics should be all about, not idle talk. According to her, being a good leader is about being able to think more than the people one is supposed to lead, about being a head starter and being sensitive to the needs of one's people.

During her trips around villages, while assessing her students during their teaching practice, Julia got to interact a lot with people. She became very familiar with some of them all over the country. During her tours she came across many projects that she had seen benefit so many people. She then took them to her own people whom she felt would benefit from the projects. Although some of the projects she introduced in Funyula provoked so much controversy, Julia is of the opinion that the projects she implemented were based on what the people really needed. Basically, she re-configured the projects by applying her professional know how so that they would be fit for the Samia people. An example is the Agenga Rehabilitation Center which she designed based on the research she had conducted in maternal and child health, as well as the course she had studied in medical clinics, which she says had been inspired by the people at home for whom it was intended to serve. Julia declares, "My intention was to serve the needy people that I saw and empathized with. So whatever their need was I gave it to them."

Thus being a politician did not bring to an end Julia's career as a nutritionist. For instance when she saw children suffer from kwashiorkor, the nutritionist in her decided that something had to be done. Julia knew that the best people to help curb the disorder were the father and mother.

Following this different family units were taken to the Agenga Maternal and Child Nutrition Rehabilitation Center, where they were put in a little hut and shown several concepts: the father how to manage the family, and the mother how to manage the environment. This center was a concept that Julia has successfully implemented by sourcing for funding from DANIDA during the mid-term conference held in Copenhagen Denmark, 1980. On her return to Kenya, Julia, now an Assistant Minister also addressed her fellow members of parliament and asked for their support, which they gave her. Little did Julia know that this project would be a source of so much criticism upon her exit from parliament.

According to the *Viva* correspondent-the magazine according to Julia was a pro-Moody paper-the Agenga Health and Nutrition project “was so personalized that it suffered setbacks when Julia was thrown out.” It further reported that despite Moody Awori’s attempts to rehabilitate the project it was difficult to sustain it due to its personalized nature. In reaction to these claims some people in Funyula constituency were of the opinion that the people of Funyula should be allowed to decide the kind of projects they wanted initiated rather than politicians imposing projects on them. But according to Julia, this project was a reaction to a fundamental need to deal with an increasing poor infant and maternal nutrition. In her opinion, the project did not fare so well in her absence because there was no expert help and finances to keep it going. As she further revealed, even her attempts to participate in the project were shunned. But all the arguments notwithstanding, this project was beneficial to some people and it continues to curb malnutrition in this area. But the fact is that not all the projects being implemented in a community will be accepted by all the interested parties thus there will never be an instance when all people will agree on a certain idea. Therefore, as much as the people should have a say on what they feel is right for them, the community leader

and in this case the MP can also introduce a project they feel will benefit their people and take it upon themselves to conduct a civic education that will enlighten their people on their needs and ways to curb their problems.

But then what cannot be denied is the fact that Julia always had the welfare of her people very close to her heart. When the president of Uganda Idi Amin threatened to march to Naivasha to expand Uganda's borders, which had purportedly been extended by the colonial rule during the scramble and partition of Africa, Julia was instantly scared for her people. On February 1976, Julia organized a demonstration by the Busia people as a protest against Idi Amin's claims to land in Kenya. Following this, she told President Kenyatta that her constitution was likely to offer the entry point as it was at the border of Kenya and Uganda. Thus she suggested a police station be built in the area and that is how the Sio port police post was established followed by the Hakati army barracks whose purpose was to ensure a high standard of security in that area. In addition, she also mobilized her constituents to establish a strong network of community policing.

At the same time Julia was aware that there were not many sources of revenue from her area yet she really wanted to liberate her people financially. Tesera had taught Julia that as a Home Economist, planning is an essential part of good management. Having been brought up in the Samia area, Julia was aware that fishing was their major source of income. As a result, she decided to capitalize on this gold mine to economically empower her people. Since Funyula constituency was at the shores of Lake Victoria, she was aware that fish was easily accessible to her people and they could therefore act as the primary distributors of this food element rich in proteins, Omega 3 and iron among others. Where better to start then than by establishing a cooperative society to

counter the rampant cases of exploitation of the Fisherwomen by the middlemen? Besides, a cooperative society would make their market stronger and ensure that the fishermen and women got income to boost their businesses when they were in dire need of capital. As a result, the Samia fisherwomen formed groups and pooled resources that they used to purchase an engine-powered towing boat to collect their catch. However, this boat, like several other projects that were initiated by Julia, greatly suffered in her absence as the incoming reign was not so keen on empowering the masses through micro and semi-micro economic plans for poverty eradication.

The other factor to Samia's advantage was that Busia is a border town that has over the years attracted a wide array of people belonging to different tribes and nationalities. It is therefore a classical cosmopolitan area with so much money in circulation. But then Julia could not see why the area continued to suffer from very high poverty levels in the face of the constant cash flow. After careful thinking and touring her constituency and from her experience while growing up, Julia came to the conclusion that a large chunk of these constituents, who were middle-aged and old men and women were illiterate. As a result, the economic activities that would have otherwise benefit Julia's constituents were passing them by, contributing to their pathetic poverty status. Therefore Julia collaborated with the University of Nairobi Adult Education Program and sent several groups of men and women to train as Trainers of Trainees for the *Elimu ya Ngumbaru* (adult education) project. The beneficiaries of this program have been of immense help all over the country to reduce illiteracy in the country.

Julia was also aware that the African women and children had been made vulnerable by their dire socio-economic conditions. She therefore lineated her research towards this area in order to find

ways ease their problems. In recognition of her services in promoting health services for mothers and children in the community the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) awarded Julia a medal. After receiving this prize she gave out instructions that the medal should be sold and proceeds from it used to purchase cross breed goats. Thus the goats were imported from America and introduced in seven sub-locations of the Samia region and they had the capacity to produce 7pints of milk daily. Julia had initiated this project to meet the dietary and economic deficiency in the Busia area, which had a history of malnourishment. It mostly benefited women who had for a long time wanted to rear goats or cattle but had been unable to do so because of tsetse flies. It was launched in Busia on June 1977 by the FAO director of sheep and goats project Dr. Edward Allanby, assisted by Julia. But then this turned out to be another source of controversy as it was termed as a total failure by her political critics. Julia later on admitted that in deed this project did not fare very well but that this was because of the adverse weather conditions and not the nature of the project. According to her, some of the goats that thrived were multiplied and distributed to other parts of the country. However, some other people have a different story to tell. The *Viva* March edition reported that most of these goats were actually distributed in the southern parts whence Julia came, implying that the project was run with a tinge of nepotism. The paper further said that the project failed poorly. However, the facts on the ground contradict this assertion, because these goats were a major contributor to the Kenya Milk Goats program that still survives in some parts of the country including Busia and Kanduyi in Bungoma.

Incidentally another of Julia's pet project was to ensure that her people got safe drinking water. She had gone into parliament with the symbol of *eshiongo* (or waterpot), and true to her election promise she initiated the ambitious water project that is now serving Busia County from Mundika.

The project was however later on expanded so that it could serve the larger Busia area. Although the project was originally intended for her constituency and the first pipes would go all the way to Samia, she wanted the other people in the wider Busia region to also benefit from the Mundika-Bukangala water scheme project. However, the project that had been estimated to cost close to seven million Kenya shillings did not go beyond the first phase due to financial constraints despite Julia's efforts at fund-raising. The various Harambees that were held as well as the funds Julia sourced from the government did not even meet half the costs. Considering the low per capita income of these constituents and the high poverty levels, this project had a narrow lifeline. But at least the water was circulated through-out the Northern Samia region, but was unable to reach most of the Southern region where Julia's home and her husband's home was.

The other projects that Julia embarked on were: taking electricity to her people stretching from Bumala up to Bumbale, then the Odiado rehabilitation center, the Ageng'a Busia Women Training Center that was intended for adult literacy of the women, the Bumbale Technical training Institute that is now a university, the water rowing sport established in 1975 whose club is very strong to date and its participants went to the Pre-Olympic trials, the establishment of several health centers in that constituency, setting up and rehabilitation of various community churches, and raising the number of primary and secondary schools in Fungula constituency from about 20-56 majority of which are still there to this day. Although her development agenda was in line with the people-centered developmental communal or what President Nyerere of Tanzania referred to as the Ujamaa model of societal development, Julia says she is not a socialist and at the time of her rule she never been in touch with socialism despite visiting Russia and Tanzania. She nevertheless, always wanted the best for her people. She wanted to see their lives bettered. This is what drove



her. It saddens her, therefore, that despite her major contribution to her society's development, so much criticism followed Julia's exit from parliament almost bordering on the personal.

Julia is not under any illusion that her political career was a walk in the park. Being the first female MP in Western Province was a challenge, as Julia confesses. Not many people readily accepted the idea of being led by a woman. Her husband was abused and called a stupid man who had allowed a woman to rule him. He was also referred to by other names that insinuated that he was the woman of the family. But he always had a positive outlook in life. To all these insults he simply said, "Fine, I am the woman of the family but I am allowing my wife do what she loves. We are all pursuing different interests, both of us leaders in our own capacity," as Julia recalls. He continued to support Julia both materially and emotionally by being there for her all the way even in the face of all political intrigues. But most importantly, the couple never forgot that they were married and that they needed to have quality time together. So whenever Hillary was not in the classroom teaching and had some free time he spent it with his wife. Julia praises him as

"A wonderful man who sacrificed so much to ensure that I was protected and that I had the resources. He literally mobilized resources and gave me the money I wanted and any other thing I needed." Therefore, Hillary was there to give Julia the financial, moral and spiritual support that she obviously needed.

Julia was an active participant in the activities of KANU which was the ruling party. Due to her known interest in women and youth affairs, Julia was elected as the KANU director of Youth and Women Affairs. Under this docket, she set up the Youth for KANU '92 also known as the KANU Youth Wingers in preparation for the 1992 general elections. Soon, however, this group was

accused of unruly behavior. So when later she expressed her intention to launch this group in Busia, Julia met some form of resistance. But despite being warned by the labor Minister Philip Masinde about launching the youth organization in the Busia area, she remained adamant that nothing would deter her from working with the youths.

As fate would have it on Friday 22, 1995, the KANU Youth Wing was in the spotlight once more, this time round being described as stagnant development-wise in *The Daily Nation* by Tom Mshindi, a correspondent who was of the opinion that this group of youths had achieved no development contrary to its objectives. He further questioned the efforts put in place by the Women and Youths' Bureau headed by Julia to improve the situation of the youth. In fact, the *Nation* Correspondent accused KANU of "manipulating" and "exploiting" the youth in the autocratic political system. As Tom further posited, "In its principal preoccupation to win by all means, idle youth have been used to fight battles, intimidate opponents and generally cause chaos." If you will remember, it is such idle youths that Julia accused Arthur of using during the 1974 campaigns to terrorize her supporters. It therefore seems that the same foul description was following them even during Julia's reign. So what could have been the problem? Could it be that her critics had misunderstood her, or that it was a case of the pot calling the kettle black?

But as it later on came to pass, KANU was soon to find itself standing on a shaky ground with the advent of multiparty democracy under the leadership of once KANU fanatics like Kenneth Matiba. Thus in 1997, KANU was hit by mass defections from its cocoon. Following this, a large number of politicians moved out from KANU to either form new parties or to join already existing political parties. Julia also defected to Ford K. These parties had been born in the wake of multi-party

democracy in 1992 that was now gaining momentum towards the 1997 general elections. This then invoked anger in the former President of the Republic of Kenya Daniel Arap Moi, who criticized these defectors calling them “double-dealers.” The former president termed these defectors as untrue KANU members who were just returning to where they belonged after losing in the nominations. Julia and Mohammed Galgalo who joined Ford-K were among these defectors. However, Julia was also to defect from Ford-K to form her own party called the Labour Party of Kenya (LDP). Later on during the 2007 election campaigns, a year that saw the advent of coalition parties formed in a sort of frenzy, LDP was also to be part of a coalition under the umbrella of ODM-Kenya. Thus Julia and her former political Protégée Steven Kalonzo Musyoka became a pivot point of this party with Kalonzo becoming the party’s presidential candidate and Julia his running mate.

But then this is not to say that Julia’s entire time in parliament was just spent in party politics and in doing projects in her constituency and that she did no work aimed at ensuring the progress of Kenya. This is would be far from the truth. 1974, the same year she was elected to parliament, the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta appointed her as Kenya’s new Assistant Minister for Housing and Social Services. This saw Julia become the first woman Assistant Minister and first woman appointed to the Cabinet in Kenya. *The Sunday Nation* dated November 24, 1974 described Julia as “A model of the ‘new African Woman’ who despite her education and obvious beauty she still remained rooted to her traditional values. In fact, she assured the people that towns and cities were temporary residential areas but Africans still regarded rural areas as their real homes. Even at that early stage in parliament, she made it known that both men and women had been placed on an equal footing by the constitution, and that “What remains is for our culture to realize the abilities

of the opposite sex, and for the women to aspire high enough.” According to her legislative objectives, Julia aimed at embarking on rural development as the key to a better quality of life for her people. In fact, when Julia saw that their culture being slowly eroded by the other cultures pervading the Busia area, she set out to strengthen the annual cultural festival held every December. This is because the town had practically extended to the rural areas. Julia did this because she valued her culture.

As Assistant Minister for Housing and Social Services, Julia laid a lot of emphasis on ensuring that the youths of Kenya received adequate education that would secure their futures, just as it had done hers. She had earlier on noted during a rally that it is ignorance that hindered progress in Samia. Seeing that women were the most vulnerable in this predicament, she went round the country encouraging parents to educate their children. She also cautioned girls not to fall prey to the antics of men and drop out of school, as it is only education that would liberate them from poverty considering most of them hailed from poor backgrounds. At the same time Julia took steps to ensure that teachers would not exploit students, a practice that had been going on during the reign of Arthur Ochwada. But then Julia also observed that the rural students were not performing well academically as their urban counterparts because the latter had proper facilities such as good quality studying lights unlike their colleagues in the rural areas. Therefore, she established the need for more projects to improve the social welfare of the students. This, she suggested, could be achieved through Harambee projects.

Julia often reminded teachers of their responsibility towards the community of in ensuring that the classrooms were hatcheries of good citizens. She further told them that this would depend on the

nature of the results and overall conduct of the pupils that would be analyzed after going through formal education. She also advised local leaders to set up more technical institutes to occupy the youths in productive endeavors in order to make them self reliant. She also called on Christian organizations like the Young Women Christian Organization to work closely with the rural population if it were to fight illiteracy and poverty through its programs. She also made a plea to people living in Nairobi and other towns to visit their homes frequently and assist boost the various development projects. This call was seconded by Jane Kiano who is Julia's friend and chairperson of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization. Mrs. Kiano's support for Julia was a message to the people of Kenya challenging the stereotype that women are their own enemies. The two women wanted to show that in deed there women who actually worked together doing positive things for their people.

Still under her ministerial docket, Julia set out to examine ways in which Kenya's population could be prevented from exploding in the face of the country's meager resources. On 26<sup>th</sup> June 1978 she conducted a workshop of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, which was held at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre. In this conference she admitted that contrary to the laws in support of gender equality in Kenya women were still being discriminated against and exploited by men. She therefore suggested that Kenya's legislators should make clear laws as the current ones had double interpretations leading to ambiguity. Homing in, she rebuked the passive nature of men in matters pertaining to family planning, yet this was a joint responsibility between a man and a woman. In her words, "Since man was a partner in child-bearing, 'why shouldn't family planning be a joint responsibility between husband and wife - for their own as well as their children's benefit?'"

In 1982 Julia was moved from the ministry of Housing and Social Services and made to be the Assistant Minister for Basic Education. But even though she was no longer in charge of social services, Julia continued to express her concern over the rapidly increasing population of Kenya. She cautioned the public that the country's resources could no longer be stretched to accommodate the basic needs of its citizens of which education was one of them. As Julia reiterated, "The city's high population growth rate was not caused by high birth rate but by rural-urban migration." Julia saw the increase in migration to Nairobi had resulted in the shortage of housing leading to the encroaching slums. What is however very interesting is the way in which Julia addresses the concerns of women in whichever forum she finds herself. For example, in 1982 Julia saw to it that the Lands Board rejected the sale of land unless the seller took his wife and children with him to the board's meeting. This was a move to secure the interests of women and children who more often than not end up suffering when the man sold the family land, in most cases without his family's knowledge. Most important therefore, is that Julia sacrificed her time and more often than not her resources to see to it that women's welfare had been taken care of, that they had been empowered, and that they were developing. Although Julia did not go back to parliament after the 1983 elections, she never abandoned her chief goal in life, 'to secure the welfare of women and children.'

Julia has a record of the highest number of bills passed in parliament by a single person to date. She set the pace for the empowerment of women, even after she had left parliament, and Njoki Ndung'u advanced this concept through the controversial sex offenders' bill, which she motioned in parliament and lobbied for till it was passed. Just before leaving parliament she had been piloting among the other members of the August house about a bill she was proposing to motion

as the micro-economic act, a concept that has been admirably incorporated in the Kenya national economic development strategy today.

Out of the five bills she tabled three were successfully passed into laws. The first was concerned with the revival of the cotton industry that had completely collapsed. You will remember that Julia had a personal relationship with cotton farming from her tender youth and she really wanted to see this industry brought back to its feet. Having conducted a thorough research she advocated for the establishment of the Cotton Development Authority, a law that has seen the resurrection of the cotton industry. Part of its strategy was to take this industry from the government's ownership to enable the people to manage it. Upon its establishment this institution was devolved to the provinces where it achieved its role.

The second bill was concerned with conservation of public resources through wastage. Some time back the minister of finance had tabled a bill on the procurement and disposal act which did not specify who should implement it thus rendering it vague. As a result this act had left ample room for corruption especially during the process of procuring government property and their consequent disposal when out of shape. She therefore tabled another bill that covered the finer details that would seal all loopholes through which the taxpayers get swindled. Part of the areas to be affected were not only material deliverables but also services such as the white elephant projects for example the roads purported to be constructed and certificates of completion issued with no physical proof available. Her bill therefore gave relevant advice on how to deal with corruption.

To achieve this she wrote a law for Professional Accountant and Procurement officers known in the financial world as the procurement chain. The aim of this law was to break the chain or cycle of financial control to eliminate mismanagement of resources by establishing a new way of accountability for the decisions made in a chain of command. The bill was debated three times then voted as an act passed by the parliament and then assented into a law by the president. As a result, the body called Kenya Institute of Supplies and Management was set up and now trains and supplies officers. Today we have the Procurement Oversight Authority ensures that the procurement and disposal of government property is conducted in the correct procedure.

The third law she saw established was the Kenya Nutritionists and Dieticians Institute (KNDI) through a motion brought on the floor, debated and passed as a bill. The KNDI embraces private public partnerships in its operations that aim at achieving the best nutrition and dietetics practices both nationally and internationally. As part of its duty KNDI seeks to understand and enlighten the public how climate affects food production and how the environment affects the distribution of minerals and other food components in different geographical locations and further seeks to balance these deficiencies through food fortification. At first she encountered immense resistance from the nutritionists who saw her initiative as a move to control their trade but she did not give up her efforts as she wanted them to understand was a science just like medicine and it therefore needed to be consolidated into one professional body and approached in a strategic and organized manner. She knew that nutrition was a multi-dimensional discipline thus it was a very important aspect of human growth and development. When it was set up, the Kenya Nutrition and Dieticians Institute, KNDI brought together all universities and colleges that offered nutrition as a course under one umbrella and put together under a core curriculum that would standardize this



profession.

Nutrition, says Julia, deals with food production, development, management, preparation and consumption, capturing the lifestyle diseases that are as a result of improper consumption of food. Therefore nutrition ensures that the injection of dietary needs and their utilization is understood thus a prerogative that KNDI insists on for all those studying nutrition. In fact her doctorate studies was on the trans-methylation process in the livers of rats in a study that required her to grow and dissect rats then digested their livers to establish how the liver gets affected by different food components and other substances ingested and the study lasted a period of three years. Her docket is preventive medicine, which reduces the risk of illnesses to promote wellness. She therefore works to ensure that a big portion of the community is well.

It should be noted that Julia worked under two presidents of Kenya.-the late President Jomo Kenyatta and the former president Daniel Arap Moi. This was a major achievement. However under president Moi, she was not able to complete her five-year time in parliament when there was an attempted coup in 1982, one year before the end of her full term. As a result, there was an emergency election period in the year 1983, and this time round Julia met a new opponent in Moody Awori, a man who would unseat her and represent Funyula constituency in parliament for a total of 25 years.

When he first ventured into politics, Moody initiated his campaigns introduced novelty in the Kenyan political scene by the use of pomp and glamour. First impressions, they say, build solid reputations, and maybe this is what endeared Moody to the Funyula constituents. Moody was the

first politician who campaigned with a helicopter thus introduced into the Kenyan political arena a culture of air lifted choppers ferrying politicians around the Kenyan landscape during campaigns. On this particular occasion Moody had completely aimed to please the constituents, but he ended up dazzling them.

As it were, a chopper went round the area dropping a package into every compound according to the number of units in the homestead. It appears that a population survey had been conducted in advance such that each unit in a compound received a package which the chopper dropped as it scoured the area. This package contained a *leso* with Moody's portrait that had been used to wrap basic household commodities like sugar, salt, flour, cooking fat, and such others. Is it a surprise that the women decided to vote for him with a wild frenzy? In their eyes he was a savior in disguise. But the world is never fair, as Julia came to realize. Like a hawk moody had seen an opportunity and struck, made a lasting impression to the women as the saying 'the way to the man's heart is through his stomach' goes. In this case though, a show of consideration for a woman's desire to meet her children's demands for food had been met. So they would vote for Moody, regardless the questionable motive for the show of the concerns. Thus he won the allegiance of many *Samias* and take over the Funyula seat.

Thus when the election results were announced, Moody Awori was declared the winner of the Funyula seat, winning the seat with a margin of 2000 votes over Julia, a very narrow margin indeed. But these elections were marred by a bitter contest which had a lot of cheating and Julia felt that the electoral process had not been open and fair. She accused Moody Awori's campaigners of bribing the masses, and buying of votes which to her was against the essence of

free and fair elections. Later on Julia contested the seat in a court of law but the case was dismissed for lack of evidence. Julia had filed a case on the basis of voting irregularities, but despite the overwhelming evidence she had garnered the ruling was made in favor of Moody. Nevertheless, Julia still considers herself the winner of those elections. Thereafter, for the next five terms the Samia people returned Moody to parliament until recently when the wave of ODM pushed Paul Otwoma into their lives once again with promises of reforms and economic progress that had apparently exited with Julia.

But this was apparently just the beginning of the tussle between Julia and Moody not only over Funyula constituency, but also in other interests in the larger Busia District. This is because thereafter Moody proceeded to claim all the other positions of leadership that had been previously dominated by Julia and next on his agenda was the KANU chair. Julia cried foul not only once when during several occasions she felt that there were plans to manipulate her out of KANU leadership and even party nominations. In one occasion the former MP said that there were plans to conduct secret KANU parliamentary nominations in Busia district. According to Julia, this was a deliberate plan of blocking her, since she was opposed to a certain powerful politician in the zone. She further accused the voter registration officials in that region of delaying the processing of the cards. She had earlier on complained about being unable to get her card twice due to alleged anomalies. But as she later on disclosed, just as the former Electoral Commission Chairman Zaccheus Chesoni and the area District Commissioner were not willing to do anything about this.

When Julia finally exited parliament in 1983 Moody “inherited” the support of the women, which he continued to enjoy until he lost to Paul Otwoma after the 2007 elections. Unfortunately when

she left parliament she still had several unaccomplished tasks. Among these were two bills that she had intended to motion in parliament in the new financial year: The first bill was on the reclamation Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASALS) into arable land to meet the food shortage that has led to Kenya suffering from food insecurity for a very long time. Then the other was a bill concerned with the social and micro-enterprises to bring financial empowerment closer for the women to access financial empowerment through resources for small scale enterprises, to teach them to save their money and how to turn their resources productive as well as how to transfer markets from one place to another.

In the controversial 2007 elections Kalonzo did not win. So when the country resumed normalcy, Kalonzo did not nominate Julia and Maanzo as his party's Members of Parliament despite their being key members of the party. This move saw Kalonzo dubbed traitor by many Kenyans. Kalonzo Musyoka had been widely expected to nominate the chairman of the party, Mr. Daniel Maanzo and his running mate Julia. He went against the wishes of the committee coordinating the nominations and the party regulations and instead chose Mr. Mohamed Abdi Afey from Wajir and Ms. Shakila Abdalla from Lamu. Later on Julia and Maanzo sued Kalonzo challenging his choice of candidates, but nothing came out of it. In 2009 there were rumours and newspaper reports about an impending alliance between her party and Kalonzo once more. Julia was categorical that the previous coalition one of convenience and ended after the elections. LPK was now a completely independent entity as it was before. When a *Daily Nation* correspondent, whether her party and ODM- K would ever partner again, she had this to say:

"We will consider that later. If we will be of the same mind and sharing similar ideologies then we could. Kenyan politics now demands that parties work together in any election."

## 2. A CRUSADER FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

To talk about Julia's political exploits, wins and heartaches necessitates that one takes the time to write about one of the subjects close to Julia's heart –the issue of women empowerment. Julia has been at the center of affirmative action for women. A large percentage of the Kenyan population still remembers the excitement that swamped the country after the Beijing conference. Most important though is that Julia was the leader of the 1985 delegation of the Kenyan women to this convention that rocked Kenya to its roots. This conference changed Julia's perceptions on the image of the African woman. She began to see a new Kenya that would take into serious consideration the possibility of women's contribution to their country's development. Upon their return home it was clear that these women had drastically changed not only their opinions, but also the way they interpreted the plight of Kenyan women in general. But soon Julia realized that this matter did not sit well with some Kenyan men who felt that by their women challenging the status quo established by a strict adherence to gender roles, they were in turn usurping the dominant position of the man not only in the family but also in the community. As anticipated, some men were heard declaring in public that this conference had only spoilt their women. To a careful observer, it was obvious that these men did not necessarily understand the relevance of this conference.

Hence many people in Kenya saw this change of attitude in the women not only as a process of the female gender consciously campaigning for their rights but also as a revolutionary political statement. It was a moment of awakening for the previously sleeping tigers. Julia elaborates. "As men are recorded in the history of their time as having occupied the conference halls in search of

the independence from their colonial rulers, so women also feel that their participation in the independence process is not to be underrated." Thus the reason behind the early sixties women conferences being held was for women of the East African States to marshal and consolidate their strength and experiences. This would then enable them to support their men's efforts. In the process these women would be able to understand what their roles would be in their new post-independent states. This period of interregnum therefore presented the perfect opportunity for the up-coming African women leaders to establish means for adequately governing their now independent states. This was to be achieved through a series of women's conferences.

In order to understand the genesis of the Beijing Conference, one needs to understand the beginning of this journey for the long journey of the struggle for women's empowerment. This journey began in the pre-independent Kenya by a group of white women. Being predominantly housewives, they felt the need to exercise the etiquette of good housekeeping lessons they had learnt back home in the finishing schools. A majority of these women were wives of missionaries who had come to Africa to spread the Holy Gospel. At first they would interact with fellow whites but as gradually the Africans got incorporated as the clergy these women saw the need to extend these qualities to the wives of these new converts with whom their husbands interacted. Therefore when they were visited by the African reverend and his wife the missionary's wife would take the reverend's wife to the side to give her lessons in housekeeping and food production. It is these qualities that Julia mother learnt from the wives of the missionaries, qualities which Julia also learnt from her mother.

In post independent Kenya, the wives of the black Reverends, now enlightened women, in turn

the need to extend what they had learnt to their fellow African women. The women then saw the need to diversify their interests to cater for economic development and financial empowerment among many other things pertinent to the African woman. Therefore it did not come as a surprise when these women began to be agitated with the need for self-governance. They wanted to have organizations that would cater for the needs of women. They came up with the idea of forming one umbrella organization that would fight for the interests of women. This is how the women came up with the idea of forming the Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization. This idea was rapidly picked up and campaign wheels were set in motion with many people lobbying support for their favorite candidates. The end result was that Phoebe Asiyo was elected the first African chair of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake organization. This is how Maendeleo ya Wanawake grew to be a famous large organization with a countrywide membership. Although there were other women organizations like the National Council of Women in Kenya, it is Maendeleo ya Wanawake that stood out more. So when Julia became the assistant minister for Housing and Social Services she set up a policy on self help groups that has seen many small and micro-finance institutions in Kenya today being established, consequently financially empowering women in Kenya.

Julia has observed over the years that despite the obvious push and pull between men and women in Kenya and the women's cries for equality, women are still not taken seriously. In fact, very few people even understand what feminism is all about, or how it operates. That is why although efforts to empower women in Kenya have been put in place there has not been a great paradigm shift. It is however encouraging to note that Julia has attempted to empower women to the best of her capability. She has been able to implement various projects, though at a small scale, targeting women in the grass roots level. It is further impressive to note that her attempts are not only for the

aim of gaining publicity for political redemption as she was engaged in such projects before, during and after her term in parliament. To achieve this, Julia has been able to reach very many women in the grass roots level through their village gatherings. But then she has noticed that as none of these women has ever sat in any forum with their other contemporaries from other parts of the world or even their continent Africa to discuss issues pertinent to them, they feel excluded from the planning stage of matters central to their welfare. As a result, most of them do not take the projects handed to them seriously as they do not feel a part of them.

*The Sunday Nation* newspaper dated January 18, 1998 reported that "Kenya's political landscape has an invisible sign that reads "Men Only" and the women who have tried to ignore this sign have paid dearly." This article further revealed how women who stand for public office often get subjected to violence and taunts because of their sexuality. This is exactly what happened to Julia when she first ventured into politics and even later on when during a KANU election meeting in Busia a man grabbed a microphone from her hand and shouted, "We don't want to be led by a woman!" This occurred when Julia was an Assistant Minister, an instance that would have never occurred to a man in her position or one in an even lower rank to hers. She was not viewed as being equal to her male counterparts. To many a people, Julia was seen as a woman and all else of little consequence to her observers. The political arena in Kenya has been a battle field with all odds against female politicians. The culture of using women as political decoys is still in practice. For some time now, male party leaders have adopted the tendency of fronting female candidates only for them to be dropped at the preliminary stage. Julia witnessed this in the post 1983 politics where she and her fellow female politicians were overlooked in party positions in favor of male candidates. Her case with Kalonzo Musyoka is a case in point. The article then proceeded to point



out. "Little wonder then that there are few heroines in Kenya." The article suggested that men marginalize women in the political sphere due to the fear that sharing the national cake will make it shrink. But now there is something to smile about, because the idea of reserving a number of seats for women that was sneered at in the past is now on its way to implementation through the Affirmative Action. It is pleasing to note that the women work force has finally been recognized for its capability, thanks to Julia and her fellow women activists like Professor Wanjiku Kabira, Jane Kiano, Phoebe Asiyo and Njoki Ndung'u among others.

In a book edited by Maria Nzomo, empowerment of women in political decision-making has brought a difference in the process of political governance in Kenya. Maria sees the marginalization of women as stemming from the socialization process of gender roles. Yet women, despite their contribution to development by complementing their men, they are not always recognized. This was the reason why the East African first ladies encouraged African women who were playing crucial roles in the struggle for independence to work together with their men in the search for freedom. As a result they organized conferences with the support of their husbands to bring together the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organisation of Kenya, Umoja Wa Wanawake of Tanzania and the Uganda Women Association. These meetings involved influential female figures like: from Tanzania, Bibi Titi and Miss Lucy Lameck; from Uganda, Mama Miria Obote, Joyce Masembe and Salome Namayanja; and from Kenya, Phoebe Asiyo and Margaret Kenyatta, among others. There was also a host of other women such as the Young Women Brigade, nurses, teachers, budding businesswomen, and social workers from all over the Eastern Africa region. Among the vibrant young women in attendance were Julia Ojiambo, Eda Gachukia, and many more who were deployed as secretaries to the conferences. From these developments, it was quite obvious that

women's roles had began to go beyond the traditional definitions of "production and reproduction," in Nzomo's words.

The book further gives details of how financial constraints make it hard for women to manage elections yet men easily access these same resources. Besides, the patriarchal society has put men at the helm of the management of financial institutions. This then makes it hard for women to access financial facilities without their husbands' consent, even when these women have their own independent securities. It therefore becomes known that in the past, it was next to impossible for a woman without a man by her side with the tag 'husband' to acquire a political seat in Kenya due to the socio-cultural norms. But luckily, today, with the various reforms that have taken place in this country, this is no longer the case. Like Nzomo, Julia saw the solution to this and several other problems facing women in Kenya in the empowerment of women, which she set out to do. In fact, this is what motivated her to set up the Center for the Advancement of Women and Children, an NGO that she established to create awareness on human rights through Civic Education and other strategies in the grassroots.

Julia in an interview with Nzomo revealed that she was not that happy with the turn that campaigns had taken, where money was used to woo voters. This has resulted in what Mrs. Nzomo calls 'commercial politics' and the culture of lies in politics with everyone calling themselves reformers yet their portfolios are a mere white elephant creation of enchanting verbose. Thus according to Julia,

"Politics is a game of survival for the fittest and, therefore women politicians must be prepared to fight the negative social systems and electoral laws that have marginalized them."

Back then when Julia first ventured into politics there was only one seat that everyone fought for, but without a fair play ground. For instance during the 1979 elections some women were reportedly ambushed and lashed at by some candidates' agents on the polling day. Earlier on Julia had made a call to women to vote for their own gender in the wake of blatant animosity portrayed by men not only towards the women political aspirants, but also towards the female voters. Therefore, it appeared that the men were passing across the message that they would not to accept any attempts by any woman t challenge their dominance in politics. This was a trend that had turned into a routine since the 1974 elections period when Julia campaigned head to head with Arthur in a fierce battle that almost turned fatal.

During her first attempt at politics, Julia had it rough. Some women who were alleged to be Julia's supporters were lashed with whips and forced to return home. In this way, these women's democratic rights to vote were infringed yet no action was taken to salvage the situation. The intention of these attackers, who were sent by their political aspirants, was in deed to ensure that these women would not heed Julia's request to vote as a bloc. Funya constituency that was initially called Busia Central constituency has since then been under the leadership of Arthur Ochwada, who was succeeded by Julia Ojiambo, then Moody Awori and is currently under the leadership of Paul Otwoma. But then as it usually is under such circumstances, female voters in the area have ever since voted solidly for any voter they have been in support of, and the one in their favor has always won. But then, Oscar warned women in his article that not unless they changed their voting pattern, they "Risk being subjected to even more hostile treatment in future."

But this is not the only thing that deterred the Samia women from voting in. In 1974 women voters did not vote as per the expectations. This is because when dusk approached, they left the voting queues to go home and attend to their domestic chores as men continued to vote. It therefore came as a relief to Julia and her campaign team when it was finally announced that she had won the elections, as it was a very long nightmare that never seemed to end.

Nonetheless, Julia continued to get the support of the women voters even in the following election period when she once again won over Arthur, returning to parliament for a second term after the 1979 elections. She also got the support of men like Mr. Victor Bwire who was also a political contender for the same seat that Julia was eyeing stepped down for Julia. He also asked all his supporters to work with Julia to ensure that she went back to parliament to continue with the projects she had began in their community. Addressing a political rally in Samia Mr. Bwire said, "Dr. Ojiambo has induced a lot of development in Samia and has been resourceful in the face of great odds."

Julia goes on further to say that women want to be in leadership and they have been looking for those opportunities but the society has not made it possible for them. "During our days," says remembers,

"We were few in the field and so it was an issue of who was going to be available and who could support you." She continues to say that there was no woman who could come to help her except the young girls in the area and the elderly women like her mother-in-law. There were also no educated women who could camp with me but today they are there in thousands in one constituency." According to her any woman can come in to leadership today because there are

vacuums people to fill them. She says that the constitution has given women the opportunity and power to do this. There wasn't anything like affirmative action when she first ventured into politics thus she fiercely fought among others to be in parliament. It was survival of the fittest as evident in her case. As she happened to be the fittest, she did survive.

But today, Julia and her fellow women leaders have brought this to an end. This they were able to achieve through the constitution, which has made it fair for women to contest any political seats through the political parties' act. However, the Kenyan society did not easily accept the affirmative action hands down. But then, as much as men would like to resist affirmative action the constitution has forced them to accept it. Julia knows that whether they like it or not they have to accept the affirmative action for a third women and other gender reforms because for now women are the minority but next time it may be the men looking for the same. Julia says this with the knowledge that gender parity does not only apply to women, thus it would be a folly for men to think affirmative action can only benefit women. As Julia observes, teachers are now wooing girls to sit in the classroom with boys. Impressively enough, the girls are equally excelling thus boosting their self-esteem. She however detests some women's attitudes of giving their brothers an upper hand instead of taking what has been offered them. She wittily argues that the very brothers also want to eat and may not let an equal opportunity pass them for their sister's sake. She therefore asserts that the two sexes must learn to exist competitively. Interestingly though, Julia does not think that boys should be made extinct for girls to thrive. She is a living example. Instead, she says that women should appreciate men's presence and contributions and merge them with theirs.

Julia further observes that since women have been prepared by the education system that has

exposed them to power, they have to say no to handouts. As she has seen over the years in most cases it is the women who encourage men to bribe the voters. They are the ones who run out to take bribes out of the need to provide basic needs for their children, albeit a temporary resolve, thus she says that they have to stop this bad practice. This is because as mothers they are the ones who lose out in the big picture and eventually feel the pain. She does not see why women should go and accept little handouts from men who are going to exploit their opportunities. Julia has occasionally heard women say to the female political aspirants, "*mkono mtupu haulambwi*," instead of saying, "Let her go there are bring us bring tapped water to our homesteads, bring us maternity wards in our area, and dispensaries so that when my child falls ill at night I will go to the hospital, ensure kiosks are near so that our girl children don't have to go far and get raped on the way, lights so that thieves do not hide and attack us, ensure that food is available and no child goes to bed on an empty stomach, and schools for our children with a provision for meals if they have to stay there the whole day-and a good balanced diet for that matter." Yet although these female voters are aware that all this is possible they still go for the man who has money to bribe them.

Julia therefore encourages women to participate in politics saying that if a woman possesses the intellect and capacity to contribute to what is going on in parliament then no one will take her for a ride. Julia did that and no one dismissed her contributions in parliament. Although she admits to being discriminated against, she says it was owing to her gender and not her intellect yet that did not stop her from standing up and giving an answer to a question or initiating several government motions and sustaining a debate in their favor. So it came as a big inspiration to her when people in Kenya began to invite her to visit their areas.

This saw Julia visit Pokot where she started schools in Kinyang'. During this visit the Pokot men and women wanted to see this woman who sat in cabinet among men. She can hardly conceal the pride that her life actually made an impact in the Pokot people. Julia reminisces, "I was the first woman to go to Pokot and sit in front of all these elders on their little stools as they spat on the ground, but evidently enjoying what I was telling them." They were eager to see how different Julia was, but the only difference they saw was in the kitenge and headscarf outfit that she was wearing. Everything else about her seemed normal and she was even talking like their little girls. So they discovered that she was just a child like theirs and when they asked if their children could also be like her she told them to take them to school and feed them well as that was all her father had done then take them to school. There, she told them, they will learn these skills that the white men had of speaking and writing, which would give them an edge over other women.

But Julia is not oblivious to the other reality that women in Kenya have for a long time been excluded from the leadership of this country by tribal machinations. At one time she heard that some people were saying that if the house of Mumbi was not available, then all others were not good enough to rule unless there was no House of Nairobi. She therefore wondered what would become of the house of Jaramogi, Muliro, and the others. She witnessed this concept work against her in 1979 when after winning the second round to parliament and having completed an acknowledged excellent performance as the first Kenya woman Assistant Minister she was nominated to be promoted to a full cabinet status only to hear at the then famous one o'clock pm radio announcement that her name had been removed from the list at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour as it was on transit to the news room. Thereafter she never made it to the August house again. The attempted coup in 1982 saw an unexpected election, which threw her at the hands of a savage electoral

system once again, and this time she did not surface with her head above water.

Nevertheless, Julia recognizes that because of the high poverty levels in the nation, bribes easily persuade many women, particularly in her constituency to vote for the wrong candidates. A strong Christian woman, Julia vows never to bribe anyone even if this decision will cost her a political seat, which has been the trend in the past. Even as we speak, she sticks to this principle. Julia is further aware that voter ignorance has made this situation worse, such that the voters are not even willing to take any action when elections are flawed. Therefore, Julia sees salvation for the Kenyan voters as lying in civic education. Prominent persons as well as political scientists have in the past, just as now, suggested this opinion.

Julia understood the importance of civic education especially to women. Interestingly however, when Mr. Kivutha Kibwana formerly of the Centre for Law and Research International (CLARION), organized Civic Education workshops in Busia, the Provincial Administration thwarted his efforts. But even more disconcerting was the report that most politicians are uncomfortable with civic awareness programs since they 'cherish' voter ignorance. This really saddened Julia. She realized that this was the time to really educate the women. She however agreed with Oscar Obonyo's assertion that

"By subscribing to gender discrimination, we have created a mess in this country and now we have to try and correct it while the price is still right. We need some radical affirmative action to be enforced for, say, 10 years (two election cycles). Within this period, any vote cast for a lady candidate in civic or parliamentary elections should count one-and-a-half times."

Thus this string of events saw the birth of affirmative action in Kenya. Affirmative action has been recognized in the new Kenyan constitution and women's place in the Kenyan society has been



addressed. She believes that women today can reap the fruits of independence because of the struggle by women like Julia and other great women of Kenya.

Julia also believes that the devolved government through the constitution has created opportunities for women thus it is a matter of filling in. She therefore does not see what could make any woman shy from attempting to fill up the gaps. She says that today women in leadership are struggling to get the amendment bill done so that the 117 women must go to parliament. It is unfortunate that not all women in Kenya know why they are constantly being told to fill these positions. If they don't fill them up, parliament will not convene, as it will be unconstitutional until it has third women. Thus she sees this as handing women leadership on a silver platter. To her it is as simple as women going to their own counties, counting their heads and saying, "Let us go and fill the deputy or governor's seat, the woman's seat, the youth seat, parliament seat, literally everything." Therefore, no political party can risk going to resist affirmative action, as it has to create space for the women. However, Julia did not enjoy this. As the playing field is now bigger, she says that women should not raise excuses but accept that if they do not get leadership it is their own folly.

Looking back, Julia finds her experience of growing up as a young woman politician alongside male political giants in the country one very long and bumpy ride full of challenges. As a young woman, she discovered that for a woman, nurturing political ambitions was a taboo in most parts of Kenya. Is it any wonder that many of the women who were freedom fighters and struggled alongside men during the quest for this nation's self-rule have hardly been acknowledged as national heroines. Julia often bumped into some of these freedom fighters or 'Mama Uhurus' as they were popularly known and sadly she noted that most of them looked poor, neglected, and not

able to afford even a decent meal on their own.

Thus Julia's participation in active politics has exposed her to the harsh realities that in the Kenyan political arena, men and women are not equal contrary to common belief. Julia advises other women not to relent in their quest for leadership. She asserts that some men have no reservations about using unscrupulous tactics to dissuade women from contesting a political seat, just as was her case. As she recalls,

"They made other women make songs about me, used vulgar language so that they could intimidate me, but what I am is what I am. Being who I am, I develop my set of values, which are the ones I am pursuing so that if you try to tell me I am a thief, and I have not stolen why should it worry me?" However she also knows that it takes time to grow up and to develop your own values and stay with them. According to her, the most important elements that bring about these qualities are critical thinking and soul searching by an individual. She however warns that it is only you who should set your goals, thus nobody should be given the privilege to do that for you. Having gone through a lot of challenges in life, Julia asserts that you should choose what you want to be, and be consistent about your choices.

At the same time, Julia admits that sometimes women are indeed guilty of letting men play with their lives. Having been through a similar experience, she warns that people will try to break your relationship if they think it will crush your self-esteem. Julia was ridiculed because she had chosen Hillary, but she never looked back. She never saw another man as better than her husband. In fact, several men approached her with the intention of taking her from her man but she stuck to her marital vows. The objective of these pursuits, as she sees it, was to make her switch attention from her husband. But since she never gave in, they took to ridiculing her. Fortunately she never lost her

focus especially during the campaign period. Had she fallen into their trap they would have caught up with her.

But then at the root of all this harassment as Julia came to understand lay real sense envy for her husband Hillary. In real sense, his enemies were wondering why he should be the one receiving all the loyalty and attention and not them. But then, Julia saw through their plans and avoided their deceitful ploys. However, as Julia says, not all women are always this fortunate. Some of these women who don't know that they are being taken for a ride assume that these men actually love them, and even permit the thought that their men are not good enough. In response, they ask themselves why they should be hanging on their men who now appear unpalatable. In the end, they lose out on both ends. She therefore advises young women to choose one man whom they like in their life and value him.

But Julia is grateful that such a case never was a problem for her and Hillary. Her man, as she chooses to call him, really loved her and it didn't really matter what anybody said. Despite the people around them criticizing his wife and knowing that Julia had a very strong but covert ego, Hillary did not allow her to be embarrassed. Of course he was aware that those things being said about his wife were mere propaganda. So whenever anyone tried to ridicule Julia he would stand very strong to protect her. Besides, he also participated in her campaigns by garnering the support of his professional friends for his wife's benefit. As a result, very few people dared to even cross Julia. At the same time, their professional friends would not allow it as they too had Julia's back. But this was not all. In addition, her spiritual leaders would not also accept any slander on her because they felt that she stood too strong in faith. So with all this armor she was good to go. Julia

says, "Nobody can stand on their own, single you fall and many you win. Start with your family, friends, but choose good friends to stand by your family."

It is evident that Julia recognizes the contributions of her husband towards her successful career as a political legislator. Recalling the immense support that the men in her community gave her and the trust they had in her, it would be wrong to imply that Julia's life is a classical story of a woman who has been victimized by all the men in her life. This is not to say that without men she would not have gone far. However, this is not that simple a matter as it would appear in the surface. Since voting is a process open to both men and women, it therefore goes to say that for any potential political leader it is mandatory that they get the support of both their male and female followers. But in a highly patriarchal society there are no always clear-cut rules for a female political contender to convince the male voters that they are going to represent their interests. As a result, there is always a need for careful planning on the female aspirant's side. Looking closely at Julia and other female politicians in the Western region, it would appear that they were all married, and their husbands were already famous people thus granting their prospective constituents a sort of assurance that they will be well led. But since the end justifies the need,

But whether or not their husbands' fame gave them an edge over the others is a matter that can be discussed in another forum. As it is the history of Kenya has a record of female politicians such as: Julia Ojiambo, Phoebe Asiyu, Grace Onyango, Christine Mango, the late professor Wangari Muta Maathai, among others who received immense support from the masses because of their marital status. Thereafter, it was also apparent that the fact that their identities were closely tied to their 'famous' husbands became a sort of reassurance to the public that all was well. Julia sees this as a

measure of traditional political maturity and not men's 'support' per se. Thus although many of them may not willingly discuss this concept and how it relates to them, it is questionable whether their husbands' fame was what made them well known to the extent that they received many votes. In addition, it seems that the public is more comfortable with a woman leader who has a man by her side, as they tend to assume it is the husband who will be advising the wife, thus they will be indirectly under the rule of a man. In cases where the woman is single, the public assumes not so to know her, which was the case of the late Professor Wangari Muta Maathai when she attempted to drop her husband's name after their divorce. But as some people would like to say that it was not that easy for Wangari to drop this name so easily as she had written Maathai on her academic transcripts. But it is pleasing to note that such sexist thoughts are gradually diminishing as a majority of the women in Kenya's parliament are single women.

Julia also realizes that as a public figure a woman is always between a rock and a hard place. This is because she was and still is always on the look out for her family, thus she more often than not had to choose between her family, career and friends. She has seen people come into her life with the intention of wrecking it so that they could distance her from her family. But luckily for her, she always had her priorities set right, her family always coming first. If a supposed friend posed a threat to her family's unity, she threw them so fast they wouldn't even know what hit them. She learnt the hard way that it is your friends who break you up. Julia therefore cautions, "So be very careful about the friends you bring into your family, especially those who come into contact with your children, who when you are away come to defile the baby girls or take your baby boys and go expose them to bad things; choose friends who will protect you."

Being brought up in Christian faith helped Julia a lot while in the political public space. She believes in the Christian way of life and therefore looks at the woman in the Bible as wholesome. She tends to copy how the woman in the Bible lived, and she tries to emulate what the Bible says about woman who stood for virtuous values. She remembers her father who was abused for having only girls but said, "Even these girls are my children," Julia draws strength from these experiences. She therefore sets her goals and does not allow anyone to upset her ego. She made a pact with her conscience a long time ago that whoever will be her friend would accept that she continues to pursue those things dearest to her heart. For example, married or not married she went to school to the point she did not want to learn any more.

An outstanding characteristic about Julia is that for all her out-going nature, Julia is a very focused woman at heart. More so, her philosophies in life seem to be deeply intertwined with her religious beliefs. Julia is of the opinion that any woman who claims to be a serious leader would not want to go to the bar and nightclubs all the time. This according to her is because a woman who chooses to go to parliament is a serious leader, thus bars and nightclubs are not one of their priorities. She has however noticed that young voters will put their priorities on choice of a leader based on their capacity to take them to the nightclub and bar even after eleven. She condemns this practice saying, "We want a peaceful nation where people rest and wake up early to go work and contribute to the national development. How can you seriously be dancing the whole night and be seriously working as a director come morning and make sound decisions? How could you look lousy at night and expect to be respected during the day? So you have to decide whether you are going to parliament for self-satisfaction or for leadership, national interest or self-interest."

In 1992 a group of professional, business and academic women led by Julia launched the National Committee for the Advancement of Women. One of its aims was to support and popularise women candidates during elections. Back then Julia was out of parliament having lost her political seat to Moody Awori, but still functioning as the KANU director of Youth and Women's Affairs. Therefore, their strategy as Julia announced would be to ensure that KANU retains its dominant position as the ruling party after that year's elections, but with the following changes: to increase women politicians to 35%, and that of women in ministerial positions to 25%. Further, they endeavored to improve the living standards of women by making the available resources more accessible to women.

This is why the idea of county governments was very pleasing news to women like Julia who has for a long time fought for the place of women in Kenyan politics. In fact, Julia was a part of those writing the constitution of Kenya. She was in fact part of the Bomas conference delegates from parliament together with women activists. Julia then participated in the security chapter at Bomas of Kenya and she is familiar with the Police Reforms. She was also part of the Human Rights activists as well as part of the National Culture team, whose mandate was to put national consciousness together as rooted in the national culture by Kavetsa Adagala. Subsequently, Kavetsa Adagala and Professor Wangari Maathai guided this team.

Thus Julia sees the advent of County Governments, as a stitch in time. This is because at last women can exercise their leadership skills with less hustle, as was her case. More importantly she implores women to embrace the opportunities that the affirmative action has put their way. Contrary to popular belief, says Julia, women are not scared about venturing into politics. She

gives the example of her District Busia that has a total of seven constituencies. Here, she identifies women who have PhDs, managerial skills, and political science degrees. There are women in business, women social workers, women welfare workers, Maendeleo ya Wanawake leaders, National Council of Women leaders, Kenya Women Alliance leaders, lawyers, doctors, teachers and even FIDA representatives. These are politicians in the making who could occupy the woman's seat, Member of Parliament seat, Governor's seat, councilor's seat, or county representatives.

Julia goes on further to say that women want to be in leadership and they have been waiting for those opportunities for a long time. "During our days," she remembers, "we were few in the field and so it was an issue of who was going to be available and who could support you." She continues to say that "There was no woman who could come to help me except the young girls in the area and the elderly women like my mother-in-law. There were no educated women who could camp with me but today they are there in thousands in one constituency." According to her any woman can come in to leadership today because there are vacuums to be filled by them. She says that the constitution has given women the opportunity and power to do this. There wasn't anything like affirmative action when she first ventured into politics thus she fiercely fought among others to be in parliament. It was survival of the fittest as evident in her case. As she happened to be the fittest, she did survive.

Back then when Julia first ventured into politics there was only one seat that everyone fought for, but without a fair play ground. For instance during the 1979 elections some women were reportedly ambushed and lashed at by some candidates' agents on the polling day. Earlier on Julia had made a call to women to vote for their own gender in the wake of blatant animosity portrayed



by men not only towards the women political aspirants, but also towards the female voters. Therefore, it appeared that the men were passing across the message that they would not to accept any attempts by any woman to challenge their dominance in politics. This was a trend that had turned into a routine before the 1974 elections period when Julia campaigned head to head with Arthur Ochwada in a fierce battle that almost turned fatal. During her first attempt at politics, Julia had it rough. As Oscar Obonyo reported, some women who were alleged to be Julia's supporters were lashed with whips and forced to return home. In this way, these women's democratic rights to vote were infringed yet no action was taken to salvage the situation. The intention of these attackers, who were sent by their political aspirants, was indeed to ensure that these women would not heed Julia's request to vote as a bloc. Funyula constituency that was initially called Busia Central constituency has since then been under the leadership of Arthur Ochwada, who was succeeded by Julia Ojiambo, then Moody Awori and is currently under the leadership of Paul Otwoma. But then as it usually is under such circumstances, female voters in the area have ever since voted solidly for any candidate they have been in support of, and the one in their favor has always won. But then, Oscar warned women in his article that not unless they changed their voting pattern, they "risk being subjected to even more hostile treatment in future."

But this is not the only thing that kept women from voting in larger numbers in 1974. In that same year, women voters did not vote effectively. This is because when dusk approached, they left the voting queues to go home for fear of violence against them and also to attend to their domestic chores as men remained and continued to vote. It therefore came as a relief to Julia and her campaign team when it was finally announced that she had won the elections.

Julia and her fellow women leaders wish that violence would become a thing of the past in elections. They hope that Kibuja's committee on National Cohesion and Integration will enforce discipline among the politicians. Chapter six of the constitution of Kenya does not allow anybody with tainted records to contest any political seat. This will, hopefully, ensure that upcoming female politicians are sheltered from such discouraging hurdles that Julia had to jump, as the men around her would gloat and laugh if she fell. In addition, Julia has seen women being prepared for these leadership opportunities by the education system.

On the education front, Julia is happy to see many girls sitting in the classroom with boys and giving them a run for their money. She therefore asserts that the two sexes must learn to exist competitively. Interestingly though, Julia does not think that boys should be made extinct for girls to thrive. She is a living example. Instead, she says that women should appreciate men's presence and contributions and merge them with theirs.

But Julia further observes that since women have been prepared by the education system that has exposed them to power, they have to say no to handouts. As she has seen over the years in most cases it is the women who encourage men to bribe the voters. They are the ones who run out to take bribes out of the need to provide basic needs for their children, albeit a temporary resolve, thus she says that they have to stop this bad practice. This is because as mothers they are the ones who lose out in the big picture and eventually feel the pain. She does not see why women should go and accept little handouts from men who are going to exploit their opportunities. Julia has occasionally heard women say to the female political aspirants, "*mkono mtupu haulambwi*," instead of saying: "let her go there are bring us bring tapped water to our homesteads, bring us

maternity wards in our area, and dispensaries so that when my child falls ill at night I will go to the hospital, ensure kiosks are near so that our girl children don't have to go far and get raped on the way, lights so that thieves do not hide and attack us. ensure that food is available and no child goes to bed on an empty stomach, and schools for our children with a provision for meals if they have to stay there the whole day-and a good balanced diet for that matter." Yet although these female voters are aware that all this is possible they still go for the man who has money to bribe them.

However, the Kenyan society has not easily accept the affirmative action hands down. But then, as much as men would like to resist affirmative action the constitution has forced them to accept it. Julia knows that whether they like it or not they have to accept the affirmative action for a third women and other gender reforms because for now women are the minority but next time it may be the men looking for the same. Julia says this with the knowledge that gender parity does not only apply to women, thus it would be a folly for men to think affirmative action can only benefit women.

Nevertheless, Julia recognizes that because of the high poverty levels in the nation, bribes easily persuade many women, particularly in her constituency to vote for the wrong candidates. A strong Christian woman, Julia vows never to bribe anyone even if this decision will cost her a political seat, which has been the trend in the past. Even as we speak, she sticks to this principle. Julia is further aware that voter ignorance has made this situation worse, such that the voters are not even willing to take any action when elections are flawed. Therefore, Julia sees salvation for the Kenyan voters as lying in civic education. Prominent persons as well as political scientists have in the past just like now, suggested this too.

### 3. LIFE AFTER PARLIAMENT

After Julia's two terms in parliament, the Funyula constituency parliamentary seat went to Moody Awori. After a series of attempts to recapture this seat, which was quite unsuccessful, Julia left parliament after the 1983 elections. But then this was not the greatest concern for Julia. The major issue was that for someone who was usually very busy she had suddenly found herself with too much time in her hands, which she had to turn to a productive venture. Usually Julia never spent a lot of time lounging in her house, thus the transition period from parliament to a common civilian was one that she was obviously not prepared to handle. However, as time went by she had to restructure her time plan so that after a few months she had completely adjusted to a new lifestyle. In fact, Julia adjusted so well that it was obvious she was not pining after a lost parliamentary seat.

Unknown to many people, Julia's strength came from her family, the only people who according to her, really understood what she was going through and had her interests at heart. As Julia explains, "Getting a great education is excellent, having a great career is wonderful but having a successful family life is the most fulfilling thing that one can ever have. When life becomes harsh as it sometimes will be having a family that share in our successes and failures is the most important thing that a person can have." Her sentiments were obviously right on cue, especially since Julia had to go through several battles in court. not only as a defendant, but also as the accused.

So when Hillary passed on in 1997 after a long period of illness. Julia not only lost a friend, husband and confidante, she had also lost a soul-mate. At the time of his death, Hillary had just been awarded a fellow of American College of Cardiology. At his burial, Prof. George Eshiwani

the then Vice Chancellor Kenyatta University said,

“In the medical and academic world Prof. Hillary was a warrior who liberated the African scholar from the white mentality that the Black African scholar was mentally dwarfed, and could not equal the white scholar in scientific performance.” Hillary excelled above world scholars of his time, becoming the first black African Cardiologist. During the Professor’s requiem mass, father Khalende of the Nangina Holy Family Catholic Church said, “*Emboko ya Abasamia bulano ikonere*” that in direct translation reads, “The great genius of the Samia people has fallen.” As Julia observes, “Hillary was the community’s front-runner, the torchbearer, the rights’ fighter, the community protector.”

As issues pertaining to population control had been one of Julia’s chief concerns as an Assistant Minister of Housing and Social Services, she now had all the time to address them, this time round unrestricted by a time frame. Therefore in 1987, while speaking at a forum on Family Planning, Julia reminded the attendant of the natural family planning methods used traditionally. In this case, a man had to move into a hut for three years after his wife gave birth. This method, she said, had been hindered by urbanization that has made this impossible due to lack of space. She also touched on the issue of parents’ obsession with male children, so that they would give birth till they got a boy, a mindset of the patriarchal society.

In the next election year after Julia left parliament she immersed herself once more into politics amid so much speculation, but all the same she was aware that the race against Moody Awori would be even more difficult than that against Arthur Ochwada. This is because Moody had ingrained himself into the constituents’ minds. To begin with, he had sent eighteen of his

constituents to India for further studies. As the community had been trying to fight poverty for a long time, the elitist strategy that Moody had adopted surely won him many political admirers and an edge over Julia. Besides, Moody came from one of the wealthiest families in Busia, and money he had in plenty to get things moving. In addition, he had all the connections that made it possible for him to achieve almost anything he set out to do. Moreover, those people who had been against being ruled by a woman would not want to see Julia reclaim the Funyula seat thus they fiercely campaigned for Moody. So once more we witness an instance of sexist ideals overruling judgement and potential good leaders due to unfounded claims and gender prejudice.

During a rally preceding the 1998 elections Julia however raised doubts about the leadership skills of Moody. On March the same year and once more sharing a platform during a joint rally Julia asked the Samia people to "Inquire from their MP about the whereabouts of money that had been illegally raised for the rural electrification project." According to Viva, Julia had made these claims on the basis that this project was to be run by the District Development Committee. As the paper further revealed, Julia had insinuated that while the Samia people had been asked to fund-raise, other constituents elsewhere were getting free money for the same program. On the subject of Ageng'a family Life center clinic project, the project that had apparently been difficult to rehabilitate on the grounds that Julia had personalized, Julia accused Moody of sabotaging various Harambee fund drives aimed at ensuring its continuity. This was also the case of the Ganga Milk Project scheme. She also notified the public that at the same time, Moody had not fulfilled his previous election year's promise of water. But a twist to the whole fiasco was brought about by Moody's claims that "Julia had no right questioning the Awori Education Fund as it was a private venture assisted by his relatives." This then raises the question, how much truth do people really

inject in their words? Was this the same man who had said that the Samia people should be left to choose their own projects and not let them be imposed on the people? Therefore, whether self-sponsored or not, it emerges that a community project may not necessarily be one formally requested by the people. Rather, it may be that a leader has identified a gap in their society, which they attempt to fill.

But then speaking of corruption it would appear Moody is not the only one to have been on the spot. The former Busia DC Mr. Zakary Orwa had earlier in 1982 also accused Julia of misusing a total sum of 1.7 million shillings intended for school projects. In her defense, Julia had asserted that the very funds had been properly utilized and that the DC had been misguided. However, she also said that there was proof in defense of her accusations in form of documents and bank statements. When the following year Julia was appointed the director of Youth and Women affairs in the Maendeleo ya Wanawake organization Julia was ecstatic. Not because she was once again at the helm of power, rather as she had gotten the opportunity to positively impact the lives of women and children to continue the legacy she had started decades ago. But this is not to say that Julia is blatantly against men per se. While addressing a congress in 1987, *The Daily Nation* newspaper on Friday May 15, 1987 reported that Julia had, “appealed to women to avoid engaging in controversial issues that would pitch them against men. This would get women nowhere. On the contrary, women should work hand in hand with men while trying to be at peace with them from the bedroom to the national level as only then will development take place, in the presence of peace.”

Although Julia lost twice in her attempts to recapture the Funyula seat, she always had it in her

mind that her desire to protect the interests of women and children would be fulfilled in one way or another. After all, never was a word that prescribed a tomorrow that was too far to even contemplate. If it would not be politics, then it would be through other avenues. But as Julia had never been one to jump ship when it showed plans of sinking, she went ahead to form her own political party, the Labor Party of Kenya, a party that she has been its chair to date. But then as it has been said time without number, a daughter is more often than not a replica of her own mother. In actual sense, this was the case with Josephine, Julia and Hillary's first child. True to the saying mentioned above, the daughter followed in the footsteps of her mother, plunging headlong into politics. But then, no one could have conceived the thought that mother and daughter would stand in opposite sides of the battlefield.

In accordance with *The Saturday Nation* newspaper of July 11, 2009, Josephine fully engaged herself into politics in 2002, as part of Project Uhuru of KANU, while her mother Julia campaigned for President Kibaki's Narc party. Thus for the first time, mother and daughter were in opposing sides of the political divide. This was also to be the trend five years later when once again they took a one hundred and eighty turn, Josephine campaigning for Kibaki and Julia supporting ODM-Kenya's Kalonzo Musyoka, a partnership that would alter Julia's opinion of her former political protégée for good. But as *The Saturday Nation* was quick to note, unlike Josephine, her mother was successful in politics. This is because after Narc came to power, Julia was nominated to parliament. But in accordance with the family spirit that Julia has always been proud of, Josephine in an interview with the Nation correspondent acknowledged, "If success in politics is measured by government positions, then my mother has done better. She has been appointed to various posts since 1974. She has benefitted more."



But as Josephine sang her mother's praises, she had no reservations to attribute her mother's success to a conspiracy by the old guard to hang on to power. As she said, "Younger politicians are not given any space. It is time younger people took the reins of power." In fact, Josephine admitted that she had never benefited from her political activism. Consequently, this comment raised a number of questions in many people's minds with some wondering if the young brood had finally begun to revolt against their own mentors. However, Julia on her part says that youthful politicians need to work hard for those positions just as they had. She further denies the allegations that she belongs to a class of politicians who want to cling on to power forever. But then, as much as she would like to pass on the mantle of leadership to her daughter, Julia realizes that her dream is quite difficult because of the patriarchal society which had not yet accepted the novel idea of girls and women being successful leaders. But then, she says that she believes in her daughter's potential in politics. Julia has been very outspoken regarding the idea of political dynasties, rebuking the practice of politicians' offspring venturing into politics because their parents were there before them. She challenges them, "Let them get away from their fathers' coats and chart their own political paths. Only then will we respect them."

Aside from inheriting her mother's political ambitions, Josephine equally adopted her mother's enemies. This is what *The Saturday Nation*<sup>8</sup> further reporter meant when she said, "Each has had to do with a demeaning tag. While the older Ojiambo has variously been accused, though privately, of working with her daughter to spy on the different political parties, Josephine has, on the other hand, been regarded as a mole." But there is another similarity between the two. Just like her mother, Josephine has had to work on her own to get to where she is in politics. She confided in *The Saturday Nation* reporter, "I am not a child of entitlement. In fact, I have had to work harder

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

to be myself.” The paper further said that Josephine has had to fight various prejudices associated with her family’s political history. “Sometimes, I have also inherited past enemies of my family’s political affiliations.” It may be that the animosity against the Ojiambo’s will never end. Apparently, the parties with which Josephine has affiliated herself with have not treated her so well. After being forced to seek a New KANU ticket although she was in PNU she was not rewarded. This forced her to shift to Narc Kenya, where she acted in the capacity of Secretary for Health. Similarly, like her mother, Josephine considers herself “successful” in politics. In her own words, “If politics is about positions, my generation has not made it. But if it is about contributions to society I am satisfied.”

But it would appear that all is not well in politics and family matters after all. But as Julia will not fail to remind us, family is more important than anything else in this world. Outside the world of politics, Julia and Josephine have never been closer. Josephine revealed to the paper that “We often meet and talk about issues that affect our family such as funerals, weddings and grandchildren; because my children are her grandchildren no matter how much we might differ.” But then, it is quite obvious that the two have found a middle ground that is safe from the political debates that ignite bonfires in their otherwise calm relationship. Josephine further said, “You see, we meet and talk about several issues. What we avoid is politics.” The most impressive lesson here is that Julia and her daughter are a representative of a democratized family with a liberalized mindset that gives everyone the freedom to make their own choices while peacefully existing in the same house. In fact, these two are a model of coalition co-existence in Kenya. They are a true testament that two different ideologies can co-exist without violence.

The handicapped in Kenya have for a long time been marginalized in Kenya. As an Assistant Minister and deputy leader of the Kenya Government Delegation to Copenhagen, Denmark, Julia mobilized for the establishment of Kenya Institute of Special Education, KISE. This is an institute that was designed to bring together people with different disabilities under one umbrella for the purpose of catering for their formal educational needs up to post-secondary level. But this was not the end of her involvement in this issue that is dearest to her heart. As Assistant Minister in charge of Rehabilitation of the Disabled persons' portfolio, Julia initiated the Harambee that was presided over by President Moi. The proceeds, from this fund-raising brought about the National Fund for the Disabled of Kenya. Apart from being a life member of the club known as Friends and Family of the Handicapped, she has severally called for the public to assist the handicapped instead of being left to beg in the streets.

For Julia, being a nutritionist is a lifetime venture. So when she was appointed by President Kibaki in a *Kenya Gazette* notice dated March 20, 2009 to work in Kephis, as its chair for a three-year period, Julia saw another opportunity to continue with her objective to ensure that the nutritional needs of Kenyans and other people all over the world are well catered for. Julia acted as the chair of this organization since 2009 to 2012 when she retired in a graceful manner, having a clean record unmarred by any claims to corruption.

In addition to all these achievements, Julia also set up a Non-Governmental Organization known as Center for the Advancement of Women and Children, CAWAC. This organization had among many other objectives the need to enlighten women on their rights and also to improve the living standards of women and children.

## EPILOGUE

### THE SPIRIT OF AN EAGLE

With a reflection on her history, Julia is in her own unique way a very successful woman. However, this cannot be determined by measuring her achievements on the same plane with any of her contemporaries. This is because her experiences are unique from any other person due to different historical occurrences as well as her historical background. Similarly, the way she handles matters is not according to any blue print. As a result, her personality as an individual in the context of her society is the only score sheet by which her success can be measured. However, most important of all is the wide array of accomplishments she achievement, viewed through the trail of changes she introduced in her society when it most needed them. As it would be difficult to assess the impact of these now seemingly minute contributions to development in the context of this present historical time, then we cannot assume that she has not done any tangible development in her society, by putting her at par with her predecessors.

According to Julia, being successful is relative depending on where you are in your journey to achieve self-actualization. While most men see themselves as successful after acquiring material possessions, their female counterparts interpret success as fulfillment of not only material but also emotional needs. In the context of her public space, she says, one can be successful in a variety of roles not only as a subject but also as a leader ahead of her people. Despite the relativity of success she concedes that success only comes if what you have supersedes what you need. All factors considered she is however quick to note that everyone is successful in their own little way. As she further elaborates, the fact that one person is more successful than others may be a matter of

chance due to the fact that they have the means to higher standards of living unlike the other people around them. Therefore, material possessions are not the best determinants of success.

Despite the different gender perspectives on success, as it most often emerges, those women in the lower echelons of the social ladder equate being successful to having attained the marital status. This is however not the case of their educated counterparts who have a more diverse attitude towards this concept of success. This is because empowered women have a different opinion when it comes to issues pertinent to their prescribed gender roles and in most cases these go beyond being a family woman. All factors considered, Julia insists that nobody despite their social inclination can go far on their own. As she observes, in many cases politicians ostracize themselves from the people who put them in positions power because of the misguided notion that they no longer need anyone's help.

Talking specifically about women in politics she deconstructs the myth of leadership and power as being one man's domain. In her opinion,

"People who think that successful leadership can be achieved singularly are misguided because a leader cannot be successful without many other successful persons. If a leader cannot bring into their context other successful persons then they are not successful leaders."

An observant person she explains that the dynamics of power are complex such that those who are not successful bring down the ones at the top because they do not contribute in any way to the development agenda. Therefore, according to her, success for a politician is envisioned in the success of their team to put together policies that would successfully improve their community and take their subjects to a higher level. She cautions about operating within other people's standards

because as she sees it this only maintains the status quo such that one does not lag behind. However this is counter-productive in a progressive society, as you will discover that others are always going to be more successful than you are. Therefore as she says, "If you have to retain your momentum and sustain your level of success, you have to be prepared at least to cause a paradigm shift in your society."

37 years earlier when Julia first contested a parliamentary seat, she won with a landslide. Currently at the age of seventy-five and still strong, she has once again embarked on the journey to legislation. She feels that she has not yet done enough for her people and she wishes to better their lives through ensuring that their interests are put first in governance. This time round however she is not interested in vying for the parliamentary seat or the county governor, rather in taking advantage of the women's special seat which if she manages to capture will put her as an overseer of the seven constituencies of Busia County thus turning her into a cosmopolitan leader. As it currently stands Julia does not think that age or gender makes not one a leader, but the motivation behind their venture into politics. She wants to actualize the journey she started in the early 60s with her colleagues when the women movement started, the affirmative action struggle, the gender and inheritance law, the liberalized land inheritance law, and hence to see the women movement incorporated in the National Assembly. This is the same woman that *Viva* had proclaimed, "If she fails to dislodge Awori, her political fate will be sealed," and that "For her the matter is a win or die out politically?" But as it is, Julia has defied all these conventions and political analyses she embarks once more in the political arena, ahead of the 2013 general elections.

## CONCLUSION

Concretizing the past into the present is an important process, as it makes an individual come to terms with their identity. Very many women have been bequeathed the responsibility of shaping the minds of the public, young and old alike, yet they have been ignored. This poses a threat to national development, as unless proper attention is given to their well-being, then measures to shape their thinking towards a positive outlook will not be undertaken. Therefore highlighting aspects of Julia Ojiambo's life that have influenced her as a person and made her to stand out of a large female population has provided the public with a model of a woman whose life experiences can inspire many.

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