

MASHUJAA · UYOMA · 1920-2007

# ONEKO



*Acquitted,  
and Still Not Free*

DETAINED UNTIL 1961. DETAINED AGAIN IN 1969.

# GRAHAM KASINDO

**ONEKO**



M A S H U J A A

# ONEKO

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*Acquitted,  
and Still Not Free*

G R A H A M   K A S I N D O

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Cover design by Graham Kasindo

First edition, 2026

*“Violently subversive, irresponsible, and seditious.”*

— The colonial government, on Achieng Oneko’s writings

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# Prologue

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NAIROBI. 15 JANUARY 1954.

The appeal judges had read the evidence against Accused Number Three, and they did not think much of it.

The case against him rested largely on a meeting of the Kenya African Union he had attended. The meeting was held mostly in Kikuyu.

Accused Number Three was a Luo. He did not understand Kikuyu.

On **15 January 1954**, his conviction was quashed. **Achieng Oneko**, one of the six men convicted at Kapenguria of managing Mau Mau, was acquitted.

He did not go home.

The colonial government simply held him anyway, in detention, without trial. He stayed there, with the other five, for another seven years.

Oneko was the one member of the Kapenguria Six whom the courts found not guilty. He was not freed until 1961.

And eight years after that, the government of independent Kenya locked him up again.

## CHAPTER ONE

# The Boy Who Walked to Maseno

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UYOMA, BONDO. 1920.

He was born in **1920** at **Tieng'a** village, in **Uyoma**, on the shores of Lake Victoria, in what is now Bondo. He was baptised in the Anglican Church, and his Christian name was **Richard**.

In **1935**, according to the Daily Nation, he walked sixty-five kilometres from Uyoma to sit the entrance examination for **Maseno School**, the leading school in Nyanza. He passed, ahead of older students.

At Maseno, he was given a nickname: *Nyakech*, the antelope.

Later, he dropped the name Richard. He called himself **Ramogi Achieng Oneko**.

## CHAPTER TWO

# The Newspaperman

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NAIROBI AND KISUMU. 1945–1952.

He worked for a while at the East African Meteorological Department in Nairobi. Then he left government service for business and the press.

In **1945**, with **Oginga Odinga**, he helped found the **Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation**, a business run by and for Luo people. It opened shops and posho mills around Nyanza.

In **1947**, he co-founded the **Ramogi Press**, and became founder and editor of its newspaper, *Ramogi*, published in Dholuo. In **1949**, the press moved to **Kisumu**.

He joined the **Kenya African Union** by the end of **1945**, and went to its first annual general meeting in Nairobi in **1946**. He sat on the Nairobi Municipal Council. He was secretary of the Luo Union. In **1952**, he went to London with a KAU delegation to the Colonial Office. That same year, according to one account, he became the KAU's secretary general.

The colonial government read his newspaper. It called his publications “violently subversive, irresponsible, and seditious.”

## CHAPTER THREE

# Accused Number Three

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KAPENGURIA. DECEMBER 1952 – APRIL 1953.

In October 1952, the colonial government declared a State of Emergency and arrested the leaders of the KAU.

Oneko was one of them.

He was put on trial at **Kapenguria** with **Jomo Kenyatta**, **Bildad Kaggia**, **Fred Kubai**, **Paul Ngei** and **Kung'u Karumba**. In the charge sheet, he was **Accused No. 3**.

The charge was managing Mau Mau.

The trial opened in December 1952. The prosecution's chief witness was later found to have been paid by the government. The magistrate, it was later reported, had been paid too.

On **8 April 1953**, all six were convicted. Each was sentenced to **seven years' hard labour**.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# Not Guilty

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THE APPEAL. 15 JANUARY 1954.

The six appealed.

For five of them, the appeal failed.

For Oneko, it succeeded. The appeal judges found that the evidence against him depended largely on a KAU meeting he had attended, where the speeches were mostly in Kikuyu, a language he did not understand.

On **15 January 1954**, he was **acquitted**.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Detained Anyway

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1954–1961.

An acquittal should have meant freedom.

Instead, the colonial government used its Emergency powers to hold him in **detention**, without a new trial. According to one account, he was held at **Manyani**. He stayed in detention while the other five served their sentences.

He was held for **nine years** in all, from his arrest in October 1952 until **1961**.

It was not the court that kept him. It was the colony.

## CHAPTER SIX

# The Minister

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NAIROBI. 1963–1966.

He came out into a country on the edge of independence.

In **1963**, he won the **Nakuru Town** seat in Parliament. Kenyatta made him the first **Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Tourism**.

The six prisoners of Kapenguria had become the rulers of Kenya.

It did not last.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# The Split

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1966.

In **1966**, the ruling party split. **Oginga Odinga**, Oneko's old business partner, led the left of KANU out of the government, to form the **Kenya People's Union**, the KPU.

Oneko went with him. He resigned from the Cabinet.

So did his old cellmate, **Bildad Kaggia**.

The government forced the rebels to face their voters again, in what became known as the **Little General Election**. Oneko lost his Nakuru Town seat.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Kisumu

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KISUMU. SATURDAY, 25 OCTOBER 1969.

On **25 October 1969**, President Kenyatta came to Kisumu, the heart of Odinga's country, to open a new hospital built with Soviet help. People called it "Russia."

There was already bad blood. **Tom Mboya**, the Luo minister, had been assassinated in Nairobi four months before.

At the ceremony, there was a commotion near the podium. According to the Daily Nation, a stone was thrown towards the dais, and KPU youth clashed with KANU supporters. The President's guard and the police opened fire.

By official accounts, more than ten people were killed. According to the Daily Nation, more than fifty were shot dead. Among them, according to the Nation, was a nine-year-old boy.

## CHAPTER NINE

# Kamiti

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OCTOBER 1969 – 1975.

Two days later, the arrests began.

The leaders of the KPU were rounded up and taken to **Kamiti Maximum Security Prison**. Odinga was detained. So was **Achieng Oeko**.

On **30 October 1969**, the government **banned** the KPU. It called the party “dangerous to the good government of the Republic of Kenya.” Kenya became, in effect, a one-party state.

Oeko was held without trial until **1975**.

He had been detained by the British, after a court had found him not guilty. Now he was detained by his own country’s government, and no court had found him guilty of anything at all.

By the time he came out, according to the Daily Nation, he had spent fifteen of his fifty-five years in detention.

## CHAPTER TEN

# Rarieda

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**RARIEDA. 1992–2007.**

He waited a long time for another chance.

In **1992**, Kenya returned to multi-party politics. Oneko stood for Parliament in **Rarieda**, near his home, on the **Ford-Kenya** ticket, the party of his old friend Odinga. He won.

He was seventy-two.

In **1997**, he lost the seat. After that, he lived quietly at home.

**Achieng Oneko** died of a heart attack on **9 June 2007**, at **Kunya** village in Rarieda. He was eighty-seven.

He was the **last surviving member of the Kapenguria Six**.

# Epilogue

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## **Uyoma. Today.**

Of the six men at Kapenguria, Achieng Oneko was the only one the law found innocent.

It did not help him. The colonial government held him anyway. Then the government of the free Kenya he had helped create held him again, for six more years, without a trial.

Kenyatta became President. Ngei became a minister. Kaggia ran a posho mill. Kubai and Karumba found their own ways.

Oneko, the boy who walked sixty-five kilometres to sit an exam, outlived them all.

He was the last of the six. For fifteen years of his life, others had decided he should not be free.

## THE RECORD

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|                 |                                                 |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| NAME            | Ramogi Achieng Oneko (baptised Richard)         |
| BORN            | 1920, Tieng'a, Uyoma, Bondo                     |
| PRESS           | Founded and edited <i>Ramogi</i> , from 1947    |
| KAPENGURIA      | Accused No. 3; convicted 8 April 1953           |
| ACQUITTED       | 15 January 1954, on appeal                      |
| DETAINED ANYWAY | Until 1961                                      |
| MINISTER        | Information, Broadcasting and Tourism, 1963–66  |
| DETAINED AGAIN  | October 1969 – 1975, after the Kisumu shootings |
| MP              | Nakuru Town, 1963; Rarieda, 1992–97             |
| DIED            | 9 June 2007; the last of the Kapenguria Six     |

*Acquitted in 1954. Detained until 1961. Detained again in 1969.*  
 Cover illustration: an artist's impression.

# A Note from the Author

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If this story stayed with you, you can buy me a coffee. It keeps the research going and helps bring the next one to you.

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Asante sana.

— *Graham Kasindo*