AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LUO IDEA OF GOD

c. 1500-1900

by

GILBERT EDWIN MESHACK OGUTU

A thesis submitted in part fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of Nairobi.

July, 1975
This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as University supervisors.

M.J. McVeigh
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies,
University of Nairobi.

W.R. Ochieng'
Department of History,
Kenyatta University College.
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter of declaration</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of thesis</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: The Problem and Research cycle stated</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I: THE LUO SETTING</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The people: their geographical setting, ethnic identity, traditional education and concept of family.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II: THE RELIGIOUS HERITAGE OF THE LUO.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Luo belief and practice from the earliest times to c. A.D. 1700.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Impact of acculturation and culture contact in western Kenya between A.D. 1700 and 1900.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III: TRADITIONAL LUO IDEA OF GOD</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV: LUO BELIEF IN THE WORLD OF THE UNSEEN</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relationship between the living and the dead. The world of spirits: human and non-human.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter V: LUO ACTS OF WORSHIP</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Luo concepts of worship: prayer and offerings, A case for &quot;Ancestor worship&quot;. Worship of God.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This thesis has not been submitted to any other University

(G.E.M. Ogutu)
Acknowledgements

For what follows I wish to convey my thanks to the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy at Makerere University, Kampala, where I had my early training into thinking like an African intellectual. From this department I wish to mention Professor John S. Mbiti who introduced me to African Traditional Religions; Dr. Aloysius M. Lugira, who taught me African Traditional Philosophy and often encouraged me to do some postgraduate research on the Luo; Said Hamdun who introduced me to Islamic theology; Dr. Tom McGinn who taught me Philosophy of Religion, and Dr. Louise Pirouet who introduced me to History of Christianity in Africa and who supervised my B.A. dissertation on "The Life and Work of Canon Ezekiel Apindi", featuring confrontation between Christianity and Traditional Religion in Western Kenya.

I am equally grateful to the others who trained me in fields which may not be directly relevant to the present study.

For the present study I am particularly grateful to History Department, University of Nairobi for sponsoring my application for postgraduate scholarship and to the University of Nairobi for offering me full time scholarship that enabled me to do the field work. My special thanks go to Professor B.A. Ogot who not only proposed a title for my thesis but was also a source of inspiration and encouragement.

I owe an invaluable debt of gratitude to the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies for accepting me as a postgraduate student and particularly to Professor J.G. Donders for his words of encouragement and general interest in my work.
From the field I am particularly thankful to the Headmistress, Staff and students of Ng’iya Girls’ High School for allowing me the use of their school facilities during the research period. Roy L. Stafford, particularly his late wife Paddy who knew me as a little boy in Form I at Maseno High School, and who not only showed interest in the project but allowed me to use their visitors room and typewriter and also remained mother and source of inspiration to me. May God rest her soul in Eternal Peace. Still at Ng’iya I would like to thank the staff of Luo Bible Revision Committee namely Nickon Owuor and George Jacob Ouko for their various contributions.

Most of what is expressed in this report comes from my informants whom it is impossible for me to mention by name. My thanks go to them all. I wish to thank my assistants: Girls from Ng’iya Girls’ High School; Paul Odaga of Makerere, William Nyapola Mang’are, Aloice Odhiambo Paul, Walter Agunda Wagwara and Willis Sisoh Ineah.

For the typing of the work I wish to thank Patricia Adhiambo Ombago, for typing Volume One of GUNDA: LUO CULTURAL TEXTS, Leonida Awuor Odur for typing Volumes Two and Three of GUNDA, Judith Omollo and Jenipher Atieno Allo for various roles they played.

I have no words to express my thanks to my supervisors Drs. Malcolm J. McVeigh and William R. Ochieng’. Very few academicians are all that patient with research students. Without their patience and many invaluable suggestions this report would have not been extracted from more than six hundred typed scripts of field notes. Although the mistakes and weaknesses in the thesis remain basically mine, I owe them
a debt of gratitude. I would also like to thank Grace Adhiambo Owuor for her keenness while typing the final copy of this report. May God really reward you.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife Jenipher for her love and comfort during my work. Above all my children Rachel Anne Adongo, Esther Bevoline Achieng', Meshack Evans Onyango and their friend Joyce Achieng' Odongo. To Joyce I say, may God really bless you. To those who helped in various other ways my greetings and best wishes.
It needs no mention that the Luo-speaking people are a force to reckon with in the three East African countries of Uganda Kenya and Tanzania. In Kenya they are the second largest tribe surrounding Kenya's only share of the waters of Lake Victoria, an area which until the second half of the 16th century was largely Bantu world. Because the Luo are a people who, until about the turn of this century have been on the move, the task of the research on their religious attitudes, beliefs and practices, is to discern its authentic continuity and change within the general rubric of history and experience. And, in order to perceive the dimensions of change and development some aspects of culture contact and interaction in the course of their southern trek and settlement in western Kenya, requires careful scrutiny.

The study commences predictably with a delineation of the Luo setting in western Kenya: the people; their geographical setting, ethnic identity, traditional education and concept of family. It is within the context of the family, and the sacrificial ceremonies the members of the family participate in, that Luo religious concepts including the concept of God must be understood.

But, the Luo of western Kenya, like the children of Israel, had their religious heritage influenced by their migratory mode of life, and the people in whose land they settled. To determine the influence of such peoples the study takes a turn and looks at the historical background of the Luo prior to their arrival and settlement in western Kenya. Herein is seen an important clue to the influence of ecology and historical experience on a people's beliefs and practices. The study then proceeds with a description of the traditional Luo Idea of God.
When people who possess different cultures meet and live together for a long time it is unlikely that the cultures they possess after long contact shall ever be the same again. A synthesis takes place, the end product of which though it might be dominated by one of them, involves mutual sharing and borrowing from all of them. This was the situation in the West Kenya scene as the Luo arrived, settled and lived together with their neighbours: the Luyia, the Gusii, the Kuria, and the Maasai.

Closely knit with the Luo Idea of God is belief in the world of the unseen and the supernatural forces. There follows therefore, a study of the relationship between the living and the dead, including ancestral ethical sanctions and belief in the world of spirits.

Active propagation of belief through practice is the hub of the Luo Traditional Religion, where the act of worship is through the avenues of prayer, offerings and sacrifice. Here the study probes into the Luo concept of worship with delineations concerning "ancestor Worship" and the worship of God.

The thesis concludes by showing how the traditional Luo religious beliefs and practices have persisted in spite of the environmental, social, economic and political factors that descended upon them in the course of their early history.
Map I

LUO: settlements and camps (1300 to 1900)

Legend:
A - Mipaco Duong
B - Tekidi
C - Rubungu (Pakwach)
D - Pawir
E - Kabermido
F - Busoga Camps
G - Nyanza (Western Kenya)
Luo settlements and movements in Busoga
LUO IN NYANZA: Early settlements and expansion

Map III

Primary settlement
- c. 16 generations ago
- c. 13 generations ago
- c. 5 - 7 generations ago
Luo sub-dialects

KEY

North Yala - Yimbo, Alego, Ugenya and Gem

South Yala - Sakwa, Asembo, Uyoma, Sume, Kisumu, Kajulu and Kano

South Nyando - Nyakach and the rest of South Nyanza.
INTRODUCTION

The Problem:

A considerable amount of work has been done on the religious beliefs and practices of the Northern and Central Luo-speaking peoples. Unfortunately very little has been done on the Southern Luo. This study is meant to partly bridge the gap by attempting a reconstruction of the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Luo of Kenya focusing on their idea of God.

In the last few decades however, there have been attempts to move away from a static approach to the study of traditional beliefs and practices. In this study an attempt has been made at reconstructing the Luo religious beliefs and practices within the context of their historical tradition, hence the title "An Historical Analysis of the Luo idea of God".

The problem of this study may be stated thus: Is there a relationship between a people's idea of God and their history? The answer to this question is hinged on the hypothesis that 'the Luo religious beliefs and practices changed in the course of their migrations from Sudan through Uganda to Western Kenya'; and to its corollaries namely, one, that 'the matrix of human experience in time and space controls religious values and determines religious attitudes', and two, that 'religion is a way of life and God is the governing principle in that way', so when the way of life changes the idea of God also changes'.

In measuring my hypothesis I have raised several questions which I have tried to answer by way of analysing the Oral traditions of the Luo of Kenya. The end result of the analysis is the following
thesis: In the course of their migrations the Luo were exposed to a new environment which modified their world view; and also contacted peoples with different cultural backgrounds, who influenced their religious life, and as a result of these the Luo concept of God, as the governing principle in their way of life, also changed.

Definitions:

In the study there is a constant reference to Luo Traditional Religion by which is meant the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Luo of Kenya prior to the arrival of new western influences at the end of the nineteenth century. Some of the traditions referred to here have been traced back to times when the ancestors of the Kenya Luo were still living in the Southern Sudan and Northern Uganda. Others seem to have been developed either in the course of their migrations or during and after their settlement in Western Kenya.

Our study is on the Luo idea of God. We use the universal term God here to refer to the deity which the Luo are generally agreed moulded them and which they call Nyasaye. The terms Nyasaye and Supreme Being are used interchangeably with God in this study. By ancestors we mean the dead who are still remembered by name in the traditional and practices of the Luo, those whom Professor Mbiti calls 'the living dead'.

In traditional religious studies, the term spirit has been used to refer to various spiritual agencies. To avoid confusion we have restricted the use of the term to what the Luo call Juogi. These are either spirits which possess people and objects or those generally called spirits of the air. Where there is special usage in the study it has been indicated and explained.
The term worship is used in this study to mean the act of invoking some supernatural agency, either directly or through a natural object, to come to the aid of the invoker. This, in the case of the Luo, is done through the medium of prayer, offerings and sacrifice.

Collection of data

In the process of reconstructing the Luo Traditional Religion there were two tasks; namely, collection of traditions and analysis of the data so collected. Before beginning the collection of data, it was necessary to determine the area of research bearing in mind the fact that it was physically impossible to cover in any detail the whole of Luoland. Moreover, the Luo have spread themselves so much that it would be a futile exercise trying to study them without defining the area of operation. For my research I used Siaya District of Nyanza Province as my area of primary research and later spread out my investigations to Kisumu and Homa Bay Districts.

In the course of the interviews I tried to make the discussion as informal as I could, and therefore avoided the use of a questionnaire though I had notes to guide me in what questions to ask. In some of my interviews I used a tape recorder. In such cases I explained fully what I was doing and what I was going to do with the tapes at the end of the fieldwork. Occasionally I played traditional Luo music to the informants before embarking on the actual interview. I found that most of my aged informants were particularly interested in the music and wanted their voices to be recorded. I therefore had to play back parts of the tape to enable them to hear their voices. However, what
helped me most was the detailed explanation I gave as to what I was doing.

In the month of August, 1973, I made use of a number of assistants who were mostly school girls though I engaged two University male undergraduates as well. I had two reasons for making use of the girls. One, I found it very difficult to collect information from women informants. A number of them after asking me details about where I came from, where I was learning and what I wanted to do with the information I was collecting, looked at me as a possible son-in-law and so took to entertaining me rather than sit to be interviewed. I therefore thought by training school girls I could get the information I wanted from the women who seemed to remember some of the practices better than men. The result of the work of the girls was very impressive.

Secondly, by involving more assistants I thought I could cover a wider area and also some points which I might have generally overlooked in my personal interviews. While training the assistants I only gave them the guidelines on how to approach informants and what areas to ask questions on. Otherwise I left them on their own to ask whatever questions they felt necessary provided they included answers to my questions and their questions in the report. The assistants did a splendid piece of work and I owe them a heavy debt of gratitude. Some of their informants I later visited on my own to check further matters.

The other approach I found invaluable was private observation and engaging people in talks about Luo beliefs and practices without informing them that I was doing research. Through this method I interviewed nearly two hundred people from all walks of life, including people who otherwise would not have accepted to be
interviewed. What I gathered from such informal interviews helped me in checking my formal interviews.

Limitation:

One of the problems a research student faces in the field is the decisions as to who should be interviewed. I was in no better position. One of my first limitations was thus related to the problem of sampling which in my case was to a large extent random. I wonder whether the people I had at one stage interviewed were representative of the Luo community. I tried to correct this during the second stage of the research by increasing the size of the sample. But even though the sample was not representative enough as religious practice seemed to vary from home to home and village to village. This I tried to take care of by holding informal discussions as I have stated above. However, as I learnt from two well informed Luo elders, it is almost inevitable that one has to generalise for the Luo.

My other limitation was that most of my informants had either been converted to Christianity or had been influenced in one way or another by Christian beliefs and practices. As a matter of fact one would be unusually bold to suggest that there are Luo people living in Nyanza Province who have never had contacts with Christianity. It is therefore understandable why more than eighty per cent of the Luo claim to be Christians.

It is easier to talk about the history of the Luo. But the impression I got from the field was that Luo-speaking people living in Western Kenya are as much Bantu as they are Nilotic. This could be explained in terms of contacts, interactions and intermarriages that have been going on between these different people for nearly five centuries. Though we discuss this later in the study, it should
be noted right at the beginning, because it features much in the data being analysed.

When analysing data collected among the Luo in Nyanza the immediate temptation appears to be an attempt to compare such data with the traditions of the Northern and Central Luo. But even here much care has to be taken as the Luo-speaking peoples in the Sudan and Uganda have also been influenced by factors peculiar to the areas where they live.

Presentation

The analysis here is based on field notes and background reading of material related to the Luo culture in general and religious beliefs and practices in particular. This has been in a series of five questions, the answers to which make up the chapters. The questions are: What is the Luo setting? What was their idea of God prior to their arrival in Nyanza and what changes and developments in their idea of God could one identify as they arrived and settled in Nyanza? What was their idea of God as it had developed by the end of the nineteenth century? What other religious beliefs did they have that were related to their idea of God? What were their religious practices? The answers to these questions are set against the background of ecology and historical experience.

The study has been both synchronic and diachronic. It was synchronic in the sense that at times I was taken to analysing data confined to the shorter periods within the focus and memory of my informants. For example, I was particularly interested in what the informants personally witnessed or experienced. But the Luo cultural continuum has been in a constant state of change. So the analysis of their religious attitudes, beliefs and practices
could not be carried to any convincing conclusion unless looked at through a longer period of time; hence the diachronic approach where the reflection of change and development is seen through generations.

Oral Traditions

This study, as I stated, is a product of the field work I conducted over the period from December 1972 to April 1974. During this period I formally interviewed nearly three hundred people. Field notes from the interviews are bound in three volumes with a total of 693 pages of typed scripts. I also collected Luo myths and legends, which are bound in another volume of 164 pages of typed scripts. Because of the bulk of the material I have not included all of them in this report, but have shown them to the supervisors for confirmation and also referred to various informants in the text. I have also 27 hours of tape recorded interviews.
CHAPTER I

THE LUO SETTING

As the destiny of an individual is a mystery to himself, so it is with the religion of a people. The Luo traditional religion was an outcome of the people's life and temperament closely connected with their traditions and social institutions. The people have no centralized political system but enjoy homogeneity of culture, the morality of which is based upon the sanctity of the communal life amounting to strong ties through blood kinship (wat) and the observance of social rules (chike) and acts (timbe). The individual is committed to the affairs of the community, and the observation of the social sanctions (kweche) is the essential condition of the life of every individual.

In this opening chapter we look at the Luo of Kenya; their ethnicity and language, their geographical setting, traditional economy, traditional education and concept of family.

THE PEOPLE: Ethnic identity and Language

The Luo are a linguistic group of people whose language has spread over a wide area covering Southern Sudan, South-western Ethiopia, North-eastern Zaire, Western-northern-eastern Uganda, Western Kenya and Northern Tanzania. They thus occupy a land that stretches between latitudes 12°N and 4°S. Ehret refers to them as Western or River-Lake Nilotes as distinct from the Eastern or Highland and Plain Nilotes who used to be called Nilohamites.

For the academic convenience, the Western Nilotes have been grouped into Northern, Central and Southern Luo. The northern group, mostly found in Sudan and Ethiopia, include the Nuer, the Dinka, the Anywak and the Shilluk. The Central group found in Uganda
and Zaire include the Alur, Jo-pa-Luo (the Chope), the Acholi and the Lang'o. The southern group found in Eastern Uganda, Western Kenya and Northern Tanzania include Jop-Adhola (the Padhola) and Jo-Luo (the Luo).

In Kenya, the Luo constitute one of the major ethnic groups. Numbering approximately 1.5 million, they are spread in various parts of the country particularly in towns and where there are employment opportunities. Many of the Luo males of the middle age live away from their homes in Nyanza. This migration has been a result of the economic development of Kenya and the rate of urbanization which has resulted.

Before this development the Luo had contacts and interactions with their Bantu-speaking neighbours for nearly six hundred years, thus bringing changes which not only produced a heterogeneity in character and values of the people, but also in their material culture.

The Dho-Luo spoken in Western Kenya and the North Mara District of Tanzania could be considered a dialect of the Luo spoken in Eastern Africa including Uganda and Sudan. However within the Kenya group it is possible to identify three sub-dialects though these are reflected more in the difference in accent than difference in the meaning of words. The sub-dialects are zonal and include the North Yala sub-dialect, spoken in Yimbo, Alego, Gem and Ugenya; South Yala spoken in Sakwa, Uyoma, Asembo, Seme, Kisumo, Kajulu and Kano; South Nyando spoken in Nyakach, and the rest of the Luo locations of South Nyanza. The important question which arises is whether there is any direct relation between the dialects and the individual Luo migration waves or whether they reflect on the type of people the Luo came into contact with.
Looking through the files of the Luo Language Committee, the impression one gets is that the committee was all through the years concerned mainly with setting rules for spelling and word division. However, the Luo Bible Revision Committee, did, on grounds of mutual intelligibility, decide on the South Yala sub-dialect as the standard.

Of interest to the religious-historical researcher is how true it is that the dialects have evolved as a result of the influence of movements and borrowing from the languages of the people the Luo came into contact with, and/or how much have the religious concepts been influenced by the sub-dialects?

While recommending this for further investigation, we would like to mention that the sub-dialects do not seem to create major alterations in the basic pattern of Luo religious ideas, particularly the idea of God.

Later in the thesis we discuss the individual waves and the people they came into contact with, and how these people might have influenced the Luo religious beliefs and practices.

**GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING**

In Western Kenya the Luo occupy the districts of Siaya, Kisumu and Homa Bay. Their neighbours include the Luyia to the north, the Kalenjin to the east, Gusii, Kuria and Maasai to the south-east and south. The Winam Gulf of Lake Victoria is thus surrounded by the Luo.

The Luoland stretches from 34°E to 35° 15'E and from 15°N to 1° 15'S covering an area of approximately 10,600 square kilometres. The land which is part of the Lake Victoria sag rises
Siaya district is more of a rolling plain with an average elevation of about 1221 metres. There are a few outcrops of hills here and there including Ramogi 1320 metres, Usenge 1287 metres, Usire 1309 metres and Abiero 1474 metres. The land then rises gently to the north extending to Mount Elgon area. Kisumu district is higher along its northern borders where Maragoli Hills rise to 1837 metres continuing to Nandi Escarpment with an average elevation of 1529 metres. The rest of the district including the Kano plain is low being generally below 1221 metres.

Homa Bay district, on the other hand, has a rough surface terrain being particularly high along the lakeshore where we find the volcanic Homa mountain rising to 1749 metres; Ruri Hills 3960 metres; Gembe Hills 3938 metres; and the Gwasi Hills 2255 metres. The land then rises rapidly to Kisii Highlands to the east. Lambwe Valley is a unique feature in the district with an elevation of less than 1221 metres.

The Luoland is drained by seven major rivers namely, Nzoia, Yala, Nyando, Sondu, Kuja, Awach, Tende/Kabuor and Migori. Apart from River Yala which empties its waters in a large swamp bearing its name the rest of the rivers flow directly into lake Victoria.

Most of the Luoland receives between 190 centimetres to 380 centimetres of rain annually though there is a very unreliable fall in the locations fringing the lake, particularly in Siaya district. The temperatures are generally high with a small range between the cool months June/July (18°C) and the hot months December/January (20°C). The vegetation is tropical savana type
with acacia trees commonplace among thorny bushes and thickets. On the higher grounds there are highland savanna type of vegetation.

Associated with these bushes are animals like antelopes, hares, leopards, hyenas and other small species. Until very recently elephants roamed most of Homa Bay district particularly the areas now known as the locations of Sakwa and Kanyamkago. Insects particularly, tsetse fly, have been a menace in many parts of Luoland. The districts most affected by tsetse infestation were Siaya and Homa Bay. According to many of the informants the Luo found their present land thickly forested, so that the land one sees now has been seriously transformed by man.

Most of the Luoland is occupied; though until a decade ago many pockets of land in Homa Bay district have been lying fallow. The fertile soils of Lambwe Valley have for a long time remained untapped by man.

The two large islands of Mfang'ano and Rusinga have been occupied for a long time and have thriving populations. Mageta Island was thickly populated until the turn of the century when as a result of outbreak of sleeping sickness on the island it was depopulated. Many people have recently gone back to the island to till the fertile soils and there is already a thriving population. The island is a sublocation of Yimbo Location of Siaya district with a population of nearly three thousand people mainly from Yimbo.

The Luoland is well served by a network of roads. The provincial headquarters and port town of Kisumu, which is the fourth largest town in Kenya is the centre of communication in the whole of Western Kenya. There are roads linking Kisumu with Nairobi through Kericho and Nakuru; and with Tarime in Tanzania.
through Kisii; and with Busia on Uganda border through Maseno and Rang’ala. Kisumu also links with Western provincial towns of Kakamega, Bungoma and Webuye.

Within the Luoland itself roads link Kisumu with the district headquarters of Homa Bay. Steamer services on the lake link Kisumu with the Tanzania port of Mwanza and the Uganda port of Port Bell near Kampala. There are also small steamer services covering Kisumu, Kendu Bay, Homa Bay and Asembo Bay. Kisumu Airport serves Western Kenya while the districts of Siaya and Homa Bay have airstrips.

TRADITIONAL ECONOMY

The Luo were to a large extent pastoralists with a very strong attachment to cattle, which played a very significant role in the sacrificial life of the traditional Luo. The cattle were part and parcel of the social set up. The herdboys (jokwath) gave the oxen names of people with respect in the community. These could be names of renown wrestlers, club fighters, prophets or medicine men of fame. They also nicknamed themselves after oxen by referring to their colours. For example, a brown ox was called Rabuor; a white one, Rachar; a red one, Silwal; a brown and red Rapenda; a black one, Rateng'; a black and white, Radier. Such names were taken by the boys so that one found among the Luo people known as Otieno Rabuor, Okech Rachar, Owiti Silwal, Ochieng' Rapenda, Ochola Rateng' and Onyango Radier. The heifers had prefix di instead of ra so that they were called Dibuoro (brown), Dibo (white), Didiero (black and white) and so forth. Very rarely did the herdboys take heifer colours as nicknames. The only exception was Dibo (white heifer) so that one could find, for example, Ogutu Dibo. The ox-names had
nothing to do with the pigmentation of the individual people. Men who had taken to such names are known not to have eaten the oxen they were nicknamed after.

The cattle were used as a measure of wealth and prestige. People who kept large herds of cattle commanded a lot of respect in the community and often married many wives. They were also used for paying bridewealth and for compensating homicide. Of special interest to us is their use in sacrifice which we discuss in some detail later. Milk from the cattle was drunk and also used for cooking vegetables. Ghee was used for cooking and in place of water for bathing purposes. Hides made the bedding while skins were part of the clothing. Dung was used for smearing houses as well as for lighting fire.

The uses of cattle products by the Luo is inexhaustable and could form a treatise of its own. The small animals like goats and sheep were also important in their own right. Most of these animals were destined for sacrifice. In certain sacrificial ceremonies only goats could be used while in others an ox was used.

The Luo economy has changed considerably. In Western Kenya for example, like the Bantu they came into contact with they became oriented towards the lake for fishing. They also became cultivators planting such crops like millet, maize, beans, peas, sesame and sorghum. Rootcrops like groundnuts, sweet potatoes, and cassava also became important though mainly for domestic consumption.

The Luo day to day economic activities is reflective of their concept of day which they divided into five major periods namely;
1. OKINYI  
   (i) Kok gwen  
   (ii) Riwo ng'amba  
   (iii) Okinyi mang'ich  
   3.00 - 5.00 a.m.  
2. ONYANGO  
   8 a.m. - noon.  
3. ODIECHIENG'  
   noon - 4.00 p.m.  
4. ODHIAMBO  
   4.00 - 6.00 p.m.  
5. OTIENO  
   (i) Ang'ich welo  
   (ii) Budho Mucho  
   (iii) Dier otieno  
   6.00 - 8.00 p.m.  
   8.00 - 11.00 p.m.  
   11.00 - 3.00 a.m.  

The activities of the day depended on whether the people lived near or away from the lake. Those who lived close to the lake went fishing about 5.00 a.m. and came back anytime during onyango. They spent the rest of odiechieng' drying their fishing baskets (ohungni) or nets. During odhiambo the fishing instruments were sent to the lake and left there over night. People who never went to fish or lived away from the lake went to tend the gardens or started milking the cows about 5.00 a.m. During onyango the women started preparing lunch while the boys got ready to take the animals out to graze. Men often spent odiechieng'out with cattle while women stayed home grinding maize or millet for the evening meal or went into the bushes to fetch firewood (this was mostly work for girls). During the digging period, men left boys and occasionally girls with the animals when they went to clear the forests for cultivation the following morning.

According to the Luo the year was divided into four periods as follows:

1. CHWIRI - long rains from about February to July. It was during this period that planting and weeding long-rain crops took place.
2. **KEYO** — a dry period, about August when the crops were harvested.

3. **OPON** — short rains covering the months of September and October. This period was characterized by digging small plots where potatoes and crops which ripen first were planted.

4. **ORO** — dry season from about November to February. During this period the Luo occupied themselves with hunting, clearing forests and digging in preparation for the long rains.

Hunting was another important activity of the Luo, and their game included wild pigs, antelopes, rabbits, gazelles, buffalo, elephants, bush buck and birds. Along the lake they not only fished but also hunted hippos.

Luo arts and crafts included shield and drum making, bead lining and embroidery, ornaments for various occasions, basketry, pottery and the making of tools and implements.

**TRADITIONAL EDUCATION**

The basic cultural traits were learned. Young people learned from contact with parents and other children to adopt the accepted ways of behaviour in the social group. By the process of traditional education, such things as language, religious beliefs and technical skill were passed from one generation to the next. Thus the individual learned to behave as he was taught by those around him. He learned the technical skills of his group; he learned to accept the framework of social, political and economic institutions; he learned to think in terms of the religious beliefs of the group and
express himself through the accepted art forms. Above all he learned to communicate, even to think in terms of a particular language.

We would like to make a distinction here between two levels of learning: personal and cultural. In personal learning there is a tendency to be acquainted with words before we learn their meaning; while at the cultural level, the concepts come first and the words are selected or formed to symbolize the chunks of experience or thought. In other words, the development of words and lexical units lags behind the cognitive process of culture. This is significant if we are to make sense of the traditional process of learning to which we shall now turn.

In traditional societies institutions were developed which were analogous to schools. Formal instruction was given in set places such as the age mates' special dwellings, bachelors' huts; widows' or grandmothers' huts and around the fire late after work. According to Luo traditions, such instruction was concerned with ethics, history, speech, aesthetics, vocational skills and physical training. In this process of education a few basic concepts may be identified. First, education was through participation in life where the child was given the chance to live, play and communicate with both adults and other youth at every stage of his life. Second, education was meant to correspond to the needs of life. All the media used formed part not only of the child's experience and life but the life of the whole community. The emphasis was more on integration. Third, the child was socially conditioned by the respect given to his personality and by making him realize that at every stage of his life he owed certain duties to his age-group and the community. Fourth, there was a marked emphasis upon social behaviour, that is right relations with and behaviour toward other people. Thus the society was placed above the individual. Fifth,
a great deal of care was given to the adolescent period. Proper instruction was given during puberty and initiation rites particularly concerning sexual behaviour and how these were related to whole life of the individual. And lastly, this process of education lasted the whole lifetime. So the Luo said: Ng'ato Ipuonjo Nyaka Tho meaning that a person was taught until he died.

Of greater interest to us is how this process of education was applied to the transmission of religious ideas. As Othieno Ochieng' observed;

Traditional system of education put great emphasis upon mastery of practices and conformity to procedures... Moral laws and moral practices were based upon religion and held within lineage... All children were taught the proper attitude towards the spirits and the ancestors and the magic connected with various aspects of life.

One was therefore trained to adopt certain religious attitudes at the same time that he was trained to fit in the social group. Thus religion was part and parcel of the Luo way of life, and religious ideas transmitted at times and places that we have indicated above.

CONCEPT OF FAMILY

The Luo society is patri'lineal, with inheritance coming mainly from the father to the son. The important social unit is the family made up of paternal and maternal members: the head of the family, his wives, his brothers and sisters, his children and their children and grandchildren. This is what Professor Mbiti meant when he said that:

in traditional society, the family includes children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and
sisters, who may have their own children and other immediate relatives. The number in a family may range from ten persons to even a hundred.

Among the traditional Luo the size of the family depended on the number of wives a husband had. In certain cases the wealth an individual had also swelled the size of his family. If Mr. X was known to be wealthy, his relatives brought their children to stay with him, to help in the activities of the home. On the other hand, a rich man (okebe) was always married to many wives. It was very rare in the traditional Luo society to find a wealthy man with only one wife. Occasionally non-relatives also came to live in wealthy homes and such people were called wasumbni. The wasumbni were often absorbed in the families and became integral parts so that under no circumstances were they allowed to marry into the same families. After a long stay they adopted the NONO of the clan thus becoming kinsmen.

For our illustration of what a family was, we shall use an average homestead of a wealthy husband with five wives and try to show how a family builds up around this nucleus. The owner of the home (wuon pacho) in our example is Ochieng’, son of Onyach (see next page).

In the traditional Luo home each wife was wuon ot (the owner of the house), meaning that she was the head of the household and leader of its domestic and economic activities. Under her were the children, sons and daughters. Each household's children grew with the idea of odwa (our household), thus planting the concept of collective ownership. In the struggle for recognition and independence of the odwa, children of one household became antagonists of those of another household. Wives also became rivals in the possession of
property and competition for the husband's favour. One could find for example, the sons of Achola referring to themselves as Jokanyamuot and hence working on their own, often against members of another household.

**HOMESTEAD OF OCHIENG'ONYACH**

```
1
ADHIAMBO
(Nyadimo)
Mikaye
D4 S2

3
ATHIENO
(Nyager)
Reru
D3 S3

OCHIENG
ONYACH
Wuon pacho

5
WANGA
(Nyaruoth)
Nyahera
D2 S2

OWINO ONYACH
D1 S3

2
ACHOLA
(Nyamuot)
Nyachira
D5 S6

4
AWITI
(Nyadimo)
Reru
D1 S2

WERE
D1 S2

WASUMBNI
4
```
Notes on the chart

(i) The figures 1, 2 to 5 refer to wives in their order of seniority. The first wife is called mikaye. The last one is called nyahera. Those in between are called reru, while the second one is called Nyachira.

(ii) (Nya...) refers to nono, the sacred name of the clan from which the woman came.

(iii) D2 means two daughters, while S3 means three sons.

(iv) We have deliberately avoided the names of the children for fear of complicating the chart. There are also four wasumbni in the home.

Where the husband's first wife did not give birth to many children, in this case sons, or she was growing old, the practice was that she went back to her people and fetched a wife for her husband. This is why on our chart both Awiti and Adhiambo are Nyadimo, meaning that Adhiambo collected a younger relative for her husband; what is known as omo siweho.

What we have seen so far is not a family as understood by the Luo but a homestead: the home of Ochieng'. The people who lived here were either mond Ochieng' (wives of Ochieng') or nyithind Ochieng' (the children of Ochieng') or joma odak gi Ochieng' (the people who live with Ochieng'). They were not Joka-Ochieng', that is, the family of Ochieng', until Ochieng' was dead and his grandchildren grew up. For us to talk of a family from this example, we must go back to Onyach the father of Ochieng'. Onyach had thirteen wives and was survived by forty seven sons and many daughters and grandchildren. On the day Onyach died all his daughters came with their children and grandchildren. The sons also had their wives and children. This was the time one correctly talked of the family of so and so. The people who came to the funeral went away saying Onyach has left his people, meaning a large family. What was life like in a traditional Luo homestead?
The houses in the homestead were circular huts with conical thatched roofs. Each wife had her house and as we have stated took care of the affairs of the house. The owner of the homestead had his hut in the centre while the sons and their cottages were at the gate. The homestead were usually fenced and had gates which were closed every evening.

Each wife's hut had two hearths; one inside the hut and the other on the verandah (agola). Most cooking was done on the hearth at the verandah while the one inside the hut was mainly used for the evening fire to keep the hut warm.

In the cattle kraal there was a dung-fire (pith) which was kept glowing all the time. It was here where the young boys warmed themselves in the evenings before retiring to bed in the simba (cottage for boys). Wuon pacho (owner of the homestead) had his hearth in his hut (duol or abila) where he entertained his visitors and instructed his sons on how to run homestead affairs. Where there were a number of married men living in the same homestead, the men gathered at this hearth to gossip over the events of the day and plan for the future. Any dispute in the homestead was also settled here.

The house of an elderly widow was also built at the gate and became the sleeping place for the girls (siwindhe). The number of huts varied from home to home. There were however some objects in the homestead which because of their religious significance we shall mention here. Such objects included panu (wooden mortar), wer (light wooden mortar used for milking), le (axe), tong' (spear), pong' (grinding stone), bul (drum) and rapogi (sharpening stone). These were essential objects in a home and we shall be referring to some of them later in the study, particularly those which reflect the religious beliefs and practices to which we now turn.


3. According to 1969 census the Luo numbered 1,521,595 being second to the Kikuyu who numbered 2,201,632 people.

4. Interviews: Harun Awelo. (14.2.73). According to Awelo among the North Yala group a son could marry his step mother in the event of the father's death. This was not possible in the other groups.

5. The files are kept by R.L. Stafford at Ng'iya. During my research I used Ng'iya as a base; hence I had the opportunity to look at the files and also hold discussions with the Luo Bible Revision Committee comprising Jacob Ouko (Protestant), Nicon Owuor (Catholic) and Roy Stafford of the Bible Society.

6. The heights referred to in this section are based on the Survey of Kenya maps 1:250,000 where they are given in feet. I have given here approximate heights in metres.

7. There are numerous seasonal rivers which have not been mentioned here.
8. Yala Swamp is being drained by the Government and when the project will be complete the river will also flow directly into the lake.


10. Tsetse infestation does not seem to have been very serious until about the turn of this century when places like Mageta Island became completely depopulated.

11. White was a pure colour and we are going to refer to it again when we talk about names of God.

12. The Luo society was traditionally polygynous. The reason for this was mainly to raise more sons who could fight against the other people who attacked them thus protecting the elders and the village or homestead.


14. With increasing populations and Land adjudication process going on, there is no more hunting. The government has also passed strict laws prohibiting all kinds of poaching.

15. See N.A. Othieno-Ochieng'. Education and Culture Change in Kenya 1844-1925 (Nairobi, n.d.)

16. See below


19. 'Wasumbni' is plural form of *misumba* which means both bachelor and a helper or servant. They could be called *Jodak* meaning squatters.

20. *Nome* was a sacred name by which one clan was distinguished from the other.

21. The husband is the head of the homestead.

22. *Jokanyamuot* here means children of *Nyamuot*.

23. Some of the homesteads were enclosed with stone walls and the number of people living in a homestead were for protection against invaders. See Chittick, N. "A Note on Stone-Built Enclosures in South Nyanza, Kenya" in *Man* Sept. - Oct. 1966, p. 152-153.

CHAPTER II

RELIGIOUS HERITAGE OF THE LUO

The development and change in the Luo conception of God can be traced through three periods of Luo history. Period one, from the earliest times to c. 1700; covering movements in northern Uganda, migration to and primary settlement in western Kenya. Period two, from c. 1700 A.D. to 1900 A.D., featuring the interactions between the Luo-speaking Nilotes and the Bantu-speaking peoples in western Kenya prior to the arrival of the Christian missionary and western culture. Period three, from A.D. 1900 to the present. This period saw the confrontation between Christianity and African cultures in the Lake Region resulting in a synthesis of African traditional religious beliefs and practices with the alien ones.

In this chapter we look at periods one and two covering the historical heritage of the Luo from the earliest times to the time they arrive and settle in western Kenya and the period of acculturation and culture contact to A.D. 1900.

The exact cradleland of the Luo before A.D. 1000 has not been established. We know however, that by about the middle of 14th century, they had settled two areas: Wipaco Dwong in Bahr el Ghazal area and the mountaneous area of Tekidi around the present town of Kitgum in Acholiland in Uganda. Wipaco Dwong has been associated with the early history of the Anywak and the proto-Shilluk. We shall therefore trace their history from Tekidi (area of Mt. Agoro) which has been associated with the early history of the Central and the Southern Luo.
The first Luo group to reach Tekidi were a mixture of Luo and their Nilotic kin, the Dinka, hence the name Luo-Didinga. When they came to Tekidi they found the area inhabited by a proto-madi people called Muru with whom they intermarried and fused into one cultural mould. This hybrid of people had Jok as their ultimate object of ritual. Jok was worshipped at the Chiefdom shrines which were either erected for the purpose or were unusual natural phenomena or outstanding landmarks in the landscape. The term Jok, is a generic word which had many meanings. In this context we are restricting the sense to that aspect of Jok which evoked a response of sacrifice and supplication at the clan level.

Associated with Jok were such symbols as the Spear and the Bead, which symbols are found in the traditions of all the Luo-speaking people. According to the traditions of the Kenya Luo the story goes that once upon a time there were two brothers called Nyipir and Nyabongo. One day an elephant came to raid the crops and Nyipir, seeing the animal, took Nyabongo's spear and ran it into the thigh of the elephant which unfortunately escaped with the spear still stuck on its body. On coming back Nyabongo was informed of what had taken place. He became so angry that he insisted that his spear had to be brought back. Because of the constant reminders from his brother, Nyipir decided to go into the woods and look for the spear. On his return with the spear, he came also with beads of a rare type, present for his wife. One day while the woman sat gossipping and admiring the beads, Nyabongo's child swallowed one of the beads. When Nyipir heard this he insisted that the bead had to be brought back. Thus Nyabongo did by killing the child and slitting the belly open. After the incident the brothers separated. Nyabongo and his aging father Olum, alias Ramogi, and other followers left for Pawir, while his brothers Nyipir and Tifool moved into
Pubungu, the area of present Pakwach to become the Alur and Jonam. These are close kin to the Luo of Kenya, as Professor Ogot has noted:

...It would appear that some of the Padhola and the Kenya Luo peoples are descendants of the original descendants at Pubungu. Several clan names mentioned in these traditions are found in Padhola and Nyanza. The third big group of Luo migrants from whom some Padhola and Kenya Luo clans claim descent moved away from Pawir in the northeastern corner of Bunyoro.

The ancestors of the Palwo are believed to have been at Pubungu at the time of the 'great quarrel' and from there they moved southward settling on the shores of Lake Albert and assimilated the indigenous Bantu-speaking populations in the area. With the coming in of more migrants, the Luo population increased. This period is important to us, because as Okot observed, many of the chiefdom deities in Acholi and Alur were originally connected with the Luo Kibanda, and the belief and practice of spirit possession also seem to have spread into Acholi and Alur from the Luo in the northern country of Bunyoro (Pawir settlement).

Most of the migrants from Pawir went into Kabermaido Peninsula. One group, the Omolo group, named after Omolo Ococ, the last Rwot of Pawir moved north and then south into Busoga. Before they left Pawir, their idea of the numinous had probably been influenced by the contacts they made with the Bantu-speaking peoples who lived to the south of their Pawir settlement.

Meanwhile there was a throne dispute at Tekidi that led to a group under Beno Omor moving to Mount Elgon area and later south to Kenya as the Joka Jok. The people who remained in Tekidi were later attacked by a group of people from the East, as a result
of which Owiny II, the last ruler of Tekidi, moved away with his people. In the course of this pull out the group split into two, one to Nimule and beyond, the other to the South-east into Busoga.

As the Owiny and Omologroups pressed further south they poured into Kabermaido peninsula along the North-eastern shores of Lake Kyoga: the apparent convergence zone of the two streams of Luo movements at the time. A point worth nothing at this stage is that at the time of convergence the Owiny group had probably contacted the Ateker-speaking agriculturalists to the North-east of Lake Kyoga. Writing on Mukama, Cohen throws more light on these contacts when he says that "The key to comprehending the success of Mukama, and the most notable index of distinction between Omolo Wakooli and Owiny Ngobi, is the pattern of attraction of followers, clients, and wives to the Owiny group. We can recover little direct and implicit evidence concerning the essential qualities of Mukama, but the traditions of the families which did attach themselves to the Mukama party present and outline of the Mukama passage of a very prestigious figure".

During these contacts the Luo-speaking Nilotes assimilated some of the Bantu peoples as some of them were also assimilated by the Bantu. The Omolo group, as we have stated, had already been in contact with the Bantu who lived to the south of their Pawir settlement. As these two groups moved into Busoga the Joka Jok also crossed River Malaba and came into Busoga. Here then was the second convergence involving Joka-Jok and the already fused Owiny and Omolo groups. But this convergence was at the most only tangential as the Joka Jok who were more to the east soon left for the south into Nyanza leaving the other two groups in Busoga.

We cannot claim the ability to reconstruct with any certainty, the religious beliefs and practices of the Luo before
1900, both because the contacts and settlements were complex, and because the people they interacted with cannot be identified with any precision. But that these early Luo drew on the traditions and cultures of other people can scarcely be doubted. As to what ideas of God they had at this time is a question that cannot be answered. Nevertheless, that they had a concept of Jok (spirit or God) which evoked a response of sacrifice and supplication at clan level is not implausible. Okot p'Bitek writing on the Central Luo says: "They offered sacrifices at the chiefdom shrines and to their ancestors and dealt with the hostile ghosts accordingly".12

According to the Central Luo traditions analysed by sister A.M. Garry13 the earliest symbol they employed in their ritual was the spear, and the indications are that political power was connected to, and may even have depended on effective ritualistic function. One might reasonably argue then, that the Royal Spear symbolized the chiefdom and that whatever shrines they erected were for the spear. It could as well be inferred that the function of Jok was limited to the clan and chiefdom and that Jok 'rested' where the people wanted it to rest. In which case, the idea of immovable Jok,14 whose residence was visited with offerings at times of need15 was a later development; perhaps after the ancestors of the Nyanza Luo had already reached Western Kenya.

Concerning the events to the north of Lake Kyoga we can add nothing to the traditions of settlements, feuds, dispersals, splits en route and new settlements, in the course of which there were contacts with non-Luo speaking peoples resulting in a reciprocal borrowing of ideas. What happened round and about Lake Kyoga?

The Luo settlements in Budoola were spearheaded by the Owiny group, arriving there ahead of the Omolo group. This group (Owiny)
is reported to have split into two. The first, 'Owiny segment' left Budoola within three generations of having arrived there and, travelling southwards through Samia-Bugwe reached Alego in Nyanza region of Western Kenya. The other fraction 'Adhola group' remained in Budoola for a generation or so before recrossing the Malaba River to settle West Budama. The Omolo group, on the other hand, stayed in Budoola area for a while before moving south to Banda where they settled for about three generations before moving eastwards and southwards into Western Kenya.

The question which must be asked now is: What religious ideas did these Luo speakers develop during their nearly four generations' stay in Busoga? As we try to reconstruct the religious traditions covering this period it should be noted that we are dealing with Luo-speakers, some of whom might not have been originally Luo. We are thus dealing with a culturally heterogeneous society, or as Prof. Ogot puts it:

We see a heterogeneous group led by Adhola and Owiny move together as far south as the present Busiguya-Molo area of South Bugisu and East Budama. Here the Brijanga drop off from the main stream. The rest of the party proceed with their journey to Bunyole, where almost half of the migrants decide to settle. The more adventurous of them continue with the trek across the River Malawa into the Bukoli country of Busoga, where they establish a big settlement at Budola. Here again a further split occurs. One section led by Owiny migrate to Nyanza, and the rest go back to rejoin their brothers in Bunyole-Lul area.

From the traditions analysed by B.A. Ogot and C.W. Cohen, the areas the Luo occupied in Busoga (including Budoola and Banda settlements) were virtually empty when they arrived. Their only Bantu-speaking neighbours were the Bakenhe fishermen along the River Malaba and banana cultivators to the southwest. Nonetheless, the records do not indicate a long interaction between these people, but mostly after the adventurous sections of the Owiny and Omolo groups had already left for Nyanza.
We have already mentioned that by the time these Luo-speakers got to Kabermaido, Jok was already the dominant deity being regarded as the object of sacrifice and ritual at clan and interclan level. We shall now turn to their conception of the deity before they moved into Nyanza; and here we shall rely on the Padhola traditions analysed by Professor Ogot.  

The Padhola like their kin, the Luo of Kenya, are reported by Professor Ogot to have always believed in a Supreme Being whom they called Were. Of interest to us is why they do not call the Supreme Being Jok or Nyasaye. This is a question Professor Ogot does not discuss in the documents referred to above. However, in his earlier study, he said:

To the Nilote, Jok is not an impartial universal power; it is the essence of every being, the force which makes everything what it is, and God himself 'the greatest Juok' is life force in itself.

Jok as we have already stated had many meanings. Okot p'Bitek applied the same idea to the Central Luo concept of Jok by saying it is a class word, and pointed out that the term Jok was applied by the Acholi to soil, rock, snakes, unusual happenings, spirits of the ancestors, inspiration granted to diviners. He states the issue in this way:

The fundamental question is whether the different forms of Jok among the Central Luo were manifestations or emblems of another power. Were the Central Luo, like the Nuer and the Dinka cousins, dualists who saw behind the material and other forms of the Jok another or higher and more powerful spirit, a God?

Okot's answer to this question is negative. According to him the religion of the Central Luo was concerned with individual causes
of misfortune and ill-health. There was no ultimate power, one responsible for the sum total of man's condition in life. Maybe Okot is right in suggesting that the Central Luo had no idea of God responsible for man's suffering in life. Be that as it may, the ancestors of the Padhola and of the Kenya Luo believed in the Supreme Being in addition to their belief in ancestral spirits and spirits which possessed objects or phenomena.

The first group of the Luo-speakers to arrive in the area as we have already stated were the Owiny group whose leader settled on Nang'oma Hill, possibly for reasons of safety as the hill could be used as a watch tower. As they settled, they erected shrines where they offered sacrifices to their Jok and their ancestors. Unlike kinsmen who remained in the north (Acholiland) these people do not appear to have developed the concept of Immovable Jok. Perhaps this is explained in the light of the whole migration event and the fact that their settlements were temporary as most of them were still on the move at the time. Be that as it may, it seems that for these people Jok could reveal himself to individuals away from home and that their method of intercession was to pray at the shrine (located at the primary settlement or at the grave of the founder of the clan) and that the symbol used in this ritual was the Royal Spear, a symbol which also indicated the close connection between the political and spiritual power of the person possessing it. It is in the light of this observation that we would like to echo agreement with Professor Ogot when he says that "by the sixteenth century, when the Padhola were settling in eastern Uganda, Jok, the traditional Nilotic God, had become an all-good, all-powerful and everlasting Supreme Being (Were)."

Of interest to us now is the development of monotheism among these Luo-speaking peoples. Though striking, this development is not surprising as it should be expected in a society like that of the Luo
at this time, where there was dire need for guided leadership in the names of clan heads or trek leaders. For the Luo therefore, the answer to this development lay in the distinctive features of their faith in their leaders (who became ancestors at death) and worship of Jok. As these seminomads looked back to the experience they had and still saw themselves distinct as a people, they affirmed that their ancestors must have had divine guidance; and if it was Jok, then Jok must be powerful.

The Abila of the leader of the clan also became an important shrine where rituals connected with peacemaking, preparation for war, hunting and long journeys were performed. The sites of such Abila became important communal shrines where sacrifices to ancestors and the worship of God was conducted. For example, the Nagugi shrine on Nang'oma Hill (the primary settlement of the Owiny group) and the ancestral shrine at Molo in East Budama (marking the site where Omolo died) have remained centres of worship of Were.

For the Padhola, as Professor Ogot points out, the "religious attitude towards the area of primary settlement was reflected in their ritual and belief. And just as it was in the Exodus that the Israelites came to know their God, Yahweh, who had delivered them from Egypt and made them His people, so it was during the migration that the Padhola really came to know Were through his servants Kuni. When therefore, they reached their Canaan in Eastern Uganda, permanent sanctuaries had to be established for the guardian spirits".

While Professor Ogot states rightly, the fact that the ecology of the area to a large extent determined the location of clan shrines, he ignores a very significant aspect of this development, and that is the influence of the people the Padhola interacted with, nor are
we in a position to discuss that here. What about the Luo and the western Kenya scene? To that we now turn.

Culture Contact in Western Kenya

The area in western Kenya which used to be called 'Kavirondo' presents a very good example of how peoples with different ethnic backgrounds, interacted in marriage and trade and selectively borrowed cultural traits and ideas. An analysis of this process based on oral tradition presents numerous problems. People who were otherwise Ababukusu, Abakisa, Abawanga, Abakabras, Abanyole, Abatiriki, Abaidakho and so forth have merged into one group calling themselves Abaluyia; while those who were Joka-Jok, Joka-Owiny and Joka-Okolo have merged into the Luo, claiming a common ancestry and cultural heritage. Yet more people who should otherwise be associated with the Baganda and the Gikuyu have emerged as distinct groups, namely the Maragoli, the Gusii and the Kuria.

In the midst of all these mergers and emergences, does anything remain for a historian upon which the development of the religious ideas of the people could be analysed? This is what is investigated in this section for the Luo with reference to the Luyia, the Gusii and the Kuria.

Nyanza, before the Luo-speaking populations entered it, was a part of a great lakeshore cultural area, extending from what is now Southern Busoga in Uganda to the Nyanza Gulf (Winam Gulf) in the Kisumu area of Kenya, with populations that were mainly Bantu-speaking. The lands now making the districts of Siaya and Busia in Kenya have been associated with dimple-based pottery and from works dating to as early as 5th century A.D. We see then that like Busoga, the Luo were coming to occupy a land that had for long
been tamed by Bantu-speaking communities whose infiltration into the area never ceased until one hundred years ago. Dr. William Ochieng', in his latest work, affirms this when he says that:-

...before the arrival of the Nilotic Luo the rest of undulating country between Lake Victoria and the Nandi Escarpment was occupied by Bantu-speaking clans.

Professor B.A. Ogot who did more elaborate work on the history of migrations and settlement of the Luo noted that the story of their settlement was a very confused affair. It was not a united invasion, planned and executed consciously and deliberately. The whole operation was diversified, irregular and unorganized. Each of the sub-tribes or groups that later evolved into sub-tribes, acted independently and often against one another. The conquest was therefore the result of independent sub-tribal and clan warfare, rather than of a tribal invasion with conclusive campaigns under a single leader. The period also marks the gradual change from a nomadic to a sedentary life which, in the political field, was characterized by change from statelessness to chiefship.

During this period, according to Professor Ogot, there is no evidence to show that the newcomers attempted to conquer or impose their way of life on the former inhabitants. It is even doubtful whether the Luo regarded their settlement on Ramogi Hill as permanent in the same way that two generations later they were to view their settlements in, say Alego. What appears to have happened is that a small band of nomads settled on the periphery of agricultural population and so long as they were safe and there was adequate pasture for their cattle, they preferred to maintain a state of co-existence.

The Luo occupation of Nyanza, as Dr. Ochieng' observed, was haphazard and spread over a long period. Indeed until the colonial
period the Luo were still colonising parts of South Nyanza.

Be that as it may, the most important areas of settlement before the arrival of the Luo were Yimbo and Samia. These adjacent settlements have been associated with very early Bantu civilizations. The Samia culture was a village culture, based on fishing, simple crop production and increased craft specialization, mostly in pottery, and also iron smelting and beating. Along the lakeshore, and on to the islands to the South of Samia was the Yimbo culture. The Bantu civilization of Yimbo was based on fishing and some sedentary agriculture on the mainland.

The crowning bond of this Nyanzian Culture lay not in the material culture but in communication and intermarriage. In particular, the communities of Yimbo and Samia were oriented primarily towards the Lake Victoria and their ties were with the islands of Jagusi, Sigulu, Lolwe and Mageta. We tally here with David Cohen when he suggests that:

It is not entirely impossible that the Lolui (Lolwe) peoples visited the sites in Central Nyanza (Siaya and Kisumu Districts), made their pots, and returned to the settlements on Lolui, or that there was some sort of economic symbiosis or trade between Lolui Islanders and pot making groups on the mainland...

The Nyanza religion before the Luo arrived is difficult to reconstruct, as the original inhabitants either gave way to the invading Luo-speaking Nilotes or took to Luo-speaking thereby adopting Luo culture. What is apparent is that, though the area was predominantly Bantu-speaking, there were differing people like the Gusii, Kalenjin, Maasai and even pygmies living in the area. One could reasonably argue therefore, that by the time the Luo arrived, Nyanza was already a mosaic of many cultural institutions and that the Luo at best just added to an already very complex community.
As we welcome the Luo into Nyanza, a question shall be asked: Is it reasonable to suggest that when the Luo intruded into Nyanza, they found their religious practices inappropriate, hence had to adjust; or were the religious systems of the indigenous populations inappropriate, hence had to be replaced?

From Busoga the Luo flowed into Nyanza in three waves. The first of their lot to arrive were the Joka-Jok, who, in the course of their southern trek, built a home at Ligala (which means a new home) in Samia Bugwe only a few miles after they crossed the River Sio. It is reasonable to argue that their movement was checked by the Bantu populations in the area and that they stayed with the Bantu for nearly a century, during which time they intermarried and exchanged cultural ideas. Meanwhile scouts were sent ahead to survey the land upon whose return the group moved behind Ramogi Hill led by a certain Idi. They later named the Hill after their supposed leader or progenitor. It could also be suggested that the hill was named after their original home around Lamogi Hill in Sudan. Three or four generations later saw the arrival of the Owiny and Omolo groups to spark off Luo expansions along the lakeshore.

In the previous section we dealt with the migrations of the Luo from Sudan to Busoga. We shall now focus our attention more on how their religious beliefs and practices changed with changes in their economic, political and social organizations.

The Luo of Kenya like their kin in Sudan and Uganda and Sudan were pastoralists. The reason for this pastoral mode of life was that in their original homeland there were vast stretches of land much of which was not suitable for extensive cultivation. As they moved from one area to the next looking for good pasture for their herds of cattle they remained basically semi-nomadic. The cattle
remained the mainstay of their economy. Even on their arrival and settlement in Western Kenya, the Luo still practiced pastoralism. Cattle and other domestic animals were reared and made to serve a variety of purposes. Cattle were used in paying bridewealth and sacrifices. But the practice of cattle rearing among the Luo decreased with time. This was because, as Professor Ogot put it:—

As the Luo migrated southwards into Uganda and Kenya they arrived and settled in forested places where an agricultural community was more conveniently practiced than a pastoral one.

This change resulted in a decrease in dependence on cattle. Thus they started mixing agriculture with pastoralism. Among the crops they planted were oduma (maize), budho (yam) and bel (millet). The nature of the land was not the only deterrent to extensive pastoralism. The area of Ramogi Hill and further to the east in what is now Alego was particularly unsuitable for large scale human as well as cattle settlement. Their goats and cattle were easy prey for carnivorous animals like lions and leopards.

There were severe handicaps in the rearing of cattle. But the game animals were also a severe handicap to farming. Buffalo and bushbuck were especially fond of maize and millet. The other menace included elephants, wild pigs, monkeys and hippos. The Luo were therefore compelled into hunting to safeguard their crops and secure supplies of meat. The flesh of the animals was eaten while the skin of some of them like buffaloes (omuga) were used for making slippers and heavy shields (kuot).

The shift from a pastoral culture to an agricultural one does not seem to have led to a great change in Luo religion, particularly as far as sacrifice was concerned. The victim of their sacrificial ceremonies still remained the oxen, goats or fowls. On the other hand
their attitude towards land changed as they realized that their livelihood depended on the fertility of the land. The concept of fertility as we stated earlier, came to be understood in a broad sense, as the fertility of the fields (*lowo en min ji* meaning the land is the mother of people), and of families. On the fertility of land depended the continuity of life and society in the everlasting bonds with the ancestors who conquered the land for the living generations.

When the Luo arrived in western Kenya, trade with neighbouring people was not unknown to them. Those of them who started their migration from western Uganda, the Owiny and Omolo groups, had traded with the Nyamwezi in among other things, beads and gerhis (cowries). Thus when they entered western Kenya, they brought with them spears, drums, stools, beads and gerghis (*Luo: gagi*). It is apparent that *gagi* was not known among the peoples the Luo found in western Kenya so that when the Luo reverted to using them for divination the clients believed their words. This should not be surprising because even in our own time when the mirror and later the radio were introduced, many medicine men used them for divination.

We have already referred to the trade that they found going on in the lake basin. When they got settled on their conquered land units, trade continued. Hoe blades from Samia are still famous all over Luoland.

The Luo also traded with their Gusii neighbours to the south. As Dr. Ochieng' notes:

...the grain, iron items, animal skins and soapstone commodities which the Gusii exported to Luoland were exchanged for a variety of items, the major one being livestock. The Gusii by the time they had settled on the Highlands, had lost most of their cattle to climate and to their "thieving neighbours", particularly to the Kipsigis and Maasai...Hence the Gusii always insisted that most of their commodities be exchanged with livestock.
Through such trade, the Nilotic Luo interacted with their Bantu neighbours. This led to reciprocal borrowing of cultural ideas.

In the course of their trek, the Luo were led by ruodh oganda (leader of the sub-tribe) whose role was more of a co-ordinator between the thuond lweny (warriors), jobilo (medicine men and diviner) and the members of the oganda (sub-tribe). Dr. Ochieng' records that:

The Nilotic Luo imported into Nyanza such political ideas. When they arrived in Nyanza and settled among the previous Bantu occupants of the Lake Region, the various Luo ruoths (ruodhi) tended to accept the positions of the existing Bantu clan elders whom they confirmed in their traditional functions. Junior elders were created to assist clan leaders and each clan was required to keep a peace-making force.

The creation of the office of junior elders that Dr. Ochieng' talks about seems to be a later development. The office of Jabilo (diviner and medicine man) was the most important next to that of ruodh oganda in the traditional Luo political hierarchy. Jabilo was the principal chief adviser to ruodh oganda. In spite of the trade already referred to, the Luo fought battles among themselves and with their neighbours. Most of these battles came as a result of cattle raids and the battles with the Luyia are reported in Bunyore (near Maseno and Luanda), in Musanda area and also in Usonga. The people who were captured in the battles became wasumbni (Luyia: Abasumba).

It is reported among the Luyia that the people who raided them most frequently were the Uasin Gishu Maasai who used to be called Abakwaba by the Luyia but are nowadays referred to as Abaseebe. Osogo notes that:
It seems that the strange type of secret cult in Baluyia called emiseebe (Luo: sepe) originates from these people. For the Abaluyia who become Abaseebe (Luo: Josepe) tend to behave like the ancient Maasai and speak a strange dialect.

It seems that through social interaction between the Luo and the Luyia, the sepe cult found its way into the Luoland. Though it is difficult to reconstruct exactly what the Luo borrowed from whom in western Kenya, they themselves having arrived as an already mixed group, it is nonetheless certain that it was during the period of infiltration and expansion that there was marked culture contact in the Lake Region. As the Owiny and Omolo groups arrived, the Luo expanded their boundaries from the area of Ramogi Hill to the interior where they contacted the Kombekombe, a Bantu-speaking community, believed to have been of Gusii extraction. Further to the interior they also contacted Mori, Uwaria and Nyang'ori in the area now Asembo. The question which becomes inescapable is: How much did the borrowing through these contacts influence the Luo religious ideas?

It is not easy to answer this question in detail. We shall mention the names the Luo and Luyia use for God, namely, Were and Nyasaye. That these people believed in the Supreme Being before they came into contact in Kenya is the main argument of this paper. C. Wagner and G.S. Were have expressed the same view for the Luyia. W.R. Ochieng and P.A. Abuso have done the same for the Gusii and the Kuria as we are going to see below. Let us however, turn first to the Luyia scene.

The history of religious ideas in this area goes back to at least the last millenium B.C., during which time the Rift Southern Cushitic speakers had spread to Western Kenya and beyond into the Northern and Central Tanzania and apparently into the
south western side of Lake Victoria. At the base of these peoples ideas lay a concept of God, called by the same word used for the sun. The linking of the sun and God continue to this day among the Iraqw, Luyia, Kalenjin and Luo societies. Additionally, both the Luo and the Luyia have myths concerning the sun when it sets in the west. Both report that, to quote the Luyia account:

at night the sun is believed to travel back from west to east, though not across the sky but underneath the earth... A story relates, however, that once a man woke up in his hut at night and went outside to urinate. There he saw the sun quickly speeding across the sky back to the east, a most inauspicious experience which necessitated an elaborate rite of lustration.

It is not only in this but both the Luo and the Luyia pray to God every morning and evening spitting at the sun asking it to rise well so that peace may abound in the day and that misfortune should set with it to the west. Without making categorical claims, it can be tentatively put forward that since the subsequent migrations and settlement of the majority of the Rift and Western Kenya peoples traversed the lands formerly occupied by the Rift Southern Cushitic peoples, the ideas about God and the sun held by these earlier peoples could have found later percolations into the newer societies.

While the Luo call the west Imbo the Luyia talk of Ebumumbo. This is noteworthy particularly in view of the fact that the cult of Mumbo, which was believed to be a Luo cult is associated with a huge snake which lives in the lake, and which lake, for the Luo is in the west. It remains to be established therefore that the spirit of Mumbo was originally not a water spirit and that the Luo came with it. Our contention is that the concept Mumbo found its way into the Luo world view from the Luyia or other Bantu peoples.

In their sacrifices both the Luo and the Luyia talk of misango (Luyia emisango) and Luswa meaning the act of sacrifice.
This could only be explained in terms of reciprocal borrowing of ideas between the Nilotic Luo and the Bantu Luyia. In the same category could be considered such words like osuri (Luyia susuli) which is the stick on the top most part of the roofs of traditional huts holding the thatch intact. Among the Luo this symbolizes authority and has to be pulled down from all the huts of the wives whose husband has died before they were remarried (tero or lago) by a cousin of the dead man. The same stick was a symbol of headship among many Luyia communities.

While many other words could be mentioned from various aspects of the Luo and Luyia cultural beliefs and practices, we would like to contend that before the colonial period the Luo and Luyia had a lot in common as far as their religious beliefs, including beliefs in the Supreme Being was concerned. Among those of them who live close to the lake, and this is another field requiring more work, spirit possession was and continues to be a common cult. Spirits like those of Sumba and Adongo Nundu which we mention later in the spread study right from Samia Bugwe in Uganda to Samia, Bukhayo and Bunyala among the Luyia; and, in Ugenya, Alego, Yimbo, Sakwa and Uyoma, to mention only a few locations, among the Luo. Later we talk about rainmaking which many informants believed was a Bantu practice adopted by certain Luo peoples when they got to this place (Western Kenya). In short, the Luo and Luyia, like many other African peoples believed in spirits and the spirit world even before they came into contact.

Thus, taking Luyia and Luo-speaking peoples together, one would infer that under the circumstances they found themselves in when they settled western Kenya, every notable feature of the world about them, every mountain or river, or great trees, every striking events or influences which affected their lives, such as storms or disease, every difficulty or trouble which they encountered received some explanation and were connected in some form with spiritual activities. As the synthesis of belief continued, we would contend, the people
evolved nearly identical skill, techniques, customs and taboos alongside inherent belief in spirits and the profound conviction as to the continued existence of the departed.

We have already talked of the indigenous populations either having given way or adopting the Luo language. The Luo and absorbed people alike were prone, therefore, to either using the same word to express an idea or different words to express the same idea. This tendency is particularly noticeable among the inhabitants of Yimbo, Alego, Ugenya, Samia, Bukhayo, Marachi, Gem, Sakwa, Asembo and Uyoma. How much does history help us explain this? Professor Ogot states that:-

It would appear that the migration of the Luyia group that settled in southern Buganda to Kenya took place about ten generations ago, and therefore c. 1652-1679. Included in this cluster were such well known Luyia peoples of the Abafooyo of Marachi, Abakhayo, Abatirichi, Abakhekke, Abamarama, Abakabras, Abanyole and Maragoli. The majority of these people occupied their present home from the present Luo district of Central Nyanza.

If the suggested date (c. 1652-1679) was correct, it would mean that the mentioned Luyia peoples, came after the Luo had arrived in the area. This creates problems we would not like to enter into here. However, the early history of Eastern Uganda and Western Kenya is very closely associated with Bantu migrations from the general areas of Western Uganda and Mount Elgon. The traditional history of many of the Ganda, Soga and Gwe clans open with migrations from either of the two areas. The same is true of the traditions of a large number of the Abaluyia sub-tribal groups, or which moved into Western Kenya from Eastern Uganda, that is; from the area between Mount Elgon and Lake Victoria. Together with the Gusii, the Suba and the Kuria, these Abaluyia clans and tribes appear to have been among the most
anciently settled of the Bantu-speaking peoples in the Lake Region. It is reasonable to infer that while other Bantu people moved away westwards and southwards from this focal point to find new polities, the Abaluyia and Gusii groups remained in the region for some time after splinter moves.

Though we are not particularly interested in who settled where and when among the Luyia clans, we would nevertheless like to mention that the inhabitants of Samia are reported to have come from Misri, trekked through Mukono (Uganda), Sigulu Island, Lwambwa on to present Samia. The major clans of Marachi came from Bunyoro, through Buganda, Busoga, Bunyala, Ugenya on to the present Marachi. Major Bukhayo clans claim origin from Ibanda in Busoga. Bunyala on the other hand, is made up of mixed origin. Of further interest to our present study is the fact that the majority of the present Abaluyia clans originally migrated to their present territories from the present Luoland, some leaving behind remnants of their peoples along the low-lying plain of Lake Victoria. Some like Idakho and Isukha had settled in the present Luo country before they later moved northwards into their present settlements in Buluyia. Others like the Abanyole still remember their earlier wandering in Yimbo, Sakwa, Asembo and Gem before they finally settled in their present territories. The entry points into Nyanza were generally at present-day Samia, Yimbo, and Alego. It remains to be stated that these late arrivals, the Luyia and the Luo, were exposed to a completely new environment, and had almost the same fascinations. This phenomenon directed the development of their religious beliefs and practices.

The Luo in their migratory mode of life were under the guidance of God and of spiritual agencies possessed of mind and will. By the time they got to Nyanza, they had spent nearly a
century of migratory mode of life. Their concept of the moulder deity had developed from Jok who protected the homestead to Nyakalaga who led them to the new land. What about the Luyia?

The only serious work that has been done on the Luyia religious beliefs and practices is that by Gunther Wagner. Like their Luo neighbours, the Luyia believed in the Supreme Being whom they variously calledWere, Nyasaye or Nasaye. The Supreme Being was believed to be the creator and was their ultimate object of worship. As was the case with the Luo and many other African societies, the acts of worship were directed to God through the spirits of the ancestors who acted as intermediaries.

The power and role of ancestral spirits was an important aspect of the religion of the Luyia peoples. The departed whom they called abafwa or ebishieno were believed to continue in existence and their spirits communicated with the living in dreams and/or hallucinations, either as good or bad spirits. Depending on their character, the spirits could cause good luck to the living relatives in matters relating to health, crops, livestock, procreation and general success and prosperity or alternatively, disease, disaster and bad luck in all spheres of life.

We do not intend to go into detail concerning the Luyia view of spirits within the rubric of religious and quasi-religious functions and ceremonies since our concern is with the Luo. However, the arrival of these Nilotic peoples brought with it an enrichment of symbol and ritual. The Luo brought with them their spears and drums which were symbols of authority. They were good hunters but they never hunted carnivorous animals for food.
The people we found here were eating anything. Leopards made good meat for them. And even now some of the Luyia peoples still eat leopards. The Luo hunted leopards for their skins. It would appear therefore, that the feeling of impurity whenever one killed a leopard leading to purification ritual now common among peoples of Western Kenya was of Nilotic origin. The Luyia are also known to have had ceremonies for the slayers of such animals but only because they were great and had killed a great enemy.

Along the lakeshore, the spirit cults, as we have mentioned, were fully entrenched. After a few generations of stay together and intermarriage the Luo added to their ancestral spirits such spirits as Sumba and Mumbo. These were spirits associated with the lake and as argued above, could not have been brought by the Luo. The same applies to boat cults. The boat spirits (juok yie) have remained a mystery among the fishing Luo communities. The boat as we said earlier, was regarded as spirit possessed. They said yie en migogo meaning the boat was a married daughter. Migogo is a Bantu word (Luyia omukoko). The most spirit possessed and most important part of the boat is Mgongo (keel) which word sounds like migogo. The Luo can be heard saying that yie en mgongo meaning that once you have the keel you have the boat. Be that as it may, here was a word which was borrowed through interaction between the early Luo and Luyia peoples.

The sophisticated Luo rituals connected with the making of a new home (ligala) are also a reflection of later beliefs. It is unbelievable that a semi-nomadic people like the Luo could have brought to the sedentary Bantu populations such practices as the ownership of the land, the giving the one who was going to
make a new home fire (kwanyo mach) and also having to step on the site for the new homestead (nyono lowo). What seems probable is that the Bantu gave the Luo these conditions before they were given land to settle on. These have however remained the practice among the Luo who until very recently never had an attachment to land. On the other hand, the traditional Luo word for homestead was pacho and the husband who was the head of the homestead became wuon pacho. Because of the interactions the most common word for homestead among the contemporary Luo is dala which apparently is of Bantu origin (Luyia lidala). It is arguable therefore that some of the Luo rituals connected with the homestead came later after they had settled in western Kenya. However, this is one of the areas where more work could be done and which is beyond the scope of the present study.

The Luo myths, riddles and proverbs are in many ways similar to the Luyia ones. These can only be explained in terms of interaction. The argument being advanced here is that before the colonial period the Luo and their Luyia neighbours had interacted so much that it becomes difficult to treat the contemporary Luo and Luyia separately, at least as far as their idea of God is concerned. What about the other peoples in western Kenya?

Among the earliest Bantu inhabitants of Western Kenya were the Gusii. Their traditions recorded and analysed by Dr. W.R. Ochieng' indicate that they were once the same people as the Kuria, the Logoli, the Suba, the Kikuyu, the Embu and the Kamba. These Gusii, the Kuria and the Logoli who are said to have travelled to Mt. Elgon area in the company of the Ganda and the Soga, migrated southwards and following the source of the river Nzoia arrived on the eastern shores of Lake Victoria some fifteen to sixteen generations ago. Ochieng' dates their arrival at about the year A.D. 1520. Turning east they travelled along the shore and eventually they erected their settlements around Goye Bay in Yimbo, and from Goye their settlements appear to
have stretched across the present-day Urima, Ulowa, Uhwaya, Sare and Unyejra at the foot of Ramogi Hill. It was in this general area that the first wave of Luo migrants into Western Kenya found them. It is important therefore that we look at their religious beliefs and practices and here again we shall rely on the works of Dr. Ochieng'.

The Gusii are reported to have believed in a Supreme Being whom they called Engoro and who created the universe, the earth and the forces operative in it. Engoro was the original progenitor and source of prosperity and life. He is believed by the Gusii to have governed the destiny of man, sending him rain or storm, well-being or famine, health or disease, peace or war.

Ochieng' reports that the Gusii regarded the ancestors as immortal beings, who interfered in the affairs of the living whenever they felt it necessary. They could either intervene on their own account, or on behalf of Engoro. If on their own account, it might well have been because they were badly treated by the living while they were themselves still alive in the physical world, or their funerals were not well ritualized, or the living had refused to perpetuate their names by naming children after them. The ancestors would consequently demand that the shortcoming be rectified. They would put across their demands to dreams or they would cause an illness or misfortune as an indication that they wanted certain wrongs righted. If no heed was taken, these illnesses were believed to result in death. A striking aspect of their religious system which has been reported by Dr. Ochieng' and which is of particular interest to us in our present study is lack of shrines. Individuals are reported to have directed their prayers to God and this was done anywhere. We shall make reference to this when we discuss Luo acts of worship in chapter five.
The other group we have mentioned as having been close to the Gusii are the Kuria. The idea 'God' is said to be evident among the Kuria and they are reported by P.A. Abuso, to have called him by various names including Nokwe, Gekoni, Getemi, Nosacha-Obairo, Kengori, Nyamhanga and Rioba. In all these names, Abuso argues, there is the basic and pervasive belief that God is the creator of all good things. The Kuria believe that God is far removed from men and from their affairs. In their worship of God they turn to the sun as a point of "contact". According to the Kuria the spirits of the dead could either be benevolent (Omukoro) or out for ghostly vengeance (Amasambo). The Omokoro had to be remembered by children being named after them, or they could cause trouble if they were neglected by the living.

With that brief look at the religious beliefs of the people the Luo came into contact with, let us attempt a synthesis of the situation bearing in mind the fact that when people who possess different cultures meet and live together for a long time, it will be very unlikely that the culture they possess after their long contact shall ever be the same again.

By the time the Joka Owiny for example, got to western Kenya they had spent nearly half a century of only temporary settled life. Thus when they started settling down their responses to the new environment were bound to be different from the response they had in their previous locale. Their idea of moulder deity as we have indicated, had changed from Jok who protected the homestead to Nyakalaga (the one found everywhere), who guided and protected his people wherever they were. It was Nyakalaga who was constantly appealed to in case of difficulties.
I would like to argue here that the name Nyasaye, whether it was coined from the verb sayo or was borrowed, became common after the Luo settled down in Nyanza, probably in the first half of the 17th century. If they had developed the name in the course of the trek then the name should have been common among the Padhola as well. As far as the evidence available to us is concerned, the Padhola use the name Were for the Supreme Being. Since the Luo of Kenya also use Were it seems valid to argue that the term Were was developed amongst these Nilotic people before the term Nyasaye came into common use, and that it might have been borrowed from the Bantu.

I have suggested that the name Nyasaye came to use in the first half of the 17th century. We shall also see that the word Nyasaye was derived from the verb sayo. I would like to point out here that the letter $s$ does not exist in the alphabet of the Acholi among whom Okot worked, and so we cannot work our analysis back to them. By this I do not mean to ascribe to Okot's argument that the Luo borrowed the term Nyasaye from the Luyia. This would be tantamount to arguing that since the Acholi do not have the letters $f, h, y$ and $s$ which the Luo of Kenya have in their alphabet then all the words with those letters were borrowed. This would be naive argument.

Sacrifices and pouring of libations were minimized as the Luo traversed foreign lands. Ceremonies and rituals involving the community were restricted to private rituals as their shrines and places where family religious ceremonies were carried out had been left behind.

In the course of the trek however, three places became important and sacred. These were: Kar jot meaning a place of stop but more so the place where the clan elder lit his first fire on a strange land; Kar hanga, some raised ground where the
men encamped while the women and children remained with the animals on the lower grounds, and later, Pap guok, a place where a dog was cut into halves to mark the boundary between two feuding groups. Some of the huge rocks, caves, hills, groves and even woods they found fascinating also acquired some religious status and were later used as shrines. The spear (tong' widhi) of the group leader became a very important religious object just as the prophet or soothsayer (Jabilo) became a very significant religious personage. Through the contacts the Luo made with their neighbours, technical skills, religious beliefs and art forms were transmitted from one group to the next. We shall briefly look at four examples, namely, sun as a manifestations of God, attitude towards ancestors, rainmaking and fishing.

One of the Luo names for God is Chieng' and that the sun (Wang' Chieng') was the most important single object of awe. A survey through the works on other Luo-speaking peoples reveals that the sun does not feature prominently in these Nilotic peoples. How come, to the Luo of Kenya the sun is the most important single object of awe?

Christopher Ehret argues that:

Rift communities spread, over the course of the last millennium B.C., from western and central Kenya into northern and central Tanzania and apparently as far west as the southwest side of the Lake Victoria. Hence ideas current among early Rift peoples can be expected to have had important consequence in the wide range of later East African societies.

At the base of Rift belief in the last millennium B.C. lay a concept of a high God, called by the same word as that used for the sun. The linking of the sun and God by use of the same name for each continues in modern Iraqw of the West Rift sub-group.
The southern Nilotic borrowing about 2,000 years ago of a Southern Cushitic term for sun, and use of it for both sun and God, shows that the same semantic linkage occurred also among the ancient Plateau Rift peoples of western and central Kenya. The Sun/God conceptualization did not, of course, imply that the sun was God, but was rather a figurative linking of the high God with one of the primal forces of the natural environment.

Ayward Shorter, on the other hand, contends that:

Sun symbolism and the use of sun-names for the supreme being are such a commonplace in the religions of the world that the linguistic phenomenon cannot be regarded as significant without the support of further cultural and historical facts.

What could one say for the Luo of western Kenya in the light of these arguments?

The Luo having settled down to a mixed agricultural economy involving both pastoral farming and crop production, in an area where the use of the sun as a name for God was already in force, were also influenced. Like their neighbours they looked at the sun as manifesting God though they did not regard it as God. Because their new agricultural economy depended on rain from the sky, they developed a cosmology polarized around the sky centred on the sun which they regarded as 'the eye of God' (Wang' Chieng').

Among the northern and central Luo it seems that the most immediate element of religious activity is God (spirit) called Nhialic, Kwoth and Jok by the Shilluk, Nuer and Central Luo respectively. Among the Kenya Luo on the other hand the ancestral spirits seem to predominate. Why?
Here again we turn to their Bantu-speaking neighbours. By around 1000 A.D. some Bantu groups had already settled around the Lake area. The religious ideas of these people nurtured by the environment they settled reflected on the basic problems of the region, namely disease, social order, family and clan solidarity. As a result the religious practices among the early Bantu centred on spirit closer to the individual, which is to say, ancestral spirits. It is in this respect, it could be argued, that the evolution of their ideas were to be in many ways similar to those late arrivals into the area, the Luo, who were also exposed to the same environment.

The Bantu-speakers made the ancestors the major focus of day to day religious practice, linking the community's past with the individual's existence and paving the way for future generations. The Luo-speakers likewise had, after their many wanderings from the cradleland, on settling down to permanent dwellings shifted their focus away from the mobile God who was found everywhere (Nyakalaga) to the ancestral spirits who dealt with immediate problems such as disease, famine and barrenness. It is this kind of evolution that we see more of among the Padhola and increasingly among the Kenya Luo.

According to the traditions of the Luo, rainmaking was known among the Luo prior to their arrival and settlement in Western Kenya. However, the popular belief among most of my informants is that the Luo found the Bantu-speaking people making rain. The Luo themselves did not make rain and the few who are reported to have been rainmakers either were personally related to the Lunde in Bunyore or at least bought rain medicine from the Lunde. The Luo prophets and medicinemen could only inform the people whether there was going to be rain and what could be done (look for rainmakers) in case there was an acute drought. This is another innovation.
which came as a result of contact and change of environment, namely the nature of economic pursuits evident in the shift from a pastoral to an agricultural economy.

The innovations that were a direct consequence of the fishing industry are also important. Among the Luo there is a belief that their ancestors followed the Nile and that they were fishermen before they arrived in western Kenya. I would like to contend that the hypothesis that the Luo followed the Nile is not true with all the three waves of the Luo migrants into western Kenya. It is true that some of the Luo (Joka Omolo) were close to the Nile as far as their Pawir settlement was concerned, but one would like to know whether they were not just using the river for watering their animals. It also remains to be stated how long these semi-nomadic peoples were in Pawir and what their economic activities were. The argument being advanced here is that since Joka Jok and Joka Owiny hardly had any contact with the Nile and the Joka Omolo seem to have been close to the Nile and Lake Kyoga for only short periods; therefore, until the Luo came into western Kenya, they were not fishermen. In other words, the fishing industry was an innovation resulting from change of environment and influence of alien peoples, who in our case, were the Bantu-speakers. What further evidence do we have?

Paul Mboya has devoted an entire chapter to Luo fishing activity. The word he uses for the act of fishing is lupo. The noun lupo is derived from the verb luwo which means 'to follow' or go on the trail of something. The term is hunting term which does not apply to fish but only to animals. The proper term for the act of fishing is newo which was borrowed from the Bantu term okhunawa. After discussions with Luo fishermen I have come to the conclusion, and agreement with them, that the Luo had no word for the process of fishing, which implies that they were not fishermen before their arrival in western Kenya.
Secondly, the most common traps for fish were kwira (Luyia - olukwira), migono (Luyia - omukono), and olalo (Luyia - obulalo) to mention only three. From this it will be seen that the Luo in addition to borrowing the term for the industry, also borrowed terms for the tools. The same applies to the names of some of the most popular fish. We shall mention only four, namely, ngæge (Luyia - ingeke), ningu (Luyia - iningu), sire (Luyia - isire), and monye (Luyia - imonye). It could be argued on the other hand that the Luyia borrowed the terms from the Luo. But the fact that the other Luo-speakers do not use the same terms invalidates that argument.

Finally, the Luo having become oriented to the lake for the exploitation of the fish developed or adopted water spirit cults (juok nam). To them fishing became a religious activity centred on the fishing vessel (yie). A fishing boat was named after a country, a famous person, a married daughter (migogo) or a grandparent. Whoever the choice was his or her spirit (juogi) entered the boat and seized it. From then on the boat was no longer a thing but a spiritual personality.

Though these do not relate directly to the Luo idea of God, it could be argued that since religion to the Luo was a way of life, their conception of God who made the way of life possible, also changed as the innovations were made.

Our contention is that the Luo indigenous religious acts have been influenced by political, social and economic factors. To these we shall now turn.

The Luo occupied the land (mako lowo) they now claim their own as a result of segmentation as well as more general migrations
and warfare. During the period of their exploration they could not be properly termed a tribe, as there was little interaction between different groups. They lacked a centralised system of administration. Thus among the pre-colonial Luo, political authority was dispersed. Some individuals exercised exceptional influence, control and power in their areas through force of character (tim), wealth (mwandu), prowess at war (lweny), and through possession of magical medicine (bilo). The political and jural authority rested primarily with the elders of each descent group (jatend oganda).

In a very similar way, the Luo religious experience centred on the ancestor from whom lineage groups (dhoudi) segmented. People who exercised influence in the political sphere were also the religious personages. This explains the lack or religious pantheon of divinities among the Luo. It also explains the lack of chiefdom shrines which are common among the Central Luo, and whose ultimate object of worship was Chiefdom Jok. It is understandable therefore, why the Luo concept of God was universalistic rather than personal or clannal. The ancestors controlled the affairs of each decent group while Nyasaye cared for all the people.

We have already alluded to the social factor as far as the interaction between the Luo and their neighbours was concerned. The Luo and the Luyia should be treated together as far as their belief in the Supreme Being is concerned. Attempts to establish whether the Luo borrowed the term Nyasaye from the Luyia and vice versa are dealt with in the next chapter. Sayo, saya or saba seems to have been a common verb (for to worship) in the lake basin, hence its use by the Bantu and the Nilotic alike.

The Luo migrations and dispersals were sparked off by economic pressures, mainly grazing ground for their large herds of cattle. When they came to western Kenya, the centre of their economic way of life shifted from cattle to crop production. However, cattle still remained significant in their religious activities. The reflection
of pastoral culture on the Luo religion is most noticeable in their acts of worship, particularly sacrifice (which we discuss later).

In Western Kenya the Luo became more settled and like their Bantu neighbours, they took to agriculture. From their traditions one senses the principal characteristic of the religious ideas of a farming culture. The people are dedicated to cultivation and so conceive of the soil as symbolizing fertility. Their existence and continuation became dependent on the productivity of the land. Thus, any act that polluted the land could lead to low crop production or outbreak of pests had to be corrected by a purification ceremony. They understood fertility as fertility of the fields and the families, and always as continuity of life and society in the everlasting bond with the ancestors. The senior descent families (joka atung') were traditionally the first to start digging (golo pur) and sowing (golo kodhi or chwoyo) and harvesting (rwako kodhi or keyo). The seeds to be planted were mixed with soil to ensure high crop yield. In cases of heavy harvest, sacrifices were offered before the people started eating the new crops.


5. This is just a paraphrase of an otherwise long story. Some people relate the same story using different characters, for example Podho and Aruwa found in Z. Okola and M. Were Weche mako mag Luo. W. Boyd & Co. Nairobi 1936 p. 57 ff. See also Jan Knappert. *Myths and Legends of the Congo* (Heinemann 1971) p. 42-43.

6. This incident could have taken place between the 12th and 13th centuries.


14. Immovable Jok. Spirit believed to reside in a particular place and has to be visited by people in times of need.

15. The leaders of the Palenga clan, the oldest clan in Pajule, are reported to have gone to Rabwor during the famine of 1720's to consult the Jok Kuku on the cause of drought and the cause of action required to deal with it.


17. History of Southern Luo, ibid. p. 82-83.


24. This conclusion is based on Padhola traditions analysed by Ogot and my field notes on the Kenya Luo.

25. The sites of primary settlements, particularly hill tops later became important shrines for homage to the ancestors.


27. It should be noted that Abila as conceived by the Luo of Kenya later meant the hut of the head of the homestead in which visitors to the homestead were welcomed. It had no special significance.


29. Ibid. p. 144.


38. Interview: Maurice Ahawo (19.5.73).


41. Interview: Ochota Ahawo (19.5.73).

42. W.R. Ochieng'. *History of Nyanza* op. cit. p. 64.

43. Ibid. p. 49.

44. Interview: Ocham Obul (11.8.73).


46. See also Keneth King and Ahmed Salim (editors). *Kenya Historical Biographies* (E.A.P.H., 1971) pp. 90-111.


48. Ibid.


54. We discuss Mumbo cult in the next chapter.

55. Interview: Obewa Okelo (24.4.73).


59. G.S. Were ibid.

60. B.A. Ogot. Southern Luo op. cit. p. 135-152.


63. For what follows I have depended on G. Wagner. The Bantu of Western Kenya (Oxford 1970) p. 167-177, and personal interviews and discussions with Luyia peoples. Professor G.S. Were also seems to have depended more on Wagner while

64. Interview: Maurice Ahawo (19.5.73).

65. Sumba lived many years ago on the two islands of Sigulu and Sumba. Later his spirit ceased a woman of his family married to a boy of the Abkhoone clan. See also John Osogo. The Abaluyia op. cit. p. 51-52.

66. The author himself bought a boat whose spirit has become a problem to the family. He has to be called every now and again that the spirit of the boat has ceased somebody.


70. Ibid. p. 216.

71. For what is said here a discussion was held with P.A. Abuso who is working on the history of the Kuria. Most of these ideas are also found in the paper he read at the Limuru Conference on the Historical Study of African Religion. The title of the unpublished paper was "RELIGIOUS WORSHIP IN KURIA SOCIETY".
72. Jabilo - Soothsayer, judge, magician, doctor, diviner all combined in one person. It was because of the many roles he played that he became so important.


75. God is used here as the Supreme (non-ancestral) Spirit.


78. A.W. Mayor. Thuond Luo (Luo Heroes) (Highway Press Nairobi 1957). The heroes referred to here include chiefs (Ng'ong'a), Prophet (Gor Mahia), Spirit possessed people (Obondo Mumbo) and warriors. Most of the battles mentioned were between the Luo themselves.


80. The clan whose ancestors first settled the land stopped people from doing any manual work and then offered sacrifices to the ancestors asking them not to visit the people with misfortune because of the pollution.

81. Interview: Simeon Mang'are (15.6.73).
CHAPTER III

TRADITIONAL LUO IDEA OF GOD.

The traditional way of life of the Luo was directed and controlled by social interdictions which were accepted by the society as requisites for preserving the society and the clans and families which constituted it. Their religious life was made manifest by a series of rites and ceremonies which were deeply entrenched in their way of life and believed to be defended by the ancestors.

Though the immediate orientation of Luo Traditional Religion seems to be veneration for the ancestors, their social codes of behaviour or interdictions were believed to have been given to their ancestors by some superior power. The Supreme Being was accordingly postulated, and this they later called Nyasaye.

An examination of Luo indigenous religious practices reveals that to them Nyasaye was no fiction. Any doubt on the existence of Nyasaye was to them absurd. Nyasaye was ultimately responsible for the entire universe, maker of all things, their primary and initial condition, and constantly involved in their continuation.

Secondly, to them God was not unconscious but knowing. Nothing that was knowable could remain outside of his divine awareness. And, thirdly in their conception, God was not aimless but exercised will. His making and sustaining of the universe was not an automatic outpouring of His power of being but a considered act performed out of conscious preference. Thus the Luo conception of God was that of Jachwech (moulder), Nyakalaga (the one found everywhere) and Jarit (protector). Their idea of God on the other hand rests with the meaning of the names by which they refer to the Supreme Being.
In this chapter we look at the name and nature of God; God and natural objects and phenomena; and finally God's relationship with man.

NAMES FOR GOD

The predominant Luo name for God as we have indicated is Nyasaye, which name has caused much debate among scholars as to whether it was originally Luo or Luyia. It is not possible for us here to propose a solution to this long standing issue. However, we wish to make an attempt at analysing the term Nyasaye which we shall break into the prefix nya- and the root verb -sayc and begin by looking at the verb.

The Luyia people have a verb 'okhusaya' which means to worship, to adore, to request kindly, to bow down to, to implore and so forth. The Luo on the other hand, have a verb 'sayo' which means practically the same thing as the Luyia verb.

'Okhu'- is a common prefix to most Luyia verbs hence we find: okhukhasia, to prepare; okhulima, to till the land; okhusaya, to worship etc. The Luo do not have a prefix for 'to'. So we find loso, to prepare, pur, to till the land, sayo, to worship. If we were to leave out the Luyia prefix Okhu we would remain with the verb saya, for the Luyia, and sayo, for the Luo. On the other hand, when it comes to addressing oneself to the third person the Luyia have omusaye, meaning 'you adore him'; while the Luo have saye, meaning 'you adore him'. Removing the prefix omu from the root word makes nonsense of the root word, but if we could remove it we would end up with the clause saye for both the Luo and the Luyia.

As a detachable prefix, 'nya' does not exist in Luyia language. In Dholuo the prefix gives the root word a special weight in meaning with a strong sense of sacredness. We shall explain this with reference to the clan which is the most intact
group in the Luo society, each clan being distinguished from the other by a sacred name known as nono. One therefore, often hears a Luo asking the other 'nondi ng'a?' meaning 'what is the sacred name of your clan'? What has the prefix nya to do with nono?

Among the Luo, a family is referred to by the name of their grandmother; for example, Kapiyo, Kaduol, Kadongo refer to the grandchildren of Apiyo, Adongo and Aduol respectively. But the clan in most cases takes the name of the grandfather who lived some generations back. They therefore have Kadimo, Kanyamuot, Kager and Karuoth, meaning grandchildren of Dimo, Muot, Ger and Ruoth. What then are the 'nono' of these clans? This is where the prefix nya- came in; so that we find Nyadimo, Nyamuot, Nyager and Nyaruoth as the sacred names with the feeling of that cohesive force of blood tie. A question which could be raised now is whether it is possible that the prefix could be attached to a verb and whether we would get the same weight of sacredness.

Let us take for granted the assumption that the Luo had no word for the Supreme Being and never even believed in such a being; so that we look only at their verb sayo.

As far as the use of the name among the Luo was concerned, to call an elderly person or a person one expected help from by name was a sign of rudeness and disregard, and the moment one did that one's needs were never met. How then could the Luo address themselves to the Supreme Being for whom they had no name? In this discussion we wish to emphasize that the Luo recognized the fact that this being, whom they might not have been able to comprehend was adored and that all petitions were referred to him as the final stage of appeal. So they called him Nyasaye
(the adored one) as a more polite way of referring to him just as they do to girls married from other areas, for example, Nyamalo meaning a woman from the highlands, (in most cases it means a Luyia girl married among the Luo)\(^5\)

Because of his universal nature and having no known progenitor, God's 'nono' could not have a pronoun as its root word but a general, universal verb indicating his relationship with the people and the world. In a nutshell therefore, we are arguing that the name Nyasaye is more of nono to the Supreme Being. Professor Ogot in an earlier study has stated that:

The term Nyasaye, among the Luo, is not only restricted to God: it is applied, for instance, to the uterus which the Luo regard as the source of life. The Luyia word for the uterus is oludeleshero. The Luo also use the same Nyasaye to mean luck, good or bad: Nyasache rach - he is unlucky, and Nyasache ber - he is lucky. These and other usages of the term, are just as fundamental to the Luo, who regard them, in line with the Nilotic concept of Jok, as manifestations of God, Nyasaye. Moreover, the Luyia verb Kusaya meaning to beseech, from which the name Nyasaye is supposed to be derived, is itself derived from the Luo verb sayo which means to beseech or implore. It is therefore apparent that it was the Luyia who borrowed the name Nyasaye from the Luo and not vice versa.

Though most of what Professor Ogot says is in agreement with our arguments above, we do not consider it convincing to conclude that the Luyia borrowed the name Nyasaye from the Luo. We consider it equally arguable that the Luo borrowed the verb sayo from the Maasai who use sai\(^7\) or from the Gusii, who talk of ogosaba. On the other hand, this should not be surprising because where people speaking different languages meet and live together for some time, there will always be reciprocal borrowing of ideas and words. Be that as it may, the predominant Luo word for God is Nyasaye.
In everyday speech the Luo talk of Nyasache ber, "he is lucky" or "he has blessing" nyasach dhako, "the uterus of the woman where the moulding is believed to be taking place"; ok in nyasacha, "you are not responsible for my well being". Nyasach as used in these contexts explain the Luo doctrine of God whom they believe moulds people, blesses them and takes care of their well being.

The Luo have many other names for God. Such names are mainly descriptive and their meanings refer to the attributes of God. Let us put the names or images into five categories and see how they relate to the Luo concept of God. We shall call each category a 'model'.

1. Familial Model: Wuonwa - our father
   Wuon kwere - Father of the Ancestors
   Wuon ji - Father of all people
   Wuon ogendini - Father of all races

2. Charismatic Model: Ruodh ruodhi - King of Kings
   Janen - Seer
   Rahuma - The Famous one
   Hono - The incomprehensible
   Ratego - The powerful one
   Piny kinyal - The unconquerable one
   Jalweny - The great warrior

3. Temperamental Model: Were - The blameless one
   Jahera - The loving one
   Jang'wono - The kind one
   Jamrima - The one with temper
4. Spatial Model: Hagawa – All embracing one  
Nyakalaga – The one found everywhere

5. Pigmental Model: Dibo or Rachar – The white one  
Rapenda – The brown and red one.

Here then were religious situations linked with secular situations of family, charisma, temperament, space and colour. Phenomenologically the Luo conceived of the presence of God in the light of the sun, moon, passing comets, rain, thunder and lightning, and earthquakes. What then do these models disclose about the Luo idea of God?

First, the Luo society is a patrilocal society with inheritance passing from father to son. The father was, to his children reliable and trustworthy. The related families were tied together by their nono which had its origin from the progenitor of the clan. This was the ancestor to be appealed to when all else had failed. But the Luo were aware that there were other people (ji) and other races (ogendni). The fatherhood that embraced all these people was the fatherhood of Nyasaye, who called wuonwa, wuon kwere, wuon ji and wuon ogendini. The Luo thus conceived of Nyasaye as the Great Father and guardian of all people.

Second, the Luo saw special power in their leaders who included Okebe (rich men), Jobilo (prophets and diviners), Thuond lweny (great warriors), Ogaye (war mediators) and Ruodh oganda (clan head). These were people who commanded respect for what they were and whose word of succour was taken seriously by all members of the community. They were dependable people to whom Nyasaye gave special power and ability. And so they called him Ruodh ruodhi, Janen, Rahuma, Hono, Ratego, Piny kinyal and Jalweny.
Third, for one to be considered a good guardian or leader among the Luo one had to be blameless (Were), loving (Jahera), kind (Jang'wono) and in the event of violation of traditional customs (timbe) or disregard for social interdictions (kweche), that would lead to divine punishment (chira), one had to be angry (Jamrima). These cosmic characteristics the Luo attributed to Nyasaye whom they called Were, Jahera, Jang'wono and Jamrima.

Fourth, there is no time the Luo have been known not to have believed in the Supreme Being, though there are contradictions as to when they started using the term as shown by the information of Sihuawo and Wagwara (foot note 2) above. Right through their history the Luo have always been in the presence of God who embraced every aspect of life (Hagawa) and who was with them wherever they were (Nyakalaga). Thus the Luo conceived of God in space (Nyakalaga) and in time (wuon kwere meaning 'father of ancestors' implying existence from time immemorial and yet the same God still protects them).

Fifth, the Luo traditions are silent on what Nyasaye looks like. Nobody has seen Him. However, they associated Him with certain colours. They called Him Rachar or Dibo (the white one) which was a sign of peace, and Rapenda (mixture of brown and red) which was a sign of productivity.

The meaning of the names the Luo refer to God, and the models we have used, disclose the depth of the Luo idea of God. Their attitude towards the Supreme Being, however, remains that of reverence and awe with strong sense of dependence.

Of significance to us is the fact that the term Nyasaye is not found among the Northern and Central Luo. On the other hand, among the Northern group, the Nuer and the Dinka, like the Southern
Luo have dominant deities whom they call Kwoth and Nhialic respectively, and whom the Southern Luo call Nyasaye or Were. The Central Luo and the Anuak, who have moved least as far as distance is concerned, do not have dominant deities; instead they have chiefdom deities whom they call Jok and Juok respectively. But for the Shilluk Juok means dominant deity:

Nyikang is necessary for the Shilluk understanding of their social and spatial categories, but he does not explain his own existence, nor the grounds for their reality which, for the Shilluk, he ordered in the categories by which they comprehend it. The nature of that reality is understood through the notion of Juok, God...

It could be argued therefore that the concept of dominant deity developed among the Nilotic Luo in the course of their movements away from the vicinity of the 'cradleland'. Let us however, look a little more at Jok.

Okot p'Bitek and others have done considerable research among the Lang'o and Acholi of Uganda where the concept of Jok seems to predominate; and Okot's articles on the concept have been read far and wide. Many that have written on the same concept after him have fallen victim to his generalizations about the Nilotes and have sought to find Jok used among the Nyanza Luo but have failed. The reason for this failure, rests solely with the history of the Luo migrations and sojourn in a foreign land. Jok, has on the other hand been rendered as a generic word which describes certain phenomena in the meeting of the divine and the human and also as relating to spirits and supernatural power. Among the Central Luo it is;

the sum total of the long departed souls merged into one pre-existing deity... a plurality of spirit merged into the person of a single godhead, a spiritual force composed of innumerable spirits,
any of which may be temporarily detached without diminishing the oneness of the force.\textsuperscript{17}

Professor Ogot suggested that "the term Jok or Juok is found in various forms in all Nilotic languages. It usually means God, spirit, witchcraft, ghost or some other form of spiritual power".\textsuperscript{18} He reiterated that no serious attempt had been made to relate and synthesize the different aspects of this power. In his article,\textsuperscript{19} Okot refrained from defining Jok but only said that Jok was a generic name, and the meaning of the term depended on the group or category of ghost or spirit that was faced at the given moment. In his later work he described the consideration of Jok or named juogi as refractions, or manifestations, or hypostases of a high god and concluded that "each category of Jok is independent of other juogi, although some are used against others. For the Nilotes there are many deities, not one".\textsuperscript{20}

We do not seem to have any ground for disagreeing with Okot for the simple reason that the concept Jok, as chiefdom deity, seems to have disappeared among the Southern Luo, who in the course of the southern trek had no chiefdom. During the trek they developed the concept of a Supreme Being who guided and protected them during the migration and to whom they directed their difficulties in the form of prayer and whom they later called Nyasaye. The term Juok on the other hand, was not discarded but remained to be used only in reference to spirits, witchcraft and namesakes (all of which we discuss in chapter IV). At this stage, all we want to do is to give a synoptic view of some of the concepts upon which our analysis is hinged. This we give for both the Central and the Southern Luo.\textsuperscript{21} It will be seen from the chart that for the Central Luo Jok does not mean the Supreme Being which is in agreement with Okot's contention that "claims that Jok is the Supreme Being do not seem to be based on any concrete evidence".\textsuperscript{22} This contention applies only for the Central Luo as we have seen, Juok is the Supreme Being.
for the Shilluk. Be that as it may, we would like to register our disagreement with Okot when he suggests that "the concepts Nyasaye/Were could be taken for granted that they were Luyia deities". While the names Nyasaye and Were could have been borrowed from the Bantu Luyia (and our analysis shows that they were not necessarily of Luyia origin) the concept of Supreme Being to whom the names refer was known among the Southern Luo before they contacted the Luyia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central Luo</th>
<th>Southern Luo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Being</td>
<td>Nyasaye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Spiritual power(s)</td>
<td>Jok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancestral ghost</td>
<td>Jok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghostly vengeance</td>
<td>Cen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curse</td>
<td>Lam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice</td>
<td>Lam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blessing</td>
<td>Lam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misfortune</td>
<td>Gemo/Jok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ill Will</td>
<td>Jok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual observance</td>
<td>Kwer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessive spirits</td>
<td>Jogi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diviner</td>
<td>Ajwaka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Very rightly, there have been controversial debates as to why the Luo of Kenya (the Southern Luo) do not use the concept Jok in the same sense that their kin in Uganda do. We have tried to show that in essence the use of the term is the same. The main difference is that the concept of Supreme Being is lacking
among the Central Luo. What could be emphasized however, is that a people's idea of God develops with the experiences they go through in the course of their history. The Luo of Kenya, like the children of Israel, had their theism influenced by their migratory mode of life. This is an experience the Acholi, Alur, Lang'o and others who remained in Uganda did not have. It is a futile exercise therefore to expect the Kenya Luo to use the concept Jok wholly in the same sense.

As we have already seen, the Luo came into contact with various people in the course of the trek and at the time of settlement in Western Kenya. We would like to state our contention that, when people who possess different cultures meet and live together for some time, it is unlikely that the cultures they possess after their contact shall ever be the same again, for in such a situation there will be a synthesis going on all the time and end product, though it might be dominated by one of them, is certainly a sequence of borrowing from all of them.

The term Nyasaye as we have indicated means the worshipped one. Nyasaye is invisible to the human eye and the Luo do not claim any knowledge of where He lives. However, His existence is never questioned by the Luo. They know He exists somewhere up there (in the sky), and can visit people for good or evil. He is both far and near.

The Luo conception of the nature of Nyasaye is anthropomorphic. He is father. Father in the patrilocal Luo society is the head of the homestead and the family. All problems in the family are directed to the father whom they believe can solve any problem. While the father is believed to protect and care for the well being of the family, he never leaves unpunished any misbehaviour and disregard for the
customs of the community. In the same way, the Luo believed that God moulded them in their mothers' wombs, protected them against evil forces but punished them whenever they broke the tribal interdictions. With his unlimited power, God moulds and sustains. The Luo also believe that God governs their destiny by sending them rain or drought, plenty or famine, health or disease, peace or war. He is both good and evil.

Though incomprehensible, the Luo believed that Nyasaye was aware and was knowledgeable. When a man in a position of power, either because he was rich or because he was a leader, despised those under him, the weak retorted: bende norum, "that will also come to an end"; or Nyasaye nonene, "Nyasaye will see him"; or piny kinyal, "the world cannot be conquered". By these they meant God who blesses would punish those who use the blessing He has given them to despise others. God is the judge.

Nyasaye was also Were, owner of grace and provider of luck. He was essentially blameless in His intention and will. Though kind (jang'wono) and loving (jahera), He was at the same time hot tempered (jamrima). He exercised His will for good or evil.

God and the problem of origin

The Luo, unlike many other African peoples are not rich in myths of origin or creation. They have a simple cosmology that God moulded the earth and all there is in it. Their verb chweyo (to mould) does not imply to create ex nihilo. It implies moulding out of something. This explains the reason why some Luo traditions talk of the earth having been made first and then man moulded out of it. Though this is not representative of the
majority of the Luo, there is a strong belief expressed in most of their traditions that everything in the universe was made by God and that God takes care of them.

They also believe that man is moulded in the womb of the mother. The uterus which is the point where life begins, is called Nyasach dhako meaning the strength of the woman. It is here that God's moulding work is carried on. When they talk about the strength of the woman, they mean to refer to the social status of the woman. According to their traditions, a woman who never gave birth had no place in the society. Her strength or power rested on her ability to give birth and to continue the lineage of her husband preferably by giving birth to a son.

The creative attribute of God is not limited by time but is continuous. In the mind of the Luo God did not just mould what there is and then retire, but continues to mould and maintain all that he has moulded. This is well illustrated by the answer which one of our informants gave when asked whether the Luo believed in Nyasaye before the advent of Christianity.

Informant: There I can tell you what my grandmother told me. My father's mother died a very old woman. Whenever we slept in her house she would say:

Yaye Nyasaye ne kimiya\(e\) yawuoyi kata ariyo, ma onego wuoda to oweyo mana ng'at achiel. (O why didn't God give me more sons; so that even though one has died I would have remained with more than just one).

That was my father and the girls. Then I asked her: Grandmother, what does Nyasaye look like? She said: Don't you know it is Nyasaye who moulded you. People believed in Nyasaye from a long time ago. Even my grandmother found people praying to Nyasaye.
There is something I saw when I was still young. One of my father's wives had given birth. Her placenta came out, but something with eyes also came out next to the placenta. The adults were kept busy pouring water on it while we, the children were sent away. When I want to explain what had happened to my mother, she told me that that thing which had come out was the woman's Nyasaye. As they kept pouring water onto it, it slowly went back. This was the Nyasaye which moulds children in the womb. Nyasaye is an old Luo word. There is just one Nyasaye, not many.

This text stresses an aspect of Luo belief in the creative attribute of God. Here was a woman mourning why God did not give her more than two sons so that even if one died, she could still have more than one left. The text also stresses the strong belief of the traditional Luo that God gave and took at will. Man had no power over God's will.

The other example was where the Sun and the Moon lived peacefully as sons of God. Later because of a debate as to which of them was the more powerful, the brothers separated. The Moon, the younger of the two, was more lonely and so the father gave him the Morning Star for a partner on condition that they would have no sexual intercourse. The moon received the partner but never heeded to command and so the Morning Star got pregnant, giving birth to green plants. This angered the father who took away the partner only to have sympathy with the son again. A second time he was given the Evening Star under the same condition. For the second time the Moon ignored the condition, the Evening Star got pregnant and gave birth to rivers, oceans, and mountains. This aroused the father's anger exceedingly and
the moon not only lost his partner but was at the same time robbed of some of his power of producing light. Meanwhile the Sun remained an enemy to the Moon and kept choking his children with heat in the day time.

This myth, which we have only paraphrased, had much to tell us about the problem of origin. In the first instance there were the Sun and the Moon as sons of God. The myth does not tell us how they came to be. Their separation took the normal trend of separation of brothers among the Luo. That the Moon's partners gave birth to plants, water and the physical features is noteworthy. From the myth one gets hints as to what could be inferred as the order of creation. First came the Sun and the Moon as sons of God, and from the Moon came the Earth and its features. Man was moulded by God and only came into the picture at the time of disobedience to God. One of their myths relates the story of the said disobedience in the following words:

From the beginning the Luo never dug their fields. Instead women sent hoes to the gardens and left them there. The gardens then dug themselves or God dug them for the Luo. One time a bride (miaha) was given a hoe to take to the garden. Instead of leaving the hoe there to dig on its own, she dug the whole morning ignoring the practice. This annoyed God and that marked the end of God helping the Luo. Instead they were left to toil in order to get food to eat.

In this story of the bride, the traditional Luo attribute their suffering and toil to a stranger, and like the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, it was because of a woman that they have to toil to get food.
One of the Luo names for God is Chieng' which means brightness. In the religious context however, by chieng', the Luo mean Great Power. The power was associated with the Supreme Being so that the celestial body the sun (Wang'29 Chieng''), became the eye of the Supreme Being. The Luo, on the other hand are only one of the many East African peoples who associate the sun with God. The linking of the sun and God continues to this day among the Iraqw of Tanzania,30 Luyia,31 Gusii32 and Kalenjin of Kenya, to mention only a few.

To the Luo the sun was the most important single object of awe.33 While to the desert dweller it symbolized death, to the Luo it symbolized life and protection, and thus considered the most fascinating image of God. They believed God was looking at them through the sun. Because of its power and influence in day to day human activities, the rising sun did not only remind the Luo of the new day but of the power of the Supreme Being as well.34

The Luo are reported to have appealed to God through the sun to bless the day. They offered brief prayers at sun rise saying:

Rise well that peace, health and luck may abound this day.35

The heads of homesteads charged with the responsibility of offering such prayers woke up very early each morning, walked about their homesteads until the sun came above the horizon,
and then said their prayers; adding simple rituals like spitting at the rising sun. As the sun went down in the evening, they repeated the ritual, asking for blessing and peace in the night and requesting that any possible misfortune be set with the sun in the west. That the sun set in the West and rose in the East the following morning was yet another puzzle to the traditional Luo. Their belief was that the sun moved across the sky to the East in the night and that only a few lucky individuals saw it flash across the sky. Their traditions say that such lucky individuals opened their hands in the hope that they might receive blessing from God through the sun. Such blessing, we are told, came in the form of dung, rope and seeds, interpreted to mean that that lucky person would keep lots of cattle, goats, sheep and have many children with enough grain to feed them.  

We would like to contend here that though the Luo addressed themselves to the sun in the morning and in the evening, they did not regard the sun as Nyasaye, nor in the least as a replica of Nyasaye. There are no indications from the Luo tradition that the sky, the sun, moon and other celestial bodies were singly or collectively God. We consider it reasonable to argue that the sun-name (Chieng') for the Supreme Being was authentic but that there was a distinction between sun and the divine sun-name. This contention was well explicated by one of the Luo myths (which we relate more fully below), stating that from the dawn of time sun and moon lived together as sons of Nyasaye. One day they had a quarrel that saw them separated. Though myths are prone to different interpretations by different people, the fact that the Luo talked of Sun and Moon as children of Nyasaye placed Nyasaye above these celestial objects and supports our contention that the multiple and diverse manifestations were not, according to the Luo traditions, singly or collectively Nyasaye.
The moon has been regarded by the Luo as God’s representative at night and as a source of blessing, particularly the new moon. The moon was associated with marriage and procreation. Perhaps this was derived from the myth we have already referred to and which we shall now relate in more detail.

Right from the dawn of time, the sun and the moon lived together in peace as brothers (sons of Nyasaye). One day they entered into an argument as to which of them was stronger than the other. This argument resulted in a quarrel which ended in the separation of the brothers. The Sun (the elder son) was definitely stronger. He pushed his younger brother out of the home. Nyasaye (their father) saw the moon very lonely and so gave him the Morning Star for a partner on condition that they were not to have any sexual relations. Unfortunately, the moon never obeyed the word of the father. He had sex with the Morning Star who became pregnant and gave birth to green plants and grass. This annoyed Nyasaye who in turn decided to separate the moon and the Morning Star. Later, he had pity on his son and gave another partner, the Evening Star, under the same conditions. The moon never heeded and his partner got pregnant giving birth to rivers, lakes and mountains. This was in complete disregard of Nyasaye who separated the Moon from his partner and robbed him of some power for producing light.

This myth gives us some idea as to how the Luo might have come up with the belief that the Moon could accord one the chance of marriage that led to the apparent worship of the New Moon. We have been told that at the sight of a new moon prayers were offered. The old men spat at it and then said;

Aneni maber mondo ayud ogogo moro.
(Let me see you well that I may find a woman who has divorced her husband).

Young men said: Aneni maber mondo apor gi nyako moro.
(May you appear well so that I may elope with some young girl).
Girls said: **Aneni maber mondo onyuoma.**
*(May I see you well so that I may find a boy to marry me).*

Married women said: **Aneni maber mondo ayieng’**
*(Appear well that I may have enough food).*

These prayers were spontaneous and involved the simple ritual of spitting at the new moon. The prayers, the Luo maintain, were not directed to the moon as such, but to God through the moon. Thus we can infer that though the Luo did not look at the moon as a substitute for the Supreme Being, they, however, regarded it as an object of awe.

Old Luo women associated the stars with fire-places belonging to the people living in the sky. When they shine, the people on earth said the sky people were cooking. Some of the stars like Pleiads *(yugni)* were used to determine the seasons of the year. *Oluoro budho* (evening star) reminded them of when to retire to bed. Though the Luo never worshipped stars as such, shooting stars were looked upon as bad omens and anybody seeing them threw glowing sticks at them with cursing words. The sight of a comet *(Nyametho)* was regarded as foretelling of some bad omen that was to befall the land.

The Luo gave religious meaning to numerous terrestrial objects, though we have no concrete indications that they ever worshipped them. The objects included physical features like mountains, caves and peculiar rock formations. There were also fauna and flora, for example, wild animals, particularly large rare ones and various trees. That the Luo had awe and respect for caves, mountains, large trees, and to some extent rivers and cliffs along the lakeshore is certain. However, this was not because they were manifestations of God, at least not as much as it was feared that spirits dwelt in such places.
The traditions indicate that the Luo feared such places and often refused to go near them.

We would not like to discard the feeling which Michael Whisson expressed that, Nyasaye was not only perceived in the sun but also in other large and extraordinary things; in the moon, in large rocks, in elephants and in all the miracles of nature that fill man with awe. It is in the light of this that we consider the Luo attitude towards animals to be reflective of their perception of luck in them. The Luo considered wild animals as rare visitors where people lived. Whenever they visited a home peacefully, they were never killed but allowed to leave on their own. A man who killed a leopard had to go through rituals of purification. Any big snakes were given food and left to leave at their pleasure. Such food was in the form of a chicken but occasionally goats could be given. Sometimes people approached diviners to find out what the rare visitors wanted. They were referred to as 'WERE' or luck. According to most of our informants, mistreating such visitors meant throwing away one's luck. In this same category fell the tortoises particularly small ones with ticks on them. These were signs of great luck so could not be let go. Instead, they were kept in pots where they died of starvation. Their remains were preserved and remained sacred property of the family concerned.

God's relationship with man

The Luo concept of man reflects a vital relationship between the individual, Nyasaye, the spirits, the family and the clan. The individual is made up of Ringruok, Chuny and Tipo meaning body, mind/will and spirit respectively. Ringruok is biological and is no more than a mere capsulating sack. The Luo say:
Ringruok ok cham
(Beauty of the body is never eaten).

By this they mean the body being earthen and belonging to the earth is not important, for it will go where it belongs. Chuny is variously used and means both liver and spirit. In relation to the individuality of a person it is regarded as the centre of man's character and manners hence makes up the self of an individual. Sometimes it is used to mean heart as for example;

Ng'ane chunye tut
(So and so has a big heart).

In this context chuny means the centre of emotions which is different from heart called adundo in Dho-Luo. As centre of emotions chuny means an individual's mind and temper. Tipo has various shades of meaning including shadow, shade, soul or spirit. According to the Luo traditions, it also means the immortal part of man. Whenever a departed person visits his living kith and kin what is seen is neither ringruok nor chuny but tipo. It is tipo which goes to the world of the departed. Chuny and tipo are both psychic while ringruok is physical thus the individual becomes a psychophysical being.

The life of an individual included birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death and entry into the company of the departed and the spirit world. When a woman gave birth in the traditional Luo society the people rejoiced and said: Nyasaye okonyo nyar ng'ane, "Nyasaye has helped (relieved) the daughter of so and so." The next question was: okelo ang'o? "What has she brought"?
The answer to that was either okelo ogwang', "she has brought a wild cat" or okelo bol, "she has brought the handle of a spear" meaning she has given birth to a girl or a boy respectively.

The wild cat symbolized unknown abode while the handle of the spear symbolized power and protection. The Luo used the spear for hunting, herding cattle and protecting the home. Those were the duties of the boy.

Immediately the child was born the midwife (jacholo) removed a fibre from the fibre dress (chieno) of the mother and tied the umbilical cord at three points for a girl and at four points for a boy. The rest of the cord was then cut by a sharp edge of the straw bark (opi,la). The placenta (biero or ratego) was carefully looked after and was buried either in the morning or evening in front of the house of the mother. It was buried on the left as you enter the house if the child was a boy and on the right for a girl. The child was then kept in the house for three or four days, depending on the sex.

On the third day if a girl and fourth if a boy, the child was shown to the sun (yiego nyathi). Very early in the morning a soft goat skin was spread on the ground at the verandah and the child laid on it. The father of the child then said short prayers thanking God for the child and calling upon the ancestors to take care of him. After the prayers which involved offering sacrifices, they cut the remaining bits of the umbilical cord (ng'ado imbo nyathi). The child was then left on the skin until it urinated after which it was taken back to the house. In some homes the child was shaved (lielo fuanda) on the same day. In others the shaving took place on a different day.

The children were named after the events that took place at the time they were born; after the time of birth or after some dead person who wanted the child to be named after him or her.
Between the ages of twelve and eighteen, the youth were initiated into adulthood. The initiation involved training for adult life, test of bravery and presentations. The training took a long time. The girls were taught in *siwindhe* (a hut of a grandmother or any elderly widow or woman who had stopped giving birth). They were taught by the grandmother or elderly woman on how to behave to boys during sexual intercourse, and how to treat the husbands and relatives of their husbands when they got married. They were also taught how to care for their houses and their children later in life. The boys learned how to fight, the customs of the society from their fathers, uncles and grandfathers. They were taught sexual behaviour by grown up boys with whom they slept in *simba* (a hut where boys slept).

The bravery of the youth was tested by the extraction of six lower teeth (incisors and canines) a process the Luo call *nak*. The candidate knelt down and a wooden bar was placed between his jaws. Somebody held the bar from the back. The extractor of teeth (*janak*) then warned the initiate not to shake or hold his hand but to keep his (the initiate's) hand by his side until the teeth were extracted. Those who proved cowards were scorned by agemates or in-laws. When everything was ready *Janak* brought his tool which was a pointed metal often a tail of hoeblade (*yiw kwer*) which he forced between the middle incisors until one of them came out. The next five came out with ease. The man was then paid for the work and the initiate escorted home. After three or four days depending on whether the initiate was a girl or a boy the initiate went round the homes of relatives being offered presents (huno) which included grain and hens. In homes where there was a large herd of cattle the father gave the initiate a cow. (We would like to caution however that the stage of presentation depended on the family and area. In some areas the initiates never went out for presents).
After these the initiate continued with the training and was not accepted as an adult until after marriage.
1. This is a general overview of the traditional Luo idea of God and does not refer to any specific period of their history. But since we are dealing with the Luo in Western Kenya it could be suggested that the analysis covers the period from C.A.D. 1500-1900. I am putting into consideration the fact that some of the ideas expressed by informants reflect a much later belief.

2. Almost all of the informants were agreed that Nyasaye was the Luo name for God. There were, however, some isolated cases. For example;
   a) Interview: Aineah Sihuawo (9.2.73) "The name Nyasaye came later in the year 1914. It was brought by somebody called Andrea Oware from Ugenya".
   b) Interview: Wilson Wagwara (19.5.73), "Nyasaye came recently with Dini. People knew there was Nyasaye after Dini. In the past people talked of Were which means hawi (luck). That was the name they had for God.... Nyasaye is a Luo word but Nyasaye which is worshipped in the church came with Dini".

3. This issue has been discussed by B.A. Ogot in his article, "Traditional Religion and the Precolonial History of Africa; the example of the Padhola" in Uganda journal, Vol. 31, No. 1 p. 111-116; and G.E.M. Ogutu "Spiritualism among Southern Luo", Religious Studies Department, Makerere (unpublished).

4. These four examples are taken from Siaya District. Ruoth referred to the leader of the Owiny Group of Luo who exerted their authority on the people of Alego. See also Oloo Peter. "History of settlement: the example of the Luo clans of Alego: 1500-1915" (in Department of History Archives, University of Nairobi).
5. The analysis here is based on the Luo concept of Nono as a sacred name for a clan and use of nono as a polite name for referring to ladies. Though nono is still used, in our contemporary society the baptismal name is rapidly replacing nono.


8. Many informants talked of Nyasaye ber with particular reference to war. Simeon Mang'are, (15.6.73) "When one escaped from the hand of an enemy they said Nyasache had helped him. Luck was also connected with Nyasaye".

9. Interview: Ochota Ahawo. (20.5.73) "What the Luo meant by Nyasach dhako was the place where the child was moulded, the origin of the child".

10. Interview: Joshua Olengo, (2.7.73) "Nyasaye is often praised. People had praise titles for Him. They called Him Nyakalaga and Were. The name Were is a very old one and the Luo seem to have used it before they came to Kenya. The name Nyasaye is common to the Luo and Luyia. I am not sure but I think the Luo came with the name".

12. The Luo talked of nyathi ma were awere 'a blameless child'.

13. Among others, Okworo Obunde (24.8.73) said: "The Luo knew there was God but his appearance was not known".


21. This chart is based on Okot p'Bitek's "Table of Nilotic Religious Concepts" found in the appendix of *Religion of the Central Luo* p. 165.


23. Ibid. p. 75.

24. The Experiences of the Luo in the course of their Southern trek is fully dealt with in Chapter II.
25. "African peoples do not consider God to be a man, but in order to express certain concepts, they employ anthropomorphic language and images about him as an aid to their conceptualization of him whom they have not seen and about whom they confess to know little or nothing" J.S. Mbiti. Concepts of God in Africa (S.P.C.K. London, 1970) p. 91.

26. Interview: Mercellar Adera. (12.5.73).

27. Note the 'Great Quarrel' in Chapter II.

28. This story is known by almost every Luo of the aged group. When asked about the question of origin this is the story they related. See also B. Onyango-Ogutu. Keep my Word (E.A.P.H., 1974) p. 47.

29. Wang' has many shades of meaning in Dho-Luo including burn, or lose in business and eye. In this context it means eye.


33. In most of the traditions analysed here the sun was referred to as God though this was more of an association. For example, Obiero (6.8.73) said. "The God of the Luo was the Sun" Gunda vol. 2. p. 45. Reference to the Sun here is better explained in the words of Ombok Oruda (23.8.73) who said; "The Luo knew God and believed that each person had his own
God though there was only one worshipped whom they called the Sun (Kang' chieng')

34. Interview: Harun Awelo (8.8.73) "The sun was regarded as God who lived in the air. He gave light; so that when the Luo were praying, they said; 'Tho chieng' iwuogna maber' (sun rise well for me) because they believed that it was from the sun that all things came".

35. This is a summary of many texts collected from the field. One informant Daniel Odindo (10.8.73) had this comment. "We people and our grandfathers did not know that there is a God as people say these days...We worshipped the sun and the Moon. In the morning when an old man saw the Sun he would say Thuu, iwuogna maber mondo atim tijena gi kwe (rise well that I may do my work in peace)". What Odindo means here is that in the contemporary Luo conception of God is not similar to the traditional one where prayers were addressed to the sun and moon and not directly to God.

36. This is synthesis of information I obtained from three informal discussions I had with groups of Luo elders in the course of my field work.

37. G.E.M. Ogutu. "Sigana: Luo Myths and Legends". These I collected as part of my field research. This myth is not very widespread among the aged Luo though well known by the young and the middle aged. It could be the influence of the Why Stories read in schools.
Interview: Jerus Achola (15.8.73). "The Luo knew God before the coming of dini. They knew many Gods like the Sun, Mountains, Spirits, big trees and some respected people who died long ago. Some animals like big snakes were also worshipped".

Interview: Ombok Oruda (23.8.73). "They believed that mountains brought rain and that in those mountains big snakes lived which controlled rain. When there was no rain they took food to those snakes and the snakes gave them rain. They took food to Huma and Wire Hills in Kapsipul. The big snake on Wire hill is called Omien".

Interview: Canon Hesbon Nyong'o. (18.5.73).

Interview: Amos Rayola (25.4.73). "The Luo viewed huge trees with special concern. The fact that huge trees provided shade led people to believing that God dwelt there or He had special reason for putting it there".

Michael Whisson. Change and Challenge (Nairobi, 1964) p. 4-5.

The Luo believed that any fortune coming to a man was a gift from God and that a visit by rare animals was a warning of what might follow.

Rites of passage are not fully dealt with in this study. However, brief reference is made to various rites where they help explain to Luo idea of God. In the following pages we look briefly at the birth and initiation rites.
45. Relief here referred to the pain of child birth and to the shame of having no child.

46. We discussed the significance of the Ancestral sacred spear in the last chapter (chap. II).

47. This depended more on the commitment of the midwife who might be busy on the day of *viego nyathi*.


Belief in spirits is a very important aspect of Luo Traditional Religion. The Luo conception of the soul and its future condition is vague. Yet, undoubtedly there exists an idea of the soul and belief in a future life. The Luo hold that when a man dies, the tipo (shadow or soul) leaves the body of the dying person and stays in the home for a few days to ensure that the correct ceremonies are carried out, and the body is laid to rest in the right place. Like their kin, the Padhola, they "believe that a dead man can come to his people in an invisible form to communicate his wishes to the living".  

In the ontological structure on the other hand, the living dead occupy the intermediate position between men, the spirits and God. They speak the language of human beings whom they recently left through physical death, and of the spirits to whom they are now joined, or God to whom they are now nearer than when they were physical.  

A study of the Luo idea of God would be incomplete without reference to their conception of spirits. Like many African people, their insight concerning spiritual realities, whether absolute or apparent, is extremely sharp. Thus to understand their religious ethos and philosophical perception, it is essential to consider their concept of the spiritual world in line with their concept of God.

In this chapter we look at the relationship between the living, the dead, the spirits and God.
Origin and meaning of death:

The Luo, like many African peoples have stories about the origin of death. One of their stories states that long time ago Moon and Man lived together peacefully as sons of Nyasaye. One day Nyasaye kept some fat for Moon, but Man stole the fat and ate it. When Moon came back, Nyasaye started looking for the fat only to discover that Man had stolen and eaten it. This incident created enmity between Man and Moon who was restraining death. In retaliation the Moon stopped controlling death, hence marking the beginning of physical death, according to the Luo.3

While the Luo accept physical death as one of the stages every individual has to go through in natural rythm of life, they do not regard death as natural.4 There are always external causes for every death that occurs among the Luo. The most mentioned cause of death include witchcraft, curses, the dead, spirits and Nyasaye. Briefly we shall look at these in turn.

The Luo understand witchcraft (juok) as the employment of supernatural powers to harm other people. The man who manipulated witchcraft was called Jajuok5 and the process of discharging witchcraft was called yido. Whenever the Luo referred to Jajuok they meant many things. They could mean the person was a liar, a thief, a man who used his mystical power to kill other people, a woman with an evil eye, a nightrunner, an unreliable person, an unsympathetic and inconsiderate person or any person who was out to cause physical, mental and psychological pain to another person. Jajuok was then one prone to using supernatural powers for destructive ends. He could use magic (nawi, tung' or ndagla) to destroy a life.
In one of my informal discussions with Luo elders I got the impression that destroying a life by use of witchcraft started after the Luo had settled in western Kenya. What they had from the beginning was bilo (magical medicine used for making warriors brave and courageous or for curing ailments). The belief in and use of witchcraft seems to be a result of jealousy between affinally related peoples and does to a large extent reflect disturbances in inter-personal relations. Complaints associated with witchcraft among the Luo are often linked with disturbances in the patient's inter-personal relations; he quarrels with somebody, takes somebody's wife, or boasts about his wealth and the like. Such disturbances may be identified by a diviner (ajuoga) as due to witchcraft. Therefore the belief in witchcraft is a reality among the Luo. But this is not unique to the Luo; for, to use Professor Idowu's words:

In Africa today it is 'real' that the majority of people believe that there are witches and there is witchcraft. Witches and witchcraft are sufficiently real as to cause untold suffering and innumerable deaths. When I speak of witchcraft I am referring to that which is very disturbingly real as to affect the lives of Africans in every walk of life. And by Africans I mean not only the illiterates who carry on with traditional customs intact, almost as they were received from their forebears; I mean also the educated men and women.... To most of these people witchcraft is an urgent, and very harrassing, reality; it is a diabolical soul enslaving presence.

It could be argued, at least for the Luo, that the existence of alternative agencies like ancestral vengeance (chien) and violation of social interdictions (kweche), which are often selected by diviners reflects an assessment by the diviner of the patient's condition in terms of his internal psychic state and that of his external relations with other
people. It is only by this that we can explain the conviction of most Luo that those who live at peace with other persons are hardly affected by witchcraft and that only those who possess charms (ris) on their bodies and believe in the efficacy of witchcraft can be affected by witchcraft. Be that as it may, one of the main causes of death has been given as witchcraft.

The Luo generally feared curses (kwong') particularly curses by an aunt (wayo), maternal uncle (neyo), grandmother (dayo) and grandfather (kwaro). Such curses were believed to cause death. However, the Luo also believed that curses were more effective only where the person cursing was wronged. If the cursing person was not wronged or uttered the curses without due cause, he suffered instead or the curse remained ineffective. The most serious were curses which were not uttered but kept in the heart by the offended person. Such curses brought misfortune to the offenders who either died personally or their relatives died (often their children) or their houses got burnt.

Closely linked with curses were oaths which were taken in the presence of a specialist (jathieth) or some form of leader. There were among the Luo four categories of oath taking namely; singruok, kwong'ruok, chamo muma and kalo mbira. Singruok was a simple oath meaning to make promise. Whether strongly made or just lightly pronounced, the Luo took promises very seriously and any promise made had therefore to be kept. Those who never kept their promises were rebuked and called upon to reform.

Kuong'ruok was more serious than singruok. It was a vow one made and it implied pronouncing a curse on oneself. If one made a vow never to do something and later acted contrary to the vow, the consequences were grave and could cost him his
own life or bring some misfortune on his home or to his family.

Muma was at times called kwiri (poison), so that chamo muma could be translated literally as taking poison. Indeed the Luo understood it as poison which ruined the taker or his family or both. Muma was taken when two people were believed to have committed an offence but denied it. The elders then called a diviner, and the suspects were brought together. Depending on the particular diviner's way of performing the oath, the suspects were given some medicated grain to chew or asked to sit on a log of wood on which medicine had been smeared, or their arms were smeared with medicine and then they were asked to dip them in boiling water. In the first example, the victim's mouth dried up and so found it difficult to chew the grain. In the second, the two were asked to stand; and in the process the guilty person got stuck on the log of wood. In the third, the innocent one was never burnt by boiling water. The consequence of muma did not end with being detected, proven guilty and punished. There remained lek marach (bad dream or source of misfortune) in the lineage of the one who took muma.

The most serious of the oaths was mbira. It was a deadly oath. Almost every informant started by saying (mbira has swept many homes). Mbira was taken where people were quarrelling over land. The ingredients of the oath included agulu marateng' (a black pot which had been used for washing hands at funeral), bur (a hole in the form of a grave where one was to be buried), rapur (the handle of a hoe which had been used for digging a grave) and bwar (ocimum basilicum, a shrub, the leaves of which were used for sweeping the graves). After the hole was dug, all these things were tied together and put into it. Where available, a human skull
was also put in. The people taking the oath were then reminded of the consequence of the oath they were taking. The ancestors were also invoked to witness the oath. Nyasaye was called upon to visit the offender with the consequence of the oath and to let the rest of the people live in peace. For example a prayer like this could be stated:

Radeny and Okeno, you are the people who acquired this land, and now these your children are quarrelling. All we want is peace. We have told them the consequence of the oath and may the oath rest with the wrong claimant.

And, we are all your children. It is not our wish to make other people suffer. If one of these people is making a wrong claim, we leave him in your hands.

The people involved also called upon their ancestors to witness the oath and asked Nyasaye to punish them if they were on the wrong. Then they walked over the hole. That marked the end of the deadly oath. Thus while people took the oaths or cursed others, they believed that it was God who punished. The ancestors were only appealed to to witness and to take the message to God.

The dead were feared for their possible ghostly vengeance (chien). The Luo believed that people who die with grudges in their hearts turn to haunt those who wronged them. To avoid the vengeance, the would be victim must right the wrong. This takes the form of what the Luo call dilo or gudo Jachien (silencing or inactivating the ghost). Briefly, this involved sacrificing a black sheep, calling on the troubling ghost while mixing all manner of medicine. The ghost having come (this was only known by the medicine man performing the ritual and occasionally the patient as well) was trapped in the medicine, put in the skull
of the sacrificed sheep and then buried. That marked the end of the trouble. Nonetheless, many deaths are known to have come as a result of people being haunted by the jochiende (plural form of jachien).

Certain deaths have been associated with spirits, particularly the type of spirit the Luo call yambe piny (spirits of the air). These are the spirits which have been associated with such epidemic as small pox (nundu) and sleeping sickness (tho nindo). The Luo do not believe however, that yambe piny can act out of their own volition. The belief is that such spirits were directed (sundo or swayo) by some other power. This could be the ancestors that were annoyed because they were not given food or the people acted contrary to the social mores and were thus punished.

Whatever misfortune the Luo could not explain or they had never seen or heard of before they attributed to God. They said "mano pok ne wanenoe" (that we had never seen or heard of before). Pressed further most of the Luo informants would say 'Nyasaye knows'. In spite of this they strongly believed that God only punished those who deviated from the established order. If the social and religious interdictions were violated and misfortune ensued, the diviner could attribute it to an act of punishment sent by God. In other words, the Luo conceived of God as the author of their social institutions and code of conduct.

Some types of death and burial ceremonies:

The Luo describe the phenomenon of dying by various terms: ng'ane chunye ochot (so and so's spirit has left him), osedhi (he is gone), ng'ane omworore (so and so has died suddenly), ng'ane Nyasaye oomo (so and so has been called by God), or ng'ane oomo nyathine, chuore kata chiege (so and so has called his child, his wife or her husband). The Luo thus conceive of
death as a departure of the person who moves to join the dead. In spite of that however, the Luo regarded death as an interferer in the normal order of things, and the dead had to be treated in a special way. We shall look briefly at deaths of infants, youth, young people and adults.

The Luo were very particular about infant mortality. Children were a blessing from God and women who never gave birth to continue the lineage of their husbands had no respect in the homes to which they were married. Whoever destroyed the life of a child was reprimanded for destroying an innocent life. Apart from the believed in causes of death we have described above, the parents could also cause deaths of their infants. There were thus many interdictions related to the infants. When a woman gave birth her husband was not allowed to have sexual intercourse with another woman, not even his other wives, before having intercourse with the woman who gave birth. This is what the Luo call kalo nyathi (passing over the child). If the father violated this, either the nursing mother stopped giving birth or the child died. The mother was also under the same obligations. The same interdictions applied to the death of an infant.

To keep the fertility of the mother, the burial of the child was also important. A son was buried in the verandah korka chiena (on the left as you enter the house) and laid on the left hand, while a daughter was buried on the verandah korka atung' (on the right as you enter the house) and laid on the right hand.

The burial of sons, be they infant or youth took the same form. For the girls the rituals were different after they reached puberty (hangruok). When a nubile girl (nyako ngili) died at her father's home she was buried outside the homestead.
preparing the grave a woman who had stopped menstruating (dhako ma pim or dhako moa e ria) was asked to break her virginity. This was done between 6 and 8 p.m. (Ang'ich welo) using a particular plant called ondoga (cyperus articulatus). If this was not done, the Luo feared her spirit would haunt the remaining girls.

A married daughter who for some reason left her husband was also buried outside the homestead but no ritual was performed on her body. Women like children were buried on the verandah of their houses. However, when a woman who had lost her husband but not been remarried (tero or lago) died, her death was not published until the remarriage ritual was performed. In such a ritual a stranger (jamwa) was looked for. This man, with an old woman were closed in the house where the dead body was. The jamwa then slept next to the corpse, went between the thighs as if to have carnal knowledge of the body but never had the actual canal knowledge. After this he broke the banana fibre (okola) which must have been around the waist of the diseased and that marked the end of the ritual. The jamwa was then given a cow as payment for the job and a goat with which to go and purify himself. If this was not done the fear was that the spirit of the dead might haunt other women in the clan and make them die before they were remarried in case their husbands left them behind.

In all these, the point being emphasized is the importance the Luo attach to social mores which they believe were given to their ancestors by God, and taken care of by the ancestors. Violation of a custom led to more troubles and the punishment was believed to come direct from God.
Death of adults came with old age and should be normal. What remains unclear about the Luo is that they blamed at least somebody for every death that occurred. The ceremonies and rituals performed when an elderly person died could form a treatise of its own. For the sake of illustration we shall use a case of an old man survived by sons and daughters and grandchildren.

The moment one died the Luo said ng'ane chunye ochot (so and so's spirit has left him). Immediately a person was declared dead, often by the elder wife, people wailed to the top of their voices; the wives stripped themselves naked, ran to the gate and back, an expression that it was the deceased who bought them what they were wearing chieno or olemo. Removing the clothing meant that the widows were from hence like girls and could be remarried.

After the spirit had left the body, it ceased to be ng'ane (so and so), for example Otieno, but became dhano (person or human being). So they talked of goluru dhano oko, 'bring the person out'. The change from dhano to ng'ane indicated the separation of the components of the person. At the time of burial the body was addressed in the following words:

So-and-so,
You whose mother came from such and such a place
Do not close your ears in the soil. Listen to your children and relatives and help them whenever they call upon you. Be peaceful in the grave, you are not the first one to die. We shall also follow.

The body was then buried often in the afternoon. The burial was done in the house of the elder wife, after which fire was lit outside the house mainly to keep away wild animals which came to unearth the body. That very evening the first offering to the deceased was made. The man's largest cock was killed and roasted on the fire which had been lit outside the elder
wife's house. Before this was eaten by those who dug the grave and any other people present including the man's sons (not daughters), a brother or cousin said this brief prayer;

> So-and-so, whose mother came from such a place,  
> This was your cock. Eat it as we also eat it.  
> And as you go where we shall all go, go in peace  
> and intercede for those who have remained behind.  

The cock was then eaten and the remains burnt on the fire. The man had now joined the world of the dead.

But the dead are not dead, many of the informants said. They live with us, eat with us, and do everything we do except we do not see them. When we die temporarily, that is when we sleep, we communicate with them. They can tell us what they want, be it food or that children be named after them. Such were cases where people died peacefully so that their ghosts did not come back as evil spirits to haunt the living and cause trouble in the homes. When a child was named after a person, that person became his Muguruhwa. It was believed by the Luo that a Muguruhwa protected the child named after him.

We shall come back to sacrifices and offerings to the ancestors in chapter five. Before we leave the dead here, we would like to look at ancestral ethical sanctions for it is in this that we see the connection between God and the ancestors in relation to the living.

The living, the dead and God: x

The Luo had a strong belief in the guiding hands of their ancestors. As we have already indicated, they believed the
ancestors protected them from evil and misfortune. However, many of the informants expressed the feeling that the dead had no mercy. They could bring ill-luck even to their own living children or very close relations. Their possible hostility had therefore to be guarded against. This was done by performing proper burial ceremonies, naming children after them and giving them food whenever they wanted it. But even that was not enough. Like good guardians they made sure the living led upright lives by obeying the customs of the community and observing the interdictions. To use Dr. Malcolm McVeigh's words:

Anyone who fails to abide by the tribal mores is an offender not only against the living members of the society but the entire community, composed of both the living and the dead. Indeed they thereby commit a special crime against the ancestors whose task is to look after the welfare of all.

The Luo concept of right and wrong could only be understood in the light of their social interdictions or prohibitions with which we have already dealt. The basic reason given for such interdictions was that the ancestors said so; or that was the practice of our ancestors from the beginning.

The ethical sanctions did not only concern the ancestors but Nyasaye as well. Whenever one was seen contravening a customary law, the Luo did not reprimand him saying that the ancestors would punish him but that Nyasaye would. God gave the forefathers a code and it was upon the ancestors to make sure the living obeyed the laws and customs. Failure to observe the customs was punished by chira. What is chira?

In the Luo-English dictionary, chira is defined as "a result of breaking a taboo, which brings leanness and sickness unto death".
There was nothing more frightening among the traditional Luo people than the knowledge that one was caught by chira, "the sickness unto death". Chira they maintained, was the primary cause of most suffering and death, wherein rested the root explanation for most forms of misfortune.

Talking about chira almost every informant started by saying 'chira comes in many forms and it can act very swiftly or very slowly'. We shall here pick on a few examples or cases where chira was believed to have been the cause of suffering or death.\textsuperscript{30}

First, there is a case where a girl found her father beating her mother. In an attempt to rescue the mother she got hold of the father's genitals and pulled him away. This was a serious break of taboo. The girl became a victim of chira and for a number of years she could not get stably married. For a long time people had no idea of what had gone wrong. However, recently the father became concerned because the girl had picked up a bad disease, leprosy. When the father consulted a diviner, he was reminded of what had taken place and was advised that the man should go and take manyasi (medicine prepared from specified herbs). This he did and the people are patiently waiting for the results. But many people are pessimistic because the two should have taken manyasi immediately after the incident.

The second is a case of a boy whose father died in the absence of the eldest son. This boy, in spite of his being a younger son, took out the father's sacred spear, ran about the village with it and ended at the site of the grave of his grandmother. When he came back to the home, people reprimanded him against what he had done and asked the mother to look for
somebody who had manyasi for that type of broken taboo, but the mother ignored it. When the eldest son came, he was advised never to touch the spear. The boy who ran with the spear became a victim of chira and has constantly suffered from a general breakdown in health and is leading a very unstable life. 

The third example concerns an Anglican priest who considered himself so modern that he was above the influence of the primitive tenets like chira. When his daughter came with her husband to visit them, the priest decided to put the couple in one of the bedrooms next to his bedroom. Both couples stayed in this house for slightly more than a week, eating at the table, sharing bathroom and many other facilities in the house. The elders in the village thought this was a terrible break of taboo. Some of them said, "let us wait and see". The priest's elder brother told him: "You have killed yourself". Other people who heard about this act pitied the family and cursed modernity. A week after the son-in-law left, the priest fell sick, and later died in a hospital where the same son-in-law took him for treatment. A few months later, the wife of the priest also fell sick and soon followed the husband. This did not surprise anyone, for they believed it would happen anyway. Both were victims of chira.

Our last example concerns a man who beat his wife. The wife became so angry that she stripped herself naked in front of the husband, patted her thighs saying: "If these are not my thighs, then you will sleep on them again". She later absconded and went to her parents. People advised the man never to share a bed with the woman before taking manyasi; but being educated and modern he said he would never put the dirty stuff (manyasi) in his mouth. After a while the woman came back and the man not heeding the warning he had been given, went ahead and shared a bed with the woman. He fell a victim of chira, and a few days later, he had an accident that cost him his life.
These few examples are only meant to explain what forms chira may take. We would like to state that there are hundreds and hundreds of chira cases among the Luo. At this point it would suffice to quote an elderly informant who had this to say:

"My son, let me tell you... Education is good but it has its disadvantages. I am telling you this in my old age. Unless you young people change to our customs which we got from our ancestors, you are ruined. You talk of 'nawi', 'ndagla' and the like; these are not there. It is chira killing you young people."

Unlike modern society with its set of written laws to guide and protect the people, the traditional Luo society had no written laws. The ancestors had discovered that certain activities or levels of behaviours disturbed inter-personal relations. To protect their descendants from behaving or acting in such ways, they enacted prohibitions and whoever violated the interdictions was cursed. The living lineage heads took it upon themselves to make sure that members of their lineages did not offend the ancestors by acting contrary to the conventions. Thus there existed a close relationship between the code of ethics upon which the peaceful co-existence of the people depended and the authority of clan heads and ancestors in their role as intermediaries between the ordinary person and God. The Luo summarized their code of behaviour in the following words:

Nyathi ma ok oluoro chik en nyathi ma oluoro lwar.  
The child who has no respect for customs fears grey hair (meaning does not live long).

The Luo interdictions (kweche) and their consequence (chira) were meant to foster respect for property, people, the ancestors and Nyasaye. The details of the modes and levels of respect are beyond the scope of the present study. All we wish to point out is that a violation of any of the conventions was a sin (richo)
which brought misfortune to the transgressor. In other words, chira was an ethical sanction by the ancestors and God on whoever violated an interdiction.

Lack of respect for the lives of other peoples and animals also carried with it a sense of guilt leading to contamination. Individuals were contaminated in many ways. We shall only look at two of the ways here.

When one slayed a great warrior in battle, people rejoiced and the man was carried home in great jubilation. Such a slayer was, however, considered contaminated and rituals of purification had to be performed. The man so polluted was not allowed to enter his homestead through the main gate (rangach); instead another gate (mbuga) was opened. On entering the home he was given pounded simsim (nyim) and a cock was also slaughtered at the gate. The blood of the cock was meant to remove the pollution. This was followed by a he-goat whose lung was removed before the animal was killed. This was then given to the slayer to swallow without chewing. After this the goat was slaughtered and skinned. Pieces of skin were tied on the slayer's hands and also on his spear. This goat was called diend gut (the goat of purification). After the long process of purification which I have just described here in part, the slayer was free to join the other members of society in day to day activities.

Contamination also came when one slayed a wild animal such as leopard or lion. The leopard (kwach) was a very respected animal in the Luo society. People never hunted leopards unless they proved destructive in the village. One who slayed a leopard underwent almost the same ritual of purification as the one who slayed a human being. After the ritual the man with a team of other
men went from village to village being given presents, an activity the Luo call huno. The village was jubilant because the strong enemy had been killed. The slayer was on the other hand contaminated and was susceptible to bad dreams later in life.

The killing of a man or a wild animal carried with it a measure of guilt on the part of the one responsible and because the slayer was part and parcel of the rest of the community, the guilt was extended to them as well. The animal of purification was meant to remove the guilt and thus served as a kind of scapegoat for the slayer. The fear was that the spirit of the deceased would trouble the slayer.

The Luo of Kenya like their kin in Uganda and other African people believed in the world of spirits, which spirits manifested themselves in various ways. Ancestral spirits possessed the living in the lineage and spoke through them. The immediately dead or what Mbiti calls the living dead, having acquired the sixth sense had power and influence upon the living kith and kin for which reason they had to be remembered, their desires considered and their possible hostility guarded against. The bad spirits were those of relations who died with grudges or died unusual deaths. But worst of all were spirits of strangers, what the Luo call remo makech (bitter blood) or juogi ma oko (spirits from without). These were to a large extent spirits of people killed in battle. So when the Luo fought and killed Omia, Kalenjin, Baganda and Bagusu, a new set of possessive spirits entered their spiritual minds. We therefore find Sepe, Lang'o, Wagande and Ogiso as possessive spirits from the Omia, Kalenjin, Baganda and Bagusu respectively. There were also spirits of Onyango Madara, Owuori, Sumba, Riwa and Adongo Nundu. These were associated with personalities or epidemics that existed or befall the community at particular times in history, and which have found themselves deeply
entrenched in the Luo ontology. In other words, the spirits to which we now turn are products of the evolution of the Luo culture as a whole.

A study of the Luo idea of God would be incomplete without reference to their belief in spirits. Like many African people, their insight into spiritual realities, whether absolute or apparent, is extremely sharp. Thus, to understand their religious ethos and philosophy, it is essential to consider their concept of the spiritual world along with their concept of God.

The living, the spirits and God:

D.E. Idonibaye writing about the concept of spirit observed that:

The ontology of any distinctively African world-view is replete with 'spirits'. Spirits are the only entity that remains constant in all African belief systems. Spirits are as real as tables and chairs; people and places. It is this reality of spirits, an entity of doubtful ontological status in Western philosophy, that provides one distinguishing feature of African traditional thought. Africans regard spirits as part of the furniture of the world, not merely as logical constructions out of certain unaccountable manifestations.

41

Spirits are between man and God in their mode of existence. According to the Luo concept of being and of man there is strong belief that after death there is a reconstruction of the human psycho-physical individual, not as the organism which has died but as a soma pneumatikon (spiritual body), inhabiting a spiritual world as the physical body inhabits the physical world. The spirits are thus a mode of existence transcending the present life as far as the human being is
concerned, though they live in the same geographical region as men.

Among the Luo the reality of spirits is markedly clear, which spirits they call *juogi*. The term *juok* (singular) from which *juogi* (plural) is derived is variously used among the Luo-speaking people. It usually means spirit, witchcraft or just some form of spiritual agency. (We have already discussed *juok* as meaning witchcraft). The Luo also use the term *juok* to refer to the spiritually generic name (*nying juok* meaning *juok name*) given to babies. Such names could be names of some dead relative or could only refer to an event. For example the generic name or *Juog Miruka* (*Juog* meaning *juok of*) is spread all over Luoland. The term *miruka* became popular in Luoland when the colonial administration introduced administrative officials like chief (*ruoth*) and sub-chief (*miruka*). As a result of this introduction, many children were named *Miruka*. Thus *Miruka* became *nying juok* among the Luo. The commonest *juok* names are family names by which I mean the names of dead members of a family given to their descendants. The spread of such names were restricted to particular clans or where daughters of such a clan were married. The *juok* names are sacred names and must not be changed or discarded for whatever reason.

When a person dies as we have stated already, the only part which survives death is *tipo* (shadow) which is also invariable rendered spirit or *juok*. The Luo believe that *tipo* leaves the dying body (*ng'at motho onge tipo*, meaning 'a dead body has no shadow') and joins other *tipni* (plural of *tipo*) in a state of immortality of spirits (*juogi*) in the spirit world. The spirit world is made up of spirits of animals; and human spirits. Their abode is both celestial and terrestrial. Some
live in the sun (juok Chieng'); some live in the air (juok yamo); and others live in the waters (juok nam). The rest live in the forests or wilderness (juok thim). It is from these areas that they come to possess people, animals or things.

Broadly the Luo place the spirits in two categories. First there are Yambe. These are spirits whose abode and intentions are not known. All that I could get from the informants about them was that they were also created by God (gibende gin nyithim Nyasaye). This implied that they were moulded as spirits. There were however some indications that some of them were initially spirits of dead people that had lost contact with their living kith and kin and were therefore floating in the air. Some of them were believed to have temporary abodes in bushes, caves and mountains. People hardly moved close to places where such spirits were believed to live. On the other hand, if they were not interfered with by their places of rest being visited, they remained peaceful spirits until they were employed by malignant spirits to cause trouble to living people. Such troubles usually came in the form of epidemics. Whenever the Luo saw many wild animals move together in areas where they are not normally found they called them yambe piny (spirits of the world). They kept an eye on their movement but never interfered with them. A causeless swelling on the body was also called yamo and was connected with the spirits of the air. Such swellings were feared as people who had medicine for them were very few indeed. Whenever one was found with such swellings they quickly rushed him to one who was known to have medicine for yamo.

Secondly, there were spirits which the Luo believed were close to man and either lived with people in their homes or in the bushes around the homes or in deserted homes (gundini) or in shrines (hembo). These included spirits of ancestors (juok kwere), spirits of persons born abnormally (juogi ma gath), and
spirits of relatives who had died with grudge and which are believed to be malignant spirits (jochiende).

In the Luo conception Nyasaye is regarded as the ultimate authority from whom everything else derives, including both man and the laws and the customs that govern society. Without Nyasaye's aid nothing can happen, whether good or bad. The ancestors are the hub of the clans and their successors (clan heads) are the centre of authority in traditional Luo society. It is they who evolved a system of government backed by customs that are observed by the whole community. Thus, in the Luo conception of the supernatural, there are four forces: Nyasaye who is apparently indifferent; the ancestors (kwere) who guide, protect and punish the living; spirits (juogi) which are well disposed toward man and which possess him; and finally, spirits which are potentially hostile and more inclined to harm man (jochiende).

The relationship between the ancestors, spirits and God can only be understood in the light of Luo social structure. The ancestral spirits belonged to a family or group of families. Their action as we have already indicated, was confined to the families concerned. The spirits, on the other hand, operated in wider fields, and Luo traditions talk of particular spirits being found among the Luo as well as among their neighbours, namely the Luyia and the Gusii. They were associated more with troubles, and divination. Above all these was God (Nyasaye), not in the sense that He was seated somewhere high and on a throne, but because in whatever the Luo did, be it administering treatment or silencing troublesome and malignant spirits, they depended on God for their success. It could be argued, therefore, that God played the role of father and friend, while the spirits and the ancestors alike had to be pleased in order to be peaceful and benevolent.
We shall now turn to the cult of spirits possession among the Luo, which cult is here defined as a phenomenon where the spirit of a dead person or thing possesses and manifests itself in a living person by speaking through him and giving him some supernatural power or charism and influence in the community. The possessed person was thus raised to the medium status and often nicknamed Jamwa, for he communicated in terms best understood only to himself. It is this type of spirit possession that has been identified as:

...Cults of affliction in which very large number of men and women were held to be possessed by the spirits of 'alien' men, or of animals or of divinities; in which there was little control in religious or secular establishments; and in which the idea of possession and the reality of the trance state was used to 'cure' diseases and neuroses by means of initiation into a spirit cult.

Though our interest is in the origin and diffusion of these cults of 'democratic' spirit possession, we would like to emphasize that the Luo idea of God was interwoven with every aspect of religious and secular life. The charisma one gained as a result of his being spirit possessed was regarded as a gift from God. This was why the charisma or magnetism of a particular personality was being acknowledged or their spontaneity or capacity to hold attention and to communicate themselves and their message to their patients and clients won acceptance.

Among the Luo the possessive spirits were either benevolent or malevolent or both. Most often the term juogi was used to refer to the spirits which possess living people, speak through them and also give them the power to cure people possessed by spirits of the same type. Spirit possession was manifested differently in different people; and so the Luo gave the types such names as, Sepe, Lang'o, Wagande and Mumbo. We shall discuss these in turn.
Sepe have been known among the Luo for a longer time than the other types of *juogi* we discuss below. For this reason they have been regarded as spirits of known relatives or family spirits. However, this could only be true where the spirits which possessed a member of a family later transferred to another member of the family at death of the first victim, and so on, until the spirits became known to belong to a given family. Let us then try and historicize the cult of Sepe which is a plural form of Sewe.

According to the traditions recorded and analysed by Professor Ogot, the Padhola contacted some people called Sewe during their settlement period in Budama. And so Ogot writes:

Sewe arrived from the east and raided their villages and stole their cattle. There is no agreement as to who these people were. In the majority of the Padhola traditions they are identified with the Maasai, possibly Uasin Gishu Maasai, though others identify them with the Sebei or even with the Nandi.

Of interest to us is the fact that Sepe spirits are more manifest among the people living in Alego, Ugenya, Samia, Bukhayo and Samia Bugwe in Uganda, areas which are closest to the Padhola. It is reasonable to argue that there was some connection between the Sepe spirits and the Sewe people who attacked and raided the Padhola settlements. In other words Sepe could be the spirit of the Sewe people who died in the encounters with the Padhola. That the people living in West Alego and Ugenya (and who are here associated with Sepe) were led by Owiny, who is remembered in the Luo traditions as having been the brother of Adhola, is noteworthy.
Be that as it may, the victims of these spirits suffered from serious loss of weight and their skins became dry and white. They usually suffered from constipation whenever they ate mutton and turned wild at the sight of pigs. They began to hate and like certain people. Immediately that such symptoms were seen a victim was taken to a diviner who identified whose spirits they were and who undertook the treatment until the spirits spoke through the victim or the person was initiated into the spirit cult.

The Lang'0 spirits have been associated with the period we referred to earlier as Luo expansionism during which period the Luo clashed with the Lang'0 peoples. On the other hand, when the Luo talk of Lang'0 they could mean any of the groups of people who have until recently, been called Nilohamites, including Nandi, Kipsigis and even the Maasai. Quoting Ogot's work Anyumba links Lang'0 with Sewe and says:

...... no comparable account has been made yet of the Sewe factor in Kenya, except for intruiging brief mention by Ogot of "Marauding Kalenjin Bands" which compelled proto-Kisumo people to abandon the Samia area, and more germane to our argument, the Maasai of Uyoma peninsula who almost annihilated the Kagayi sub-clan. It may be that the Lang'0 were not as crucial in the struggle for Nyanza as the Sewe were in Padhola. The fact remains that among the Luo of Kenya the Lang'0 are thought to have had very powerful and lasting effect on Juogi beliefs and practices.

Wherever the Luo contacted the Lang'0 and whoever they were, what we have learned from the traditions of the Luo on this issue and for which we are quite in agreement with Anyumba's findings is that the emergence of the Lang'0 spirits marked a major departure from the traditional or nascent ancestral spirits. What we referred to earlier as family spirits and which spirits submerged the foreign Sewe spirits.
In an earlier paper Anyumba vividly described what happened at the early stages of Lang'o spirit possession. The victim first saw a flash of fire in his eyes and it was in vain that the person tried to cover his eye with his hands. As the tension mounted the person would see Awiti nyar Lang'o with her small shield, her spear, her long sword and her clanging bells threatening him; or she would see many short people with wildly grown hair who seemed to jump on the victim as if to slash him. At this moment the victim became extremely wild, his body trembled violently and he burst out into a violent jabber making the climax of the possession when the Lang'o spirits expressed themselves in the victim. The wild state and the shiver are reported to reflect the Lang'o warrior in the battle field; the jabber was a crude automatic attempt to speak the Lang'o language. The victim was then taken to one who had been possessed by the Lang'o spirits for treatment which involved appeasing the spirits and provoking them to speak through the victim. Later, after the initiation, the victim would obtain the power to prophesy and treat others possessed of the same type of spirits.

Wagande, on the other hand, are spirits from the lake found only among the people living along the lakeshore. The early stages of possession are almost the same as those of Lang'o possession except here the victim saw people rowing canoes, trying to catch him and put him into the canoe. He also bursted into a violent jabber making a desperate attempt to speak the language of the Baganda. He shouted: "canoe, canoe, canoe", and asked for a paddle to help himself with. The victim often turned wild at the sight of the lake and never drank water from the lake. Such were symptoms that Wagande spirits had possessed one and that he had to be taken to one who had earlier been possessed by the same spirits for appeasement and initiation.
Of interest to an historian is the fact that this whole drama signified the time when the Baganda, assisting the Arabs slave traders, came to the shores of the lake to capture the people. Wagande spirits were therefore the spirits of the Baganda who died in the struggle for slaves especially by their canoes capsizing.

Mumbo spirits could at best be associated with prophetism and personality or heroic cults. The Luo heroes (Thuond Luo) acquired their heroism either through their lineage position or charisma. By the latter is meant the special power or ability inherent in an individual setting him above other men, hence making him a leader. The charismatic leaders were originally warriors, diviners, medicinemen or prophets. Obondo Mumbo was the son of a medicineman. Mumbo on the other hand was a huge mythical snake living in the lake and believed to be the mother of fish. Obondo was the first Luo to be possessed by Mumbo spirits who came to him through the fulfilment of a prophet vision he had earlier. The message he received in the vision was that in the near future he would see a huge snake that had never been seen by anybody else. But before seeing the snake he would have a serious stomachache.

A few days after this vision a neighbour died in the village and Obondo went to attend the funeral. On his way back he developed a terrible stomach pain that caused him to be confined to his hut for nearly a week. Some time after his recovery his sister's husband died in Seme Location of the present Kisumu District. As was usual for the Luo, Obondo and other relatives in the village went to attend the funeral. On their way back Obondo saw a huge snake in the form of a rainbow. He became very frightened but remembered the vision he had earlier. Those who were with him saw nothing.
Huge snakes, as we saw earlier in chapter three were regarded as spirits by the Luo. Seeing such snakes the Luo tied grass knots which they threw on them. Obondo did the same on his imaginary snake and continued home with the rest of the people. As Professor Ogot put it: "The vision of the rainbow haunted him everywhere. Soon his sickness developed into insanity, and he ran wild all over the countryside. Eventually he drowned himself in Nam Lolwe (Lake Victoria). He lived under the water for sometime, under the protection of Min Rech (the Fish Mother), who kept away all the dangerous water creatures from him. During his stay with Min Rech, he was trained in herbal medicine. At the end of his training he was allowed to come back to the surface again, and fishermen found him thin and weak on the shore".  

Obondo sent a message to his father that presents should be brought to Mumbo and that the presents be white. So the father sent a white cock and a white goat to the shore where Mumbo is believed to have consumed them in the presence of the people who had converged there. Obondo was then released to go home where his father killed a white cock for him and offered a white bull for the Mumbo spirit which had possessed him. After these preparatory stages, Obondo became a renown prophet, diviner and herbalist among the Luo. He had a unique habit of walking only in the night because his spirits did not like the sun (a sign of the influence of water). The Mumbo spirits have continued to possess people and give them the power of prophesy, divination and healing.  

What we have given here is a general overview of the cults of spirit possession. The analysis of the characteristics and development of individual cults is beyond the scope of the present study. However, I wish to emphasize my earlier statement that the traditional Luo idea of God was interwoven with every aspect
of their religious and secular life, and that the ontological transcendence of God is bridged by the spirit mode of existence. An individual who was spirit possessed was believed to act in the context of the power of the spirit possessing him. Such individuals thus acquired the names of the spirits possessing them, hence Adongo Nundu, Onyango Madara and Obondo Mumbo. The power they had was a special gift from God and which they strictly used for the well being of the community.


3. In another myth the Luo say that God decides what type of death an individual will have (at the time of his birth). But this seems to contradict the widespread belief that we cannot just die. There must be some other external cause to every death. These are myths I collected during my field work. Also Interview: Turfena Ogola (9.8.73) et al.

4. Interview: Herbert Magowi (29.1.73) "Though I said earlier that the Luo seem to believe in the immortality of man....They were quite aware that they will die. What leads them to looking for causes of every death I fail to understand" Interview: Elijah Alunga (8.2.73). "This is done so that the spirit of the dead does not haunt the living relative".

5. Interview: Mercessa Adera (12.5.73). "People just decided that such and such a family had night runners or people with evil eyes. But I have never seen a particular person known as jajuok". This contrary view was not unique to Marcela as many of my informants declined to name any jojuogi or their experiences of witchcraft activity.
However, this could be fear that the jajuok would hear the revelation of his secrets.

6. Michael Whisson. In his book *Change and Challenge* (Nairobi, 1964), defines *bilo* as "Powder containing magical properties, usually made from that ash or leaves. Usually thought of in connection with protective magic from enemies, thieves, witches or spirits but also in connection with magic for aggressive purposes".


8. Group Interview: (27.6.73).

9. Almost all of my informants were agreed on the four types of oaths and on their progressive seriousness.

10. Interview: Paulo Sewe (13.2.73).

11. To get this information I conducted several informal interviews.

12. The few examples mentioned are just for the purpose of illustration. Death rituals and ceremonies could make a whole treatise.

13. The following categories are for the convenience of this paper though worked out from field information.
14. People who were married but not regarded as adults until their children got to marital status.


16. Ibid. Chapter II.


19. Ibid.

20. Interview: Serah Olilo (12.8.73) "After grave has been dug an old woman goes with 'Ondoga' and breaks the virginity of the girl as her husband would have done".


22. Many changes have taken place and these days they call the bodies by name. However, dhano referred to the dead body, while the name was believed to escape with tipo (spirit) hence was living.

23. Here the Luo called the name because they believed that the man's tipo was still around the home and was watching what they were doing, though they could not see it.

Interview: Maurice Ahawo. (19.5.73).

25. Interview: Jacob Obago (10.8.73). "Those who die do not really die but they become spirits. Some are good but others, especially if they are not given a proper burial ceremony become bad spirits and haunt people. Some dead people bless their offspring and then become a sort of God to them.

26. The word *Muguruhwa* is known mainly by very elderly Luo peoples. It also sounds a Bantu word and could have been loaned from the Bantu people.

27. Interview: Amisi w/o Omoth (11.8.73) "The dead are only dead because they cannot help us, but, in reality they are with us always. I can tell you what happened to me when my husband died. My husband came to me one night and stood at the door. When I asked him what he wanted he said 'I want my two daughters. I will come and take them next month'. After this he disappeared. At the end of the month which he told me the two girls died...."


29. This is a very valuable but rare document. A copy of it which is rapidly tearing to pieces is kept by Mr. Roy Stafford at Ng'iya Girls' High School, Siaya District.
30. Names of people involved here are kept secret for most of them are still alive and known to the author personally.

31. The sacred spear can only be taken out by the eldest son unless it was the will of the father that a younger son was to handle it.

32. This informant asked me very kindly never to mention his name in anything I was writing for public use. He was interviewed on 21.9.73.

33. This is a common expression among the Luo and to remind a youth who knew its meaning, particularly by an elderly person was a curse in itself.

34. To exhaust what the Luo understood by respect (luor), we would have to analyse respect for person in various capacities: animals tamed and wild; places, and sites of various kinds.

35. The Luo said he carried tora. None of my informants could explain clearly what tora meant. The few attempted to explain it seemed to imply impurity and sense of guilt. This explains why such men were not allowed to enter other peoples' villages and why they had to pay compensation for the blood guilt.

37. The ability of the dead person to influence for good or worse those who are still living. The sixth sense has also been called extrasensory perception or simply the hidden power house in the mind which can be tapped to transmit and receive uncanny messages through the barrier of space and time.


39. Interview: Marcellar Odongo, who was herself spirit possessed, (7.7.73) "Spirits came in large groups. In the chronological order the groups are as follows: Onyango Madara (male) from Yimbo; Owuori (female) from Manyala; Sumba (male) from Manyala; Riwa (Wang' Chieng'); Adongo Nundu (male) from Yimbo".

40. Ibid. "There was somebody called Adonga Kodero who died as a result of the outbreak of smallpox (nundu). For some reason I cannot explain his spirit moved about with other spirits visiting homes at night. When they got to the gate of the homestead they wanted they would sing this song:

Nundu, magawla koro adonjo dala ma en dala Nundu, Kodero, Nundu magawla chilo oowo wang'e. Whenever they entered a home the children in that home were attacked by smallpox".

42. This is another example where through marriage ideas, beliefs and practices spread from one place to the next. Women could name their children after their fathers, mothers or grandparents. For such children the maternal uncles were very important particularly in rituals involving namesakes.

43. Nam refers to both lake and river. When people in Ugenya, Siaya District talk of nam, in most cases they will be referring to River Nzoia.

44. Professor Mbiti says: "Some spirits are considered to have been created as a 'race' by themselves". African Religious op. cit. p. 79.

45. Interview: Mrs. Obewa Okelo (24.6.73).

46. Where a given family had moved from the area they had settled it was believed that the ancestral spirits remained there. If some other people came and settled such an area then the spirits of the ancestors of the clan which settled there first would affect the newcomers.

47. Locations like Yimbo, Alego, Ugenya have the same spirits like the Luyia locations of Bunyala, Samia Bukhayo and the area of Samia Bugwe in Uganda.

48. The spirit of Mumbo. Though used later as an anti-colonial movement, was known among the Luo of South Nyanza and their neighbours the Gusii and the Kuria. It is therefore understandable why the Gusii embraced the cult during their resistance to colonial infiltration.
49. **Jamwa** is a term the Luo use for any person who uses a language that is not Nilotic in origin. The other Nilotic non-Luo speakers like the Kipsigis, Maasai they call Jolang'o.


51. Interview: Mrs. Obewa Okelo (24.4.73).


53. According to one of our informants sepe also called Ogiso, a term used for the Bagisu and other people living on the slopes of Mt. Elgon. Interview: Mercella Odongo (7.7.73).


56. J.M. Lonsdale, in his *Political History of Nyanza 1883–1945* reports that "Ganda war-canoes made periodic raids on the Nyanza coast devastating villages...."


59. Mumboism as a political philosophy was founded by Onyango Dunde from Alego Location of Siaya District. For various studies on the cults see Nyangweso. "The cult of Mumbo in Central and South Kavirondo" Journal of East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society (1930).

The Luo acts of worship included prayers, sacrifices and offerings. These acts as Professor John Mbiti says, "may be formal, regular or extempore, communal or individual, ritual or ceremonial, through word or deed". By their acts of worship, the Luo not only turned to God but also to the departed and the spirits. For our purposes here therefore, we wish to define worship as the activity, attitude or thought consciously directed to the service of God, ancestors, spirits and any other object of awe. It is in this wide context that we use the term 'worship' in the following pages.

We stated earlier in the study that the traditional Luo religion was a way of life and that their religious process represented a historical phenomenon. However, it would not be historically accurate to read the normative worship of God as understood in our time back to the ancestors of the Luo. Though their traditions reveal belief in a Supreme Being, as we have already stated, the ancestors were at the centre of all acts of worship and appealed to by the living as intermediaries between them and God. Thus, given belief in the numinous with minds and will of their own, it is understandable why the Luo should have tried to enlist their aid by direct appeals in the form of prayer. We shall therefore look at prayer first and then consider sacrifices and offerings together. This we do because, while almost all sacrifices and offerings involved prayer, not all acts of prayer were accompanied by offerings and sacrifices.
Prayer

Prayer among the Luo, though in most cases simple and informal, was believed to be efficacious. The Luo looked at their prayers as selfless acclaim to Nyasaye and to his absolute goodness. On the other hand, their reverence and awe of Nyasaye made it unbecoming for them to communicate directly with Him, hence they addressed themselves either to the physical phenomena manifesting God, namely the sun and moon or to their ancestors whom they looked upon as forming a link between them and God. This could also be explained in terms of respect, for when one wanted help from a superior, he did not go to the superior directly but instead and as a sign of respect he went through an intermediary.

Be that as it may, the Luo said simple prayers every morning at or just before sunrise and also in the evenings at about sunset. The family elder (head of the homestead) walked about the courtyard saying prayers to God and to the ancestors. The actual words said varied from place to place and from person to person but were concerned with the current problems in the given home. However the most reported words included:

in the morning:— Were, Wang' Chieng' iwuogna maber,
Koyo madibedi ei dala mondo orum.
Dend ji okudh.

Were, the sun, rise well for me
Any misfortune that might come in this home should disappear. Let the people be in good health.
Almost the same prayer was repeated in the evening when the man said:

Wang’ chieng’, ipodhna maber,
Yamo madibedi marach to ipodhgo Imbo.

You, the sun, set well for me.
Any evil spirit that might be in this home should set with you in the West.

At the gate of every home there was a shrine made of three stones and a few white feathers stuck on the ground. The owner of the homestead swept the shrine every morning and evening after which he said prayers. The order was not definite however. The prayers could come first. Unfortunately, like many other Luo religious symbols that are rapidly disappearing, these shrines have disappeared, and when this research was carried on, there was hardly any Luo home with such a shrine. In all these prayers the elders asked for peace in the home and health among the members of the home, with particular reference to the children.

In their salutations and farewells, the Luo uttered words of prayer. They have three general greetings: Oyawore for Good Morning, Oyimore for Good Evening, and Osawore or Misawa for any time of the day but more so for the time between 9.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. In addition to these they have several prayerful expressions. We shall pick on a few examples.

A Luo could be heard greeting the other: ber (good) and the one replies ber or ber ahinya meaning good or very good. The meaning of this salutation is that there is peace. It could be interpreted to mean that there was no problem either between the two individuals or in the land.
When a Luo went to a home and found people settled somewhere discussing something, he stood some distance away and said:

Okuweuru, meaning 'Peace be in your midst'.

and people replied (often in chorus):

Okuwe ahinya, meaning 'May peace abound'.

Such utterances were not meant to recognize the existence of peace but rather were prayers calling for peace. After praying for peace, the person did not join the group but instead kept his distance until he was invited to join in.

In their parting, the commonest expression by the Luo is Oriti, which means 'may He protect you'. Sometimes they say Okonyi, meaning 'may He help you'. In these the one was wishing the other God's protection and succour. It was in a nutshell a prayer. The farewell prayers were on the other hand more formal when and where an elderly person was addressing himself to a younger person.

Ber, iwuoth gi kuwe (Good, travel in peace)
Nyakalaga otelni (May the one found everywhere lead you)
Yamo marach kik luwi (May no evil follow you)

Such a prayer was looked upon as a blessing and very often the junior fellow never replied to such prayers but instead walked quietly away. Among the traditional Luo a young person never left a home before being bidden farewell by an elder in the home. But this like many other practices is dying rapidly.
They also prayed for luck in the course of the journey. One had luck in the journey either because he had been blessed at the beginning of the journey or because he started the journey well. Whether started well or badly depended on the lucky sex of the individual and not the nature of the journey. This was determined by the foot first knocked against a stone or a stump. One would hear a Luo woman say: 'I am male'. This means that her lucky sex was male. For a journey to be started well for such a woman she would have to knock the right foot first or meet a man first. The reverse was true for those who said they were female. On the other hand, there were those who were either neutral or did not know exactly what sex had luck for them. When such people knocked their feet against a stone or a stump they said a simple prayer:

*Achwanyi maber*, meaning 'May I knock you well'.

Although the expression sounds as if addressed to either the stone or the foot, in actual fact the individual was addressing himself to God and saying:

"May that knock be my luck in this journey".

There were also informal prayers of thanksgiving uttered mostly by the adults in appreciation of the gift, respect, or help they got from the young. The aged solemnly asked God to bless such kind or respectful youths. One would say:


Thank you. May Nyasaye Were bless you. Have luck and may it be possible for you to marry. Have enough children to name after your forebears.
Such prayers never involved any offerings or sacrifices.

**Sacrifices and offerings:**

The sacrificial tradition of the Luo seems to have been transmitted to them by their seminomadic ancestors. The cult could not have evolved in Western Kenya nor even during the trek. Its origin must therefore be sought in the cradleland. All that we could get from the informants concerning the origin of their acts of sacrifice was that the forefathers did the same or simply: 'we got the practice from our progenitor Ramogi'. This made it difficult for us to relate how certain rituals started. At the same time, what the informants described could certainly be later beliefs and practices. But since few cults are as conservative as the cult of sacrifice it could be argued that later practice developed earlier practice certainly with additions and enrichment. This argument seems valid because the Luo sacrificial rites have a lot in common with those of their Bantu neighbours, more so the Luyia; in the types of animals offered (their colour and sex) in concepts like *Misango* (Luyia *emisango*), *liswa* for both; and also in the outward form of the ceremonies. Some connection must be assumed as the traditions reveal that the Luo had very simple rituals during the trek.

Be that as it may, sacrifices and offerings were the commonest acts of worship among the traditional Luo. By sacrifices we mean to refer to those acts where animal life was taken in order to present it in whole or in part to God, the spirits or the ancestors. By offering on the other hand, we refer to acts which did not involve killing of an animal, but which involved mainly presentation of foodstuffs or living animals.

According to the Luo, the purpose of their sacrifices was to restore relationship between man and the spirits and the dead.
A break in the relationship was feared for the danger that would ensue. As one of the informants put it:

If you do not live according to the demands of the dead they can ruin you. Those of us who are spirit possessed are even in a worse situation. We have all the time to live according to the way they want. If we do not give them food, we suffer for it.

To the Luo therefore the sacrifices were meant to keep off danger, appease an angry spirit, or put right a wrong that had taken place and which would result in some misfortune befalling the land or the people. The sacrifices themselves were either personally performed at household or homestead level or communally performed at the family, clan and community levels. We shall look at them in that order. But before we do, we shall make a few general comments.

Most sacrifices we describe below were associated with cleanness and uncleanness; guilt and sickness. To avert these the officiant had himself to be clean. The Luo therefore had rules to be strictly observed before the day of sacrifice. The rules varied from place to place in Luoland. However, most of the informants were agreed that people who were going to participate in a sacrifice were under the obligation to refrain from having sexual intercourse and also to avoid quarrels of any nature. Violation of these rules if known could lead to a postponement of the ceremony.

Secondly, all the people connected with the sacrifice had to be informed of what was going to take place. The fear here was that, if such people were not informed and they heard about the sacrifice later, any misfortune befalling them they could attribute to the sacrifice and could therefore blame the people who performed the ceremony for having *lokonigi ndagla* meaning,
diverted misfortune to them. This could lead to a very serious tension within the family, clan or community.

The Luo, on the other hand did not just wake up any morning and start offering sacrifices. There had to be a reason. There were many problems in the families, clans and communities that called for the offering of sacrifice. Some of these we discuss in the next few pages. The question we raise here is: How did the Luo know who had to be appeased?

To determine the cause of a problem and how to avert it, the Luo depended on the Jomariak (the wise men) which we discuss below. The wise men told the people causes of problems they had and what could be done to arrest the situation. The wise man (Ng'at mariek) stated to whom a sacrifice was to be made; when, where and what animals to sacrifice; and particularly the colour of the animal.

There were however, two instances where it was possible for people to offer sacrifices without first consulting a wise man. The first was a situation where a member of a family dreamt that one of the ancestors wanted food or just saw the said ancestor in a dream in a lonely mood. That was enough to make the owner of the homestead arrange for a sacrifice to the ancestor. Secondly, there were times when children named after certain individuals looked sickly and dull with no symptoms of any particular sickness. In such cases the first step was to offer sacrifices to the muguruhwa (namesake).

Nonetheless, if the moves we have mentioned failed to improve the condition of the victim, then the people went to
consult a wise man as to what should be done. But who were these wise men?

There were innumerable specialists among the Luo. These were collectively called jomarieng meaning, wise men, and included those elders qualified by age and experience to lead in particular rituals, and those whose skill was acquired by inheritance or some special training. It did not matter by what means one acquired a certain skill, experience or training. At the back of the Luo mind it was God who provided the power to the individual, not for his personal benefit but for the benefit of the whole community. This explains the respect commanded by specialists in the Luo society. It also explains why the specialists were often leaders in the society. The office of the specialists included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jodolo</td>
<td>Lineage priests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajuoke</td>
<td>diviners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobilo</td>
<td>soothsayers and also diviners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jokor wach</td>
<td>prophets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jojimb koth</td>
<td>rain makers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The specialists could as well be grouped into two broad categories, namely, mediums and diviners, but this academic distinction becomes misleading for a group like the Luo for whom there was no marked difference between medicine men and diviners both of whom are often called Jothieth. It is important to note that what is important as far as our understanding of the Luo idea of God is concerned is the role the specialists played in the community and how they were believed to have acquired their power.
In the following pages we shall see the role the Jodolo (lineage priest) played in the sacrificial life of the traditional Luo. For one to qualify as a lineage priest one had to come from a senior family by descent and was expected to be an honest and respected member of the community. The Jadolo had to be loving with a tongue full of blessing and was often an elderly person full of experience and well informed of the traditions of his clan and whose counsel was respected by both the young and the old. His office was like that of a medium, linking the dead and the living particularly at the time of offering sacrifices. He prayed to God for rain, peace in the land and for good health. In the event of drought, fierce winds, earthquake, strange phenomena in the sky such as an eclipse or a comet moving across the sky, cattle diseases or epidemic, the Jadolo was called upon to offer sacrifice so that the bad omen would pass.

The Ajuoke (diviners) were very respected people in the Luo society. They were widely consulted about various problems in life: during battles, in cases of sickness, and by those arranging for long journeys, parties and marriages. They offered advice and some form of medicine like manyasi (crushed herbs), buru (ash from medicinal bark of a tree and other things) or even charms and amulets. Diviners are known to have existed right through Luo history. The office of a diviner was a blessing from Nyasaye and was either inherited or learned from a relative or some other diviner at a very high cost. The traditional diviners were under the obligation to speak the truth and not to cause quarrels between peoples.

Diviners were of different types but included both the male and the female sexes. Some diviners just talked to their
clients and straight away diagnosed what was troubling them in life. Some used mbohwa (a wooden board from the trunk of a sacred tree. Such trees were mainly keels of canoes or a tree on which somebody hanged himself). Some used gagi (cowrie shells) while yet others used rattling gourds. Those who used rattling gourds (ajawa) were mainly people who had been possessed by the spirits of the dead (see spirit possession above). The spirits which possessed the diviner advised both the diviner and the client on what to be done to settle the problem for which they were consulted.

A kind of diviner called Jamirieri (witch hunter) had the specialised skill of detecting where harmful witchcraft material was planted. Jamirieri could walk to every corner of a troubled home until he spotted the exact place where the witchcraft material was planted. This was a very skilled act of divination, and such diviners were closely watched just in case they brought such things in the home and then later claimed to have detected and dug them out.

Jobilo (soothsayers) were mainly responsible for telling people what would happen in the future and how to go about misfortune that was likely to befall the land. Their bilo (medicine) gave them both the power of divination and that of prophesy. Bilo was a general term for medicines which were in ash form. It could be used for instilling courage in people, healing ailments, giving people who are otherwise weak at courting girls the courage they lack and so forth.

Jothieth (herbalists) were like chemists in our modern society. They had medicines which they administered on the advice of the diviner or gave to people who had been told to go and look for particular medicines to help them out of their
problems. Some *jothieth* walked to many countries and bushes collecting herbs, feathers of rare birds, skins or hair of rare animals and various other items commonly used by diviners.

*Jokor wach* (prophets) only prophesied on what would happen to the land in the near future. They could say for example, that an important person had to die on the land before rain would fall. Such prophesies were dangerous and people were left disturbed about them. However, the diviners would conspire between themselves and then divert such a calamity to another land, what the Luo call *lokondoagla*.

The Luo word for rainmaking (*Jimbo koth*) does not mean making rain but increasing the rain. From the tradition of the Luo of Kenya rainmaking was not a traditional Luo activity. A number of my informants told me that the practice of making rain or holding rain from falling by living people was not known among the Luo until they got into contact with the Lunde of Bunyore. When there was no rain, all the Luo did was to offer sacrifices to God and to the ancestors so that rain might fall. They believed that for rain to fail there must have been some interdiction committed by the people living in the area where there was no rain. So all they needed to do was to put the wrong right. The Luo families which make rain these days like Jo-Yiro of Ugenya and Joka-Rading of Gem are believed to be related to the rainmaking Bantu people.

Be that as it may, the rainmakers were believed to have medicine for rain which could make it fall or hold it from falling. When there was no rain in a given area, the Luo looked for *Jajimb koth*. This man collected herbs of different types and on a given afternoon he went with an elder in the area to some raised ground. Here a fire-place was erected and the herbs were boiled in a huge pot. Meanwhile the man prayed
to God asking for rain. Immediately the steam started ascending into the air he stopped praying and started whistling. The whistle was meant to call the clouds. After the whistle he said another prayer for rain and then they left for home. Either that night or evening the rain fell.\footnote{18}

The Luo believed that all these specialists received their power from God; and if any of them misused the power, then God punished them for it. The punishment according to many of my informants came in the form of failure to have children. Asked where they obtained their power, one of the informants who was herself a diviner said:--

\begin{quote}
We get the power from God. That is why before we start divining we invoke God to reveal to us what is troubling our clients. We have no power ourselves. Where else can we get the power from? We are just like any other people. It is God who gives us the power to help his children who are in difficulties.\footnote{19}
\end{quote}

The diviners and all categories of wise men among the Luo accept that the power they have and that of the medicines they use derive from Nyasaye. Without the help of Nyasaye, the medicine itself could not be effective.\footnote{20} Where a diviner inherited the act of divination from an ancestor, the tendency was for him to invoke the ancestors to make the medicine effective. The clients were first told that the medicine came from God and that all the diviners did was to act on behalf of God. The efficacy of the divination and the medicine depended on the sincerity of the client. Some diviners warned their clients that their role was not to cause trouble between people, so that if the client wanted trouble with his neighbour then he could go to another diviner.

After the warning and assurance of the role of Nyasaye in what was being done, the client was given medicinal ash (bilo)
to seek. Then the diviner invoked the ancestor from whom he inherited the medicine:

Onyach Rabuor, yadhni en marwa machon.
To un ema ne uwenwago, mondo wakonygo nyithind Nyasaye. Nyathini eri obiro
To en kod thagruok. Anto aonge teko.
Gima ne uwacho ni atim ema atimo.
En ang'o....

Onyach, the Brown one; this medicine is ours from old. It is you who handed it over to us, to help the children of Nyasaye. This child has now come, and he has a problem. But me I have no power. What you said I should do is all I can do. What is it....

The divination then continued into the problems of the client and could go on for a number of hours. So much for the wise men. Let us turn to the sacrifices.

For the purpose of this paper we have referred to sacrifices performed at homestead level as personal. These were conducted by the head of the homestead on behalf of himself, his wives or children. Where a problem concerned only one household (ot) within the homestead (dala), the sacrifice was performed in that particular household. We shall take two examples; a sick woman and the naming of a child.

When a wife was constantly suffering, the husband went to a diviner who could tell him for example, that a neighbour
who had no children was not happy with his wife and that he had tried all he could to get rid of the life of the woman but was prevented from doing so by the ancestors. The ancestors were also complaining that for a long time they had not been given food. The thing to be done was to get medicine (from the diviner) which the woman was to put in water. Then she was to wash her face, her hands and her legs in the water. The dirty water, with the remains of the medicine was to be carried and poured out on the path leading to the neighbour's homestead. That was enough to remove the cause of the sickness. The following day the man was to offer a brown hen to his dead grandmother and to sacrifice a white he-goat to the ancestors and mention in particular the name of his father who was working exceptionally hard to save the life of his daughter-in-law.

With that information and the medicine, the man came home but as a rule never informed the patient. The fear here was that should the patient die before the sacrifice was made she would haunt the living for having not saved her life in spite of the advice of the diviner. The man secretly looked for all the things that were required. After finding all of them, he then arranged for the sacrifice. That was the time the patient was told of what the diviner had suggested.

The evening before the actual sacrifice the woman did the washing as the diviner had advised. Then she sat on the floor at her house with legs straight facing the door. The husband then took the brown hen, held it by the legs and rubbing it on the woman he said this:

Achola dana, ma en nyakwari.
To ka gweno ema idwaro, yaye nyargi
Opiyo; to gweno eri. Keluru mana kuwe.

Achola my grandmother, this is your granddaughter. If it is a hen that you need, O, the sister of Opiyo, then here is the hen. Just bring peace. We have no problem. May Nyasaye Were help, and may the children be healthy.

The hen was then thrown down and kept in the household as Apiyo's hen. The people then retired to bed.

The following morning at about sunrise the goat was sacrificed. After skinning the goat, the left foreleg (bad jachien) was removed and taken to the house for the ancestral spirits to eat. Then a special dish was prepared with pieces of meat from various limbs of the animal. This was taken to the patient who was by then seated in the courtyard in front of her house. As she held the dish, the husband invoked the ancestors.


Ochieng', whose mother came from Kagwa, what is bringing sickness? Here is food. Call your friends and eat. Let there be peace and good health in the home. O, Nyasaye Were, this is your child, relieve her of the ailment.
After these words of invocation, the man took the dish and walking about the homestead, threw pieces of meat and ugali (kuon) in the direction of the sun and then to the four corners of the earth. As he did this he said more prayers. After this the rest of the meat was roasted, some stewed and all the people in the home partook thereof. That marked the end of the sacrifice. In the words of one informant:

After the sacrifices, it never took long before the patient saw some change.
That was our hospital which Nyasaye gave our forefathers.

Naming a child:

The Luo, Christian and non-Christian alike, still name their children after their dead relations. The decision to name a child after a particular person came through a dream or through the advice of a diviner. When a child cried persistently the father went to a diviner to find out the cause and what could be done. In almost all cases the cause of the persistent cry was diagnosed as a dead person wanting to be named.

The naming ceremony was simple. The father took a hen, rubbed it on the child and then called the name of the person wanting to be named. The hen was then thrown down and remained the property of the child. In certain cases food was prepared and people in the home feasted together. Meanwhile, the women babysat the child in turns calling it with the name.

The Luo offered sacrifices at the homestead whenever there were such problems as sick or dying children, wives' miscarriages, sickness among the men; flock not doing well and
wild animals destroying the crops in the fields, or where there were regular bad dreams by the people in the homestead. Such problems were not confined to any household but concerned the whole homestead.

When one or more of these misfortunes were known to be rampant in the homestead the man consulted a diviner as to what was wrong, and what could be done to help the situation. The following is a description of what was done:

People sacrificed when there was trouble in the home. In such cases they paid homage to their dead kin. Even me, some of my brothers died in war. I could go to a diviner who would tell me to offer sacrifices to my dead brothers. I would then take a hen and keep it covered with a basket outside. If a wild cat took it, then there would be no sacrifice. But if it stayed there till morning, I would sacrifice just there where it slept. I would then call the names of my brothers saying:

Take this and eat.
Do not bring evil spirits upon me.
Just bless me.

This is how people prayed during a sacrifice. Sometimes people sacrificed when they were poor. Such a person could collect maize, millet dung from the flocks and all the other things that were signs of wealth. These he could put together and with a roasted chicken call upon the names of the dead saying:

So and so, why am I poor and yet you were rich? Take these and eat and bring me wealth.

Before such a sacrifice was performed in the home, all the people concerned were invited or informed of the details of what was going to take place. The married daughters were asked to go
back to their husbands. Those who for some reason had left their husbands were asked to go and pay visits to their aunts or cousins wherever they were married.

On the morning of the sacrifice, all the people in the home gathered at the house of mikaye (headwife). The sacrificial animal, often a he-goat was then brought. One of the sons was asked to hold it while the father invoked the ancestors saying:

So-and-so and so-and-so, and so-and-so.
You are our ancestors and our protectors.
See, we have today brought you food. If this is acceptable, then let there be a sign.26

He then paused until the goat urinated or dropped dung. After that the goat was killed and skinned. Meanwhile each woman prepared ugali. In certain homes blood was drained from the cattle the previous evening. Where that was the case, the blood was boiled for the women to eat. Quails were also killed for the female ancestors were believed to like feeding on quails. After the goat was skinned a special dish was prepared composed of meat from various limbs of the animal, pieces of quail meat, boiled blood and all types of food that were going to be used there. The man then walked about his homestead, threw bits and pieces from this dish to all directions and said:

Onyango kwara, aa wuonya Uradi,
Un ma wakelonu chiemo. Yaye, Nyambogo dana,
aa nyar gi Ochieng'. To en ang'o, ma koyo
ng'eny ang'eny e dalani? Keluru kwe.
Dend wahia mondo okudhni.
Wang' chieng' aa Were Nyakalaga, irienynwa
maber. Yamo madibedie mondo ilorgo Imbo. Masiche madibed e dalaka mondo oke nono.27

Onyango my grandfather, you whose mother came from Uradi. It is to you that we have brought this food. And to you Nyambogo my grandmother, the sister of Ochieng', what is wrong that there is a lot of sickness in the home? Bring peace. May the children be in good health. The Sun, Were Nyakalaga, shine well for us. Any misfortune you should descend with to the west. Any evil forces that might be in this home should scatter.

While this was going on, the people present stayed still and quiet watching what was going on. When the father finished, the food was shared out and everybody in the home ate. Any visitor coming to the home in the course of the ceremony took part in the eating.

What we have described is what happened in the homestead of a man, his wives and children. The traditional Luo lived in fenced villages comprising a number of husbands, their wives and children. These were for the purpose of defence. Each of these villages had their owners, who was the man with whom the other people lived. When those other people wanted to offer minor sacrifices in their individual households, they informed the owner of the village. But where there was to be a major ceremony involving many people including possibly people from outside the village, then the owner of this particular village had to be asked either to officiate or to be present throughout the ceremony. Under no circumstances could such a sacrifice be
conducted in his absence. Where he was dead, then his widow played his role.

Though a number of people were involved in the sacrifices as we have described them above, they were nonetheless limited to individual households or homesteads. That is why we have referred to them as personal sacrifices. We shall now turn to communal sacrifices.

Earlier in the study we discussed the Luo concept of family and saw that families descended from one person made up a clan. The progenitor of such agnate families formed a unifying force to all members of the clan. We also saw that the clan was so tied together that sin by one member of the clan was sin for all and that the consequences of such a sin was the concern of all the members of the clan. In the event of any problem in the family or clan, the members called for the protection of their ancestors. This took the form of sacrifice to the ancestors, which provided a focus of great importance for the religious activities of the lineage.

There were many reasons why the Luo offered sacrifices to their ancestors. The living were in many ways obliged to the ancestors as the intermediaries between them and God and also as the custodians of the customary interdictions. Their funeral ceremonies had to be performed in the proper way and the living to observe the interdictions. Failure to fulfill an obligation by the living was believed to anger the dead and to make them cause trouble. Thus, when members of a clan felt something had gone wrong, they sent the senior member of the clan to a diviner to find out what had gone wrong and what could be done to repair the matter.
The diviner would tell the lineage or clan head, for example, that there was nothing serious except the ancestors were complaining that they had been neglected for a long time and that their friends were laughing at them. Secondly, the children in the clan did not know one another and were, as a result, shaming the ancestors by their behaviour. So all that was required was to give the ancestors food and to call the families together so that the youth could know one another. The diviner also told him what form the ceremony was to take, what colour of animals to be offered and when to perform the ceremony.

On his return, the clan head called all the heads of families of the clan to a meeting and briefed them on what the diviner had advised. At this meeting all the arrangements for the ceremony were discussed and resolved. On their return to their homes, the heads of families also called a meeting of members of the family and briefed them as to what had been decided. They made sure all the members of the clan received the information and all those who had gone to pay visits in some other places were called home for the occasion.

Sacrifices at this level were performed at the ancestral shrine (hembho), which was either at the graveyard of the founder of the clan, often at the deserted old home (Gunda) or under a huge tree where the man used to rest while still alive.

In most cases, hembho was the foot of a large tree where people could gather. There was nothing specially kept there, nor were people permanently living there. Things for sacrifice were kept in the homes, so there was nothing kept at a hembho......

2.
Each clan had a sacred place where such sacrifices could be performed. In certain cases the spirit of the ancestors was believed to reside in particular place, for example Kit Ochieng' (the stone of Ochieng') in South Gem Location of Siaya District. Ochieng', the progenitor of the Kathomo people died and was buried in Yimbo. But his spirit is believed to dwell in a huge rock in Ulamba sub-location of south Gem. Whenever the Kathomo people wanted to offer sacrifices to their ancestors they all gathered at this shrine.

Sacrifices at the clan level were officiated by the head of the clan and assisted by various heads of families of the clan. The day of the sacrifice was a great occasion. It was like going to battle. People were dressed in their traditional attire according to their ages. The woman sang and danced. The heroes of the clan wore their war attire and challenged their age mates into a mimic battle. The youth fought with sticks and also wrestled. The families brought with them their herds of cattle. The bulls from different families were praised as they charged and fought each other. It was a day of jubilation, which brought the families together and restored family solidarity. As to the procedure of the sacrifice, we shall quote a typical example described by an informant (not from Kathomo).

My ancestor Dok married four wives. His first wife Akombo, never gave birth. So she brought to her husband one of her cousins, also called Akombo. This again never gave birth. Dok went to the same family and married a third wife also called Akombo, a niece to the elder wife. This one gave birth to a son called Othieno Nyademba. Later Dok married Anduro who had two sons by the names Othieno Magaga and Opondo.
Recently these grandchildren of Dok went to offer sacrifices at their ancestor's grave. Food came from all the homes. The head of the family of Othieno Nyademba had a goat and fire while that of Othieno Magaga also took with them a goat and fire. When they got to the grave and all the people were ready, they wanted to know whose goat was acceptable to the ancestors. So Nyademba's family took their goat first. The ancestors were then provoked and asked to give a sign that they accepted the goat. Nothing happened. Then the Magaga group brought theirs forward. This pushed Nyademba's goat aside. As it stood there, the ancestors were provoked and asked for a sign. The goat immediately dropped faeces and urinated. This was followed by a huge shout of happiness. The women yodelled and made ululations and shouted again and again with joy. This goat was then killed first and the others followed.

The informant declined to go into the details of the prayers that were said at the ceremony. However, at every sacrifice the officiant named the ancestors, stated the problems they had in the clan and then asked the ancestors to come to their aid. Where the youth were a problem as we mentioned earlier, they were also reprimanded and asked to know that they were grandchildren of so-and-so and that any misbehaviour on their part annoyed the ancestors.

Sacrifices at the community level involved people who were not necessarily related. Such sacrifices were officiated by heads of the clan which was believed to have occupied the land first. Such sacrifices were offered at some raised ground (Kar hanga), often on a hill or mountain. The sacrifices were
not offered to any particular ancestor or set of ancestors, but to God. These were only necessary where there was fear of some epidemic in the land, or the land was believed to have been polluted and hence sacrifice for purifications was necessary. Such sacrifices were meant to allay misfortune and to avert calamity.

A case for Ancestor Worship:

The Luo have no specific word for worship. Their verbs which embrace all acts of worship are *lamo* and *sayo* which could be translated *invoke* and *request* respectively. *Lamo* could be for blessing (*gweth*) or misfortune (*kuong*) as in the case of curses. The Luo invoked their ancestors to bless the children or to visit them with some misfortune where they were disobedient and a disgrace to the parents and the community. But this was only among the affines. Where one was cursing a non-relative he could say *Nyasa ye noneni* meaning *Nyasa* will see you or see your sin and punish you for it. For blessing they simply said: 'May God bless you'.

The ancestors were at the same time *requested* to bless the people and to intercede for them before God. Where one was referring to a person not related to him, the request was made directly to God.

My argument here is that, at the secular level the Luo venerated their ancestors, particularly those who were just recently dead, for example the fathers and the first or second grandfathers. This they did because of the position the dead held as elders in the community, in the same way that they adored or venerated the living elders in the society. Because of this veneration and the feeling of dependence the Luo had for their ancestors, they worshipped them, asking for protection and succour. They called upon them to intercede for the living and carry their requests to God to whom they were now close. In other words, in their prayers, offerings and sacrifices, the Luo worshipped both their dead kin and God.
Worship of God

In all the examples we have described, we have shown the roles the ancestors are believed to play among the Luo. In the Luo conception, the ancestors rank next in authority to Nyasaye. They are thus regarded as agents that determine the well-being or distress which affect the clan or family or a household. Earlier we stated that the ancestors had the same attitude towards their descendants as they had during their lifetime. The strong belief of the community was that the dead members could be hungry or thirsty; they could become angry because of the bad behaviour of their children and happy when customs and social interdictions were observed. The maintainance of social sanctions was regarded as obedience to the ancestors and to God, and any violation had to be corrected by way of sacrifice.

Nonetheless, the major role the ancestors were believed to play in relation to God was that of intermediaries between the living and Nyasaye. In Luo culture it was an indication of lack of respect to walk to a superior asking for help unless it was a case where one was looking for immediate protection. In the same way the Luo never went to God directly asking for help. Instead they went through their ancestors whom they believed were closer to Nyasaye; and being senior members of the community they could talk to God on their behalf.

Where social interdictions had been violated the relationship between the living, ancestors and God had been interfered with. To restore the link the living offered sacrifices to the ancestors and to God where their sin was taken by the scapegoat (the sacrificed animal) and the chain
of relationship was reconnected. It is in this context that we could appreciate why the wise men had so much power and influence among the Luo. They were given the power by God for the benefit of the people. The religious officiants as sacrifices also had influence because they helped in maintaining the unity of the community.


3. Interview: Harun Awelo. (14.2.73).

4. This report is based on more than a hundred informants from the three districts of Siaya, Kisumu and South Nyanza where the Luo live.


6. Interview: Adriano Oduma (13.5.73).

7. Most of my informants attributed the lack of these shrines to the rise of the Maria Legio of Africa Church. Many of the people who until 1960 still practiced traditional religion were converted to Maria Legio.

8. Group Interview: Six Luo elders (13.2.74).

9. Interview: Origa Othieno (23.4.73).

10. Interview: Marcella Adera (12.5.73).

11. As we said in Chapter II there are many similarities between the Luo and Luyia acts of sacrifice which are themselves reflective of reciprocal borrowing.
12. Interview: Nyafula w/o Ong'ongo (13.10.73).


15. Paul Mboya stated this in a personal communication in relation to his other work which is unpublished and bears no title.

16. Interview: Daudi Obat (8.8.73).


Z. Okola & M. Were. *op. cit.* p. 16. See also Chapter III above.

18. Group Interview: (10.4.73).

19. The diviner asked me not to mention his name but was interviewed on 24.2.74.


21. Name to be kept secret, Interview: (24.2.74).

22. Interview: Obewa Okelo. (24.6.73). "If the diviner recommended a particular type of animal it had to be looked for. If it was found among somebody's livestock they just took it and later paid the owner whatever he wanted in return".
23. The names used here are ficticious as the informants declined to use names of their dead relations.

24. Interview: Amos Rayola (25.4.73).

25. Interview: Simeon Mang'are (24.4.73).

26. Ibid.

27. Interview: Okoth Gumba (23.9.73).

CONCLUSION

We are living at a time when people all over the world are getting more interested in the rich heritage of the African past. It is for the African scholar who speaks the language of a particular people to give account of the heritage of the people. In this venture we should not begin at the end, with the easy mediation upon what goes on in our time. Instead we need to consider the essence of our culture. Two concrete points are worth making, and they will also make clear something of the specific contribution of research on our religious heritage. First of all, a quest for a people's religious heritage must be concerned with historical tradition. This does not mean remaining uncritically within the narrow confines of a single tradition - how fortunate the historical symbiosis between differing peoples in Africa through interaction to their cultural heritage! Neither should we be overburdened, in the historicist fashion, with historical reminiscences whose relationship to life has either disappeared or has even been arbitrarily removed. Rather, what we need is an openness to experiences which go beyond the present time and place, and which, as remembered experiences, make a people's own time and place broader, deeper, richer and more beautiful, weightier and more serious. Secondly, a true humane culture includes something which is the fruit of a study of history; the ability to compare, to distinguish, to differentiate and to appreciate subtleties, and so to approach what is unfamiliar with a willingness to understand and to do justice even to what presents difficulties.
In the foregoing chapters I have attempted to show that the Luo world view was overwhelmingly a religious one. The basic structure of their religion was similar to those of many other African people's religions. They believed in a Supreme Being whom they called Nyasaye, whose goodness, wisdom and power was concealed in the many names by which the Luo called Him. He was however remote. More concerned with the daily affairs of men were the ancestral spirits to whom sacrifices were offered in time of need and calamity.

The religious quality of life was not peculiar to the Luo as works on other African societies reveal. Where relatively few natural explanations of happenings were known, supernatural explanations became particularly important. Thus the Luo, in the course of their history, devised a battery of socio-religious checks and balances, in the form of social interdictions to maintain the integrity of the community. Crimes of whatever kind and description were abhorrent abominations because they were offences against the ancestors (the founders of the tribe) and against God.

The traditional Luo values were taught to the young. All children were taught the proper attitude towards the elders, the ancestors and the observation of social interdictions. While the practical work was done outdoor and during the day time the teaching went on in siwindhe (the house of a widowed woman often a grandmother). One who expressed ignorance of the values was rebuked in the words:

Iming' ka manene ok onindo e siwindhe
(You are as uneducated as one who never slept in siwindhe).
The other classroom was *abila* (the hut of an old man). Here young men were taught about their role in the affairs of their homes, families and clans. They were also taught how to fight in battles. The history of the clans was related to them, as well as what battles had been fought and who the heroes were.

Briefly, that was the Luo situation towards the end of the last century and which situation runs through the greater part of the first half of this century. But by the time of this research a lot of changes had taken place and new values adopted. Most of the change that took place has been attributed to the presence of the Christian Missionary and the colonial administrator, an area which the present study does not deal with.

This discussion of the religious beliefs and practices of the Luo concentrated on their activities associated with God. Rites of passage, peace-making ceremonies, rituals relating to war, hunting, traditional dances, and travel have been omitted. However, from the foregoing it is evident that religious beliefs and practices contributed an important element to the data which help in the unravelling of oral history.

Like any other aspect of society taken in themselves, religious beliefs and practices do not provide a basis for absolute conclusions regarding a people's world view. Given human ingenuity and creativity, one hesitates to postulate an origin for a given idea such as the Luo idea of God. Practices taken from everyday life like spitting at the rising sun or on the hands of a son when the father is stating his will, tell us little. Nevertheless certain associations suggest themselves. A cattle-keeping people can be expected to develop pastoral practices as did the Nilotes like the northern Luo namely,
the Shilluk and the Nuer. Likewise a fishing community, and agricultural community will adopt appropriate ideas which reflect their way of life. When the presence of such ideas is supported with other evidence it does indicate convincing interaction and contact between peoples. This is what I have tried to show for the Luo of Kenya who combine pastoral, fishing and agricultural modes of life.

Furthermore, Luo history shows that traditional African beliefs and practices are not merely static entities to be taken as they exist and studied in a vacuum without reference to the historical processes which have gone to form them. Historians likewise must recognise the role played by religious beliefs and practices not in retarding change but providing the momentum which helped society to articulate and seek its goals, goals often verbalised and externalised in ritual before they were accomplished in fact.
1. Note the general works on African Traditional Religions like:


SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Primary sources

Ogutu, G.E.M.  **GUNDA - Luo Cultural Texts** Vols I, II & III.  
These are notes compiled from my field interviews of nearly five hundred people over the period October 1972 to February, 1974.

SIGANA - Luo Myths and Legends. These myths and legends were collected during the research period referred to above.

Mboya, P. Various unpublished documents on Luo cultural tradition.

B. Articles, dissertations and theses


Garry, A.M. "Ethnicity and Change in a group of Central Acholi Kingdoms". History Department, Makerere, 1971.

Abuso, P.A.  
"Religious Worship in Kuria Society"  
a paper read at the Limuru Historical Conference for the Study of Religion in Africa, 1974.

Ogot, B.A.  
"Concept of Jok" in African Studies  


Ogutu, G.E.M.  


Were, G.S.  

## Published Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher, Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abraham, W.A.</td>
<td>The Mind of Africa</td>
<td>Chicago, 1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayany, S.G.</td>
<td>Kar Chakruok Mar Luo</td>
<td>Nairobi, 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butt, Audrey.</td>
<td>The Nilotes of the Sudan &amp; Uganda</td>
<td>London, 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crazzolara, J.P.</td>
<td>The Lwoo, Part II, Lwo Traditions</td>
<td>Verona, 1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ehret, C.</td>
<td>Southern Nilotic History</td>
<td>Northwestern, 1972</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Malo, S.  Dhoudi Mag Central Nyanza (Nairobi, 1953).

Mayor, A.W.  Thuond Luo (Nairobi, 1957).

Mboya, P.  Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi (Nairobi, 1967).


McVeigh, M.J.  God in Africa (Claude Stark, 1974).

Ochieng', W.R. A Pre-colonial History of the Gusii of Western Kenya (Nairobi, 1974).


" (ed.) ZAMANI - A Survey of East African History (Nairobi, 1974).

Oguda, L.G. So They Say - Luo Folklore (Nairobi, 1970).

" African Religions in Western Scholarship (Nairobi, 1970).

" Religion of the Central Luo (Nairobi, 1971).


Onyango-Ogutu, B. Keep My Words (Nairobi, 1974).


Were, M. & Okola, Z. West Kenya Historical Texts (Nairobi, 1974).

Whisson, M. Weche Moko Mag Luo (Nairobi, 1936).

Change and Challenge (Nairobi, 1964).