

## DEATH AND RITUALS AMONG THE LUO IN SOUTH NYANZA

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**ABSTRACT** Luo, a Western Nilotic people, perform a series of rituals and many feasts for the dead because of their strong fear and respect for the dead. The paper describes several basic features of the rituals especially in connection with Luo gender relationship. There were differences found in the way how those rituals were performed, depending upon personal attributes of the dead, episodes of ancestors, and religious denominations. Socio-cultural changes were reflected in the rituals for the dead, brought about by modernizing and Christianizing processes, including intensified permeation of various Christian denominations in general, and African Independent Churches in particular.

**Key Words :** Luo Of South Nyanza; Rituals for the dead; Christianizaion; Gender relationship; Categories of personal attributes; African Independent Church.

### INTRODUCTION

The Luo are generally known in Kenya as a people who are seriously concerned with their burial place, far more than any other ethnic group. The now famous Otieno case in 1986-87 attracted much public attention: Court wranglings were repeated in the Nairobi High Court and the Supreme Court between the late S. M. Otieno's widow and his brothers about where his body must be buried. It was largely through this court case that many Kenyans came to recognize how deeply Luo people were preoccupied with their burial place.

The Luo attitude towards their burial place evidently shows how they fear and respect the deceased ancestors. They perform more than ten kinds of different rituals for the deceased, largely held in their rural homeland in the face of ongoing modernization and urbanization in overall Kenya.

During my five-month research in Luoland, I came across eleven cases of death, and attended twenty times, some parts of a whole series of these rituals. How do the Luo people conduct rituals for the dead? Details of the rituals differ for all the deceased, depending on the deceased's sex as well as the sex of participants in the rituals. A ritual is performed in certain, fixed ways to reflect how a particular death occurred, the good and bad deeds of the deceased, and the way the deceased and the ancestors performed the same rituals. There are some differences that reflect different areas. A tremendous change has occurred since the publication of Millikin (1906) and *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi* (Mboya, 1986 [1938]).

My fieldwork was carried out between October 1996 and February 1997 in Nyanza Province about twenty kilometers southeast of Homa Bay.

The Luo, Western Nilotic people, inhabit the shores of the Lake Victoria and its interior in western Kenya. Luoland is subdivided into numerous segmentary units,

*i.e.*, clans and lineages, and the characteristics of a Luo clan are much the same as those of the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard, 1965 [1949]; Southall, 1952). People in my research site belong to Kanyamwa clan, which currently consists of groups in three Locations, *i.e.*, Central Kanyamwa, Western Kanyamwa, and Eastern Kanyamwa. My research site was Kuwandiku Sub-location, Central Kanyamwa, Ndhiwa Division, Homa Bay District.

Kanyamwa clan people plant maize, a variety of beans, sweet potatoes, and groundnuts. Sugarcane is not so popular as a cash crop in the area. They do not keep many heads of cattle, the average being less than five heads per household. Many people engage in small business. Women sell crops and home products at the local markets, while some men sell daily commodities of soap, oil, bread, biscuits, notebooks, and pencils, at markets and kiosks, and others work in the towns such as Homa Bay and Rongo, Kisumu and Nairobi.

## RITUALS FOR THE DEAD

Luo people perform a total of about fourteen rituals for one deceased. All rituals are performed only when elderly men died, and a certain number of rituals are omitted depending upon age, sex, and marital status of the deceased. First, I will provide a list of a series of rituals in successive order of their occurrence, and then explain each ritual.

- 1) Death announcement
- 2) Vigil (*budho*)
- 3) Grave digging (*kunyo*)
- 4) Burial (*iko*)
- 5) Accompanying the spirit of the deceased to the former battleground (*tero buru matin*)
- 6) Shaving (*liedo*)
- 7) Mourners' departure for their houses (*kee*)
- 8) Serving a meal to the deceased and its family by married women (*yaodhoot*)
- 9) Serving a meal to the deceased and its family by married women (*tedo*)
- 10) Going to the former battleground with the spirit of the deceased (*tero buru maduong'*)
- 11) Visiting the widow's natal home (*tero cholla*)
- 12) Dividing articles left by the deceased (*keyo nyinyo*)
- 13) Remembrance (*rapar*)
- 14) Serving a meal to the family of the deceased by affines (*budho*)

### I. Death and Its Announcement

People come to know of a death by hearing the women's long, quivering wail, followed by the sound of drums. The death is always announced in the early morning or in the evening. Never have I heard this wail in broad daylight.

There are rules prescribing the time of announcement. The time varies with the dead person's age, sex, and occupation. If a baby died in the morning, its death is

announced immediately, and its body is buried the following morning. If old men or diviners died, their death must be announced after sunset, that is, women must wait for the right time to start wailing.

## II. Vigil (*budho*)

The close relatives of the deceased such as the spouse(s), parents, step-mothers, brothers and sisters, and first and second patrilineal cousins, must stay within the compound of the deceased throughout several nights until the burial day. Two to four days pass before the burial, because relatives living in cities have to return to their rural homeland.

A lamp is lit through the vigil. Inside the house of the deceased, stools are placed for as many relatives and church members as possible. Whenever new visitors arrive for condolence, some must step outside to make room.

Men and women form separate groups within the compound. Especially on the day of the death, they continue to cry and sing their lamentations and war songs throughout the night. Christian songs are sung if the dead person and his/her close kin are Catholics or followers of overseas-based Protestant Churches. People who belong to the Roho, an African Independent Church, pray, while they dance and play drums and metal instruments.

Most of the vigil visitors follow either Catholic or Protestant ways of expressing condolence. However, as they step slowly inside the house, older women and men may start crying and call out the name of the dead person as if talking to the body.

Outside the house, some sit on stools and others sleep on the African mats under the eaves. Men make fire called *magenga* near the house for warmth, because it becomes very cold at night, about 10 °C. They say that this fire is made also for the departed to warm him/herself. The vigil continues up to the burial.

From the day following the death, the surviving family and relatives of the deceased busy themselves to prepare for the burial service: building the shade, cooking for visitors, and preparing the coffin and cloth. They must take a day off to fulfill their share of such obligations.

Neighbours start turning up to bid farewell to the deceased for the last time. Married women raise a strange voice before entering the compound to announce their arrival. Men enter the compound playing their whistles and singing their own elegies. These visitors go straight into the house where the body is laid without greeting other people, and then they pray, sing, or cry in their own ways. After a while they come out of the house, greet other people and join them.

The relatives stay within the deceased's compound during the mourning hours, which is called *padho*, meaning 'sitting without doing anything.' Most of the neighbours usually leave the compound in twos and threes after spending two or three hours. Some old people in particular, stay in the compound during the daytime. Most who come to pay condolence on the burial day are either married or marriageable.

### III. Grave Digging (*kunyo*)

According to some old men, people used to dig a grave in the daytime in the old times. These days, people prepare the grave in midnight before the burial day, because, they say, it is too exhausting to dig under the strong sun. Digging begins around 9 p.m. and is completed about 3 to 4 a.m. of the burial day. Sometimes it takes many hours because of the rocks in the soil. Young and middle-aged male relatives and several neighbours join forces in digging.

The right place for the grave is decided by a church member or any of the deceased's male kin, including the father and the father's brother. Men with pregnant wives are not allowed to participate in grave digging. If they did, their wives would give premature birth. Nor are twins allowed to participate in digging the grave.

### IV. Burial (*iko*)

For deceased adults, the burial ritual normally starts at 2 o'clock p.m. The father or one of brothers of the deceased presides over the proceeding of the ritual. The program of the ritual includes: speeches about the memories of the deceased by parents, brothers and sisters, children, and friends, etc.; a *harambee* asking for donations to cover expenses for lamp oil, food, and other items which are consumed for this occasion; and several political speeches by politicians. Then, burying the body ensues.

Because these speeches and the *harambee* take a long time, the surviving family are sometimes forced to serve a meal to their affines before the burial takes place. Other mourners are served a meal after the burial. The surviving family and other relatives eat and sleep inside the compound of the deceased for one full week, which is followed by the *buru*.

### V. Accompanying the Spirit of the Deceased to the Former Battleground (*tero buru matin*)

This performance marks the beginning of *cholla* (mourning period). It can be done one or two weeks after the burial. To begin this ritual, several relatives take their cattle to the deceased's compound early in the morning around seven o'clock. This ritual is performed only for a man, and participants are also basically men. Men and boys who include neighbours and relatives of the deceased take their own cattle and goats to the former battlefield located along the boundary between the clans. The cattle of the deceased are also taken there by the relatives. They kill a cock without using a knife, and divide and eat pieces of the meat. Sometimes a hen is substituted for the cock. Then, they return to the home of the deceased.

Men and cattle form a cheerful procession. Men blow horns of buffaloes and rhinoceroses (*oporro*), and play drums (*bul*).

On their way home, the procession swells, as more men and women join them. The procession becomes longer and noisier as people sing and play the instruments more and more loudly. Women hold up leafy branches, some men raise their spears,

and other men wearing traditional hats and mantles of animal skins, hold up shields and clubs.

Returning near the home of the deceased, people become extremely excited. They shout, cry, and run with tree branches, spears, and shields in their hands. Some blow whistles and others play drums and metal instruments (*ongeng*’).

There are also many people waiting at the deceased’s compound. People in the procession struggle to rush into the compound through the main gate, taking their cattle with them. Upon entering the compound, they start running about, crying and shouting. Some cry loud and throw their body on to the grave. Others continue to repeat entering the house and the main gate, while crying. This spectacular scene continues for 20 to 30 minutes. Later, the participants and visitors are served a meal. While all this take place, other relatives slaughter one of a few heads of cattle for this ritual. Sometimes a group of musicians are invited. They play traditional music and people dance until dawn.

This ritual reminds the people of the time when forefathers engaged in inter-clan wars. When one member lost his life in a battle, the forefathers worried that their fighting power might diminish. Thus, an idea was born that the loss of one member should be compensated by killing one of their enemies.

According to the old men, people went for the *buru* early in the morning before burial in the old days. Later, they went two days after burial. And nowadays, two kinds of the *buru*, major and minor, are conducted.

The burial was formerly done on the day following the death. People other than those participating in the *buru* were in charge of preparing the grave. After the participants in the *buru* returned, the burial was held at noon. Participants of the *buru* was divided into two groups. The first one had their own special function to practice divination on whether they had a good chance of winning if they tried to kill one enemy to compensate for the life of the deceased. This was the reason why the first group included some fighters and a diviner, together with a cock and cattle. When they reached the boundary, the diviner killed the cock and conducted divination by examining its intestines. With bad omen, they returned home. With good omen, the second group consisting of fighters and cattle were called, and the two groups joined for a battle.

People give following reasons for performing the *buru*:

- 1) To chase away the evil spirits,
- 2) To have the many spirits of war heroes of yore and new spirits join them for this occasion. Eating chicken killed on the battlefield symbolized such solidarity,
- 3) To remove the shadow (spirit) of the deceased. The *buru* must be done by the river, because they believe that the shadow will go away through the river. The shadow must be taken away from the home, otherwise it lingers,
- 4) To drive the evil spirits to the bush or to the enemies,
- 5) To identify who may make a good leader and who is brave and skillful in war tactics.
- 6) To demonstrate that they have lost a member of their community.

The Roho people conduct ‘*buru* for women,’ which was not strictly a Luo tradition and therefore not always performed. This *buru* is called *suda* among the Roho.

## VI. Shaving (*liedo*)

Four days after the burial, people shave their heads. A razor blade is usually used. The first shave is supposed to mark the beginning of the mourning period. At the end of mourning, those who were shaven are shaven again, which marks the beginning of their new life.

There are three types of shaving. The first one is for the spouse(s) of the deceased and children of the deceased, conducted one or two weeks after the burial. It marks the beginning of the mourning taboos. In the old days, people were shaven soon after the *buru matin* before the relatives departed for their home.

The second one is for children, between two weeks and one month after the burial. After shaving, the children are free to step out of the compound. This leaves the widow(s) to follow the mourning taboos.

The third is done to free the widow(s) from the mourning taboos. After this, a widow can choose a man who inherits her in the *tero cholla*, explained later. The shaving used to be conducted at the *keyo nyinyo* when the articles of the deceased were distributed.

The first and second shaving must be performed soon after death, but the third can take place one month, one year, or even two years after the burial. Nowadays, however, most people do not heed the above-mentioned three types of shaving, which must be done at different times. They perform all the shaving once and for all, and shave only a little on the back of their head in a symbolic manner.

## VII. Mourners' Departure for Home (*kee*)

The *kee* refers to the members of surviving family and other relatives returning to their respective home in order of age. The first-born departs first, followed by the second, then the third, and finally they all depart. This whole process may take place in just one day, a few days, or even one week depending on the number of sons and daughters in the family of the deceased. It is because only one person a day departs. The relatives who do not have to be shaven may stay for a while and go home only after they made sure that the shaving (*liedo*) was done early in the morning, following the day of the *tero buru matin*. The *kee* is normally completed one week after the shaving.

The period between the death and the *kee* is called *budho*, which actually refers to the mourning period, and literally means 'sitting without doing anything,' because people are supposed to stay within the deceased person's compound without doing any worthwhile work.

## VIII. Serving a Meal to the Deceased (*yaodhoot*)

The relatives return to the deceased's home once again soon after returning home. Married women (*wagoguni*) bring food and cook to comfort those who remained, such as children and spouse(s) of the dead person. They invite neighbours to share the meal. They think that eating together with the deceased pleases him/her. They celebrate the occasion by dancing, playing music, drinking local beer to try their

best to forget the sad event.

Literally, *yaodhoot* means ‘opening the door,’ which implies that the survivors start their new life. Some explain that *wagoguni* return to open the door, which has been shut since the person died. After the door is opened, the surviving family start a new life. Others say, “we do not do this for bachelors, because they don’t have their own family. For whose sake the married women must open the door? They don’t have a wife or children who should live in his home after he died.”

At present, people perform the *yaodhoot* for every death of an adult. If the surviving family have many domestic animals, they slaughter some of them for their guests. Otherwise they buy fish and meat in the market.

#### IX. Serving a Meal to the Deceased (*tedo*)

The *tedo*, which literally means cooking, follows the *yaodhoot*. On the day of the *tedo* the sons and daughters return to their natal home to cook for the dead mother or father. Children contribute a certain amount of various kinds of food according to their income.

The first-born, son or daughter, is the first person to open the fireplace, and the food he/she contributed should be cooked first. The food include meat, fish, and sugar, and depend on what the family like to eat. The relatives should be informed of the day of the *tedo* in advance. They come that day to celebrate the occasion with the children of the dead person. It is just like a get-together party for the children and their relatives.

#### X. Going to the Former Battleground with the Spirit of the Deceased (*tero buru maduong*)

This ritual is performed only for the death of elderly men. This *buru* is performed on a much larger scale than the previous *buru*: *buru maduong*’ means ‘big *buru*’ while the previous *buru matin* means ‘small *buru*.’ The family and relatives of the dead man take their cattle to the former battlefield in the same way as they did in the small *buru*. This time, however, they do not kill a cock in the field. Returning to the compound, they find a lot more people and far more abundant food than in the small *buru*. The relatives slaughter many heads of cattle, called *dher buru*, and goats, and serve local alcoholic beverage including *changa*, *busa*, and *mbare*. They invite traditional musicians and dancers.

The people must prepare a huge amount of food and much money for this occasion. This is why they must set the day of the big *buru* to come right after harvesting with much of maize and sorghum for preparing food and drinks.

#### XI. Visiting the Widow’s Natal Home (*tero cholla*)

This is the ritual which ends the mourning. Right after this ritual, the surviving family members start their new life, and the surviving spouse starts his/her life with a new partner. Widows, in particular, must have a man in her mind as her prospective inheritor before the day of the *tero cholla*. If a husband died, the widow and her

eldest son pay a visit to the home of the widow's parents. They spend only one night there. The following day, before departure, a goat called *cholla* is slaughtered. Part of its meat is eaten by the widow's parents and the rest is taken by the widow to her home.

The widow's prospective inheritor (sing. *jater*; pl. *joter*) sleeps in the widow's house while she is visiting her natal home. When the widow returns, she cooks the meat she brought back. The widow and her inheritor eat the meat. They engage in sexual intercourse that night, and the man must prove that he is a real inheritor. Then, the inheritor starts building their new house, helped by the widow.

A widow too old to have sex selects a man who is about her age. When she returns from her natal home, her inheritor prepares a fireplace for cooking. She cooks and they eat together. They spend the night without sex. But the inheritor must keep inside the house his belongings. This is done so that visitors may know that the old man and woman stay together and love each other. With a young widow, it is practically impossible for any man to inherit her and not have sex.

If a wife died, the widower follows the mourning taboos only when she was the first wife. In that event, the husband takes his children to the deceased's parents. They stay one night and return the following day. The children are given meat or a hen by their grandparents.

The parents of the dead wife sometimes give one of their unmarried daughters to the husband as his new wife. The daughter normally comes over to the husband's home on the day of the *tero cholla*. She begins to live in the house and inherit whatever her sister had. If the husband marries some other woman, he should build a new house for her.

## XII. Dividing the Articles Left by the Deceased (*keyo nyinyo*)

This is the occasion when the family and relatives divide between themselves articles left by the deceased, such as clothes, furniture, dishes, calabashes, and cooking pots. Land and animals are divided among surviving sons not that day, but some other day.

Women leave behind many things or few things largely depending upon how old they were when they died. Old women may leave behind many cooking pots, water pots, and dishes. Old men would leave clothes, three-legged stool (*komnya luo*), spear, shield, mantle, animal skins, and horns of animals he hunted.

## XIII. Remembrance (*rapar*)

This is the ritual in which the relatives get together in the dead person's home to remember, comfort, and please the dead person. The parents, children, brothers and sisters, and affines of the deceased come and enjoy a lot of food together. The host invites his neighbours and arrange a dance which continues through the night of the *rapar*:

The relatives may build a small temporary hut (*akumba*) if the original hut is gone. The first thing the married daughters (*wagoguni*) of the dead person should do upon their arrival is to enter the hut and put their luggages and clothes inside as a



sign of greeting the dead person. They then start cooking in the small space inside the hut and cut the meat of the animal, slaughtered for the dead person. People surround the hut and eat together. The spouse of the deceased must sleep inside the hut during the night of the *rapar*. The following day, the spouse pulls down the hut.

Because this ritual requires heavy expenses, it depends on the relatives' finances how many times they hold the *rapar* for the dead person.

#### XIV. Serving a Meal to the Family of the Deceased by Affines (*budho*)

This is a ritual feast organized by affines. The purposes of this feast are to make sure the relationship between affines even after the death of the mediator and to consort the remaining family. The affines set the day after preparing enough money and food for the feast. So the *budho* may take place before the *rapar*. On the day, the affines come with maize flours and animals for slaughter. Since affines have the relationship called *luor*, which means respect and fear, they are expected to reach the compound of the dead after sunset (*agi an'gich welo*) and to stay only for one night without sleeping. Following morning, they return home.

### CASE STUDIES AND ANALYSIS

#### I. Two Case Studies

I provide two examples of the proceeding of rituals for the dead. For useful comparison, one example is for a man and the other for a woman.

##### 1. Rituals for the Death of an Old Man, A

The old man died soon after I settled in my research site. I attended rituals from the vigil to the *tero buru maduong*, which took five months:

- 21/10/96 The old man lay in his sickbed.
- 23/10/96 His sons built a small hut. A polygynous husband must be buried in front of his first wife's house. This old man had lost his first wife and her house was demolished. The small hut built by his sons was a substitute for the first wife's house.
- 25/10/96 Death at 7 p.m.  
~4 days Announcement of his death
- 29/10/96 Grave digging from 8 p.m.
- 30/10/96 Burial from 2 p.m. and music and dance
- 01/11/96 Music and dance
- 02/11/96 *Tero buru matin* music and dance
- 03/11/96 Music and dance
- 16/11/96 *Yaodhoot*
- 21/02/97 Music and dance
- 22/02/97 The *tero buru maduong*' music and dance
- In June 97 *Tero cholla*
- Date not fixed *Keyo nyinyo*

Date not fixed *Rapar*

## 2. Rituals for the Death of an Old Woman, B

I started visiting her home on the day she died. I attended the ritual events up to the *yaodhoot* (*nyago bandera*) performed on 8/2/97. The whole ritual events were as follows:

Around the end of Nov. 1996. She lay in her sickbed.

26/12/96 Death at 5 a.m.

Announcement of her death.

One of the Roho churchmen hoisted the Roho flag.\*

27/12/96 A ram was slaughtered in the morning.

28/12/96 Slaughter of a cow in the morning.

Grave digging from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. the following day.

29/12/96 Slaughter of a cow music and dance in the morning.

Burial from 2 p.m.

30/12/96 Music and dance

31/12/96 Arrival of sons-in-law.

Arrival of brothers, their wives, sons, and friends.

01/01/97 *Chier*\* (resurrection) from 5 a.m.

02/01/97 Music and dance

03/01/97 Music and dance

08/02/97 *Nyago bandera*\* (and *yaodhoot*)

In Dec. 97 *Suda*\*

Date not fixed *Nindo oko* (*tero cholla*)

Note: Activities marked with asterisks are done for the Roho members only.

## 3. Personal Attributes of the Two Dead Persons

A:

old man,

married,

polygynist,

had lost his first wife,

had sons,

belonged to Pentecostal Church, but, in fact, a pagan.

B:

old woman,

married,

married a monogamist husband,

had lost husband,

had sons.

belonged to the Roho Israel, an African Independent Church.

The above personal attributes of the two dead persons were important in examining differences in the proceeding of the rituals for the dead. The major attributes causing difference in the ritual proceedings of the two cases were sex and religious

denominations. The rituals marked with asterisks were performed only because B was a Roho follower.

How about other cases? Are there other personal attributes that bring about further difference in the ritual proceeding?

## II. Analysis

First, I point out that there are two kinds of difference in the ritual proceeding: first, the number of ritual events; and second, the ways rituals are performed. I now summarize such difference in the ritual proceeding as based on different personal attributes of the deceased.

### 1. Categories of Personal Attributes and Concordant Ritual Events

The organizer of each ritual first examines personal attributes of the dead person such as sex and age, then plans the ritual accordingly. I will enumerate the important attributes below:

#### 1) Infant

An infant is yet to be accorded its gender identity, hence no ritual activities, but just a burial is organized.

#### 2) Male

##### (a) Old married man with children

All the rituals described above are performed. Death is announced between the sunset and sunrise. Burial is in the afternoon, not in the morning. The burial place and how the body is laid down depend upon the sex. The body is buried sideways or on the right side of his first wife's house ('right' and 'left' directions follow the Luo usage, i.e., directions looked out from the door of the first wife's house). The body is placed in such a way as it faces the gate of his compound so that he may command a view of the whole compound. If the first wife's house is already demolished, the dead man's sons and relatives build a temporal hut instead of the case of A. There are cases where the husband and his sons try to preserve his first wife's house so that it may be used when he dies.

At the *liedo*, his wife/wives must be shaved. For the *yaodhoot* and the *tedo*, his married daughters and sisters must return to cook for the deceased. For the *tero cholla*, each of his wives puts on her dead husband's clothes and visits her natal home, accompanied by her first son. Upon reaching her natal home, she takes off the clothes and stays for one night. The following day, she is given a goat by her parents and return home with it.

##### (b) Married man with his own compound

All the rituals described above except the *buru maduong'* are conducted in this case. If the man died childless, his mother, in addition to his wife, also must be shaved at the *liedo*, and his married sisters come to the *yaodhoot* and the *tedo*. For the *tero cholla*, each of his *maduong'* wives goes to her natal home alone.

##### (c) Married man without his own compound

Except the *buru maduong'*, every ritual is performed. Luo men must be buried in the compound they belong to. A man without his own compound is buried on the right side of his natural mother's house in his father's compound.

If the deceased did not have his own hut (*simba*) and died before his wife, his relatives must build a temporal small hut (*akumba*) for him before burial. This is because his hut is the landmark for the place of his wife's grave. His wife must be buried on the left side of his hut.

(d) Unmarried adult male

The rituals in this case are performed almost in the same way as for the married man without his own compound. But only his married sisters come for at the *yaodhoot* and the *tedo*. For the *tero cholla*, his natural mother visits her natal home. If the deceased son was the firstborn, she is given a goat from her parents.

(e) Unmarried young boy

None of the rituals is performed in this case. Nor is the *buru matin*. He is buried on the right side of his mother's house. According to some people, his parents must be shaven at the *liedo*.

3) Female

(a) Old married woman with children

Except the *buru*, all the rituals are performed as in the case of an old man. Her body is laid sideways on her right shoulder. Her body is buried on the left side of her house, with her head facing it. At the *liedo*, her husband and children are shaven.

There are two kinds of the *yaodhoot* and the *tedo*. One is organized by her husband, the other by her close relatives, e.g., her mother and brothers, in her natal village. For the *yaodhoot* and the *tedo*, her mother, sisters, and her brothers' wives are expected to come for cooking. For the *tero cholla*, her husband and first son go to her natal home with her clothes on, and stay for one night. They return the following day, leaving her clothes in her natal home, after they are given a goat by her parents. If she died childless, only her husband is shaven for the *liedo*, and for the *tero cholla* only her husband goes to her natal home.

(b) Married woman with her own house in her husband's compound

The same rituals ensue as for an old woman. But if her husband had paid no bridewealth to her parents, he must give them at least a few heads of cattle before he buries her.

(c) Married woman whose husband did not have his own compound

The same as above. Her husband is buried on the right side of his mother's house, and she is buried on the left of his house called *simba* built in his father's compound.

(d) The first wife (*mikayi*), the second wife (*nyachira*), the third wife (*rero*), etc.

According to some men, they perform a whole series of rituals only for the first wife, because the first wife is the only true wife and the rest are not.

(e) Unmarried adult woman

The burial place of an unmarried woman is a problem. Generally, adult women are not supposed to be buried at her natal home. If she died before marriage, her parents ask any of her elder sisters' husbands or a male immigrant in their community to bury her body in his compound so that she would be treated as if she were his wife. If her parents cannot find anybody willing to comply with their request, they would bury the body outside their compound. In that event, the dead woman is believed to curse her living family members.

(f) Unmarried young girl

She is buried on the left side of her mother's house. None of the rituals is performed after her burial. In recent years, single mothers are ever increasing. Sometimes I heard parents of those single mothers grumbling about where they should bury their daughters, if the latter happen to die in their compound.

In the traditional Luo initiation ceremony, the lower front incisors of both boys and girls in puberty were extracted. This custom, however, disappeared almost completely after Kenya's independence. As a result, it has become difficult to distinguish between unmarried, initiated, and non-initiated girls. This ambiguity is now further compounded by increasing numbers of single mothers.

## 2. Ancestral Deeds and Subsequent Change in the Rituals

I describe here some other factors that affect the ways the ritual are performed. It is now almost a hundred years since the Kanyamwa clan members ceased to kill a cock at the *buru* because some forefathers forgot to take a cock to their former battlefield during the *buru* for Oswago, one of Kanyamwa's greatest ancestors. Their explanation for this is that they cannot do what was left out for any of their ancestors.

A part of Kagan people moved to the Kanyamwa clan area. After they settled down there, they also discontinued killing a cock at the *buru*. One of their ancestors was a devout follower of a certain independent Christian Church. When he died, his brothers did not kill a cock at his *buru*, because they knew that it was strictly forbidden by the teaching of his Church.

As is shown in the above two cases, a certain discrete episode that happened to one of clan ancestors can influence the ways a ritual is performed by living members of the clan. As a result, a certain ritual event which was formerly performed may be discontinued. According to a general Luo belief, they must follow whatever their ancestors did or did not, which indicates the seniority principle prevailing in everyday life.

Nowadays, however, the extent this principle is faithfully abided by is eroding, because some people perform rituals in whatever way they choose, ignoring what happened to their ancestors.

## 3. Variety of Religious Denominations

The process of burial service and other rituals vary according to religious denominations. In the Catholic burial service, for example, holy water taken from the spring inside the church is used. But some other denominations do not use holy water. Every church has its own hymns for different occasions.

In the death of a pagan, none of church functionaries comes to preside over the burial and other rituals. People just attend the rituals as they wish. Even without church members, somebody will start singing a certain hymn while people throw the soil into the grave.

I will here elaborate on the Roho. Basically, the Roho members follow the traditional Luo ways of performing rituals, but they are also influenced to a certain degree by Christianity because of their early immersion in Christian belief. For example, the Roho Church has a ritual called *chier*, which is a direct Luo translation of the Resurrection. What in fact is done at the *chier* is *harambee* to collect contri-

butions for the sake of dead person's surviving family.

Roho members perform the *buru* even for a dead woman. They call this ritual *suda*, not *buru*. They say that there is no difference between the *suda* and the *buru*. During the *suda*, people go to a certain holy place and chase away the evil spirits as they play music.

Apparently, however, there are several differences between the *buru* and the *suda*. At the *buru*, some men wear warrior clothes and go to the former battlefield together with their cattle. At the *suda*, all people wear Roho uniforms and go to their holy place. In addition, both men and women belonging to the same Roho church must attend their member's *suda* even if they are not related to the dead person.

Several times I witnessed the burials where some people expressed their grief in the traditional Luo way while others followed the Christian way within the same compound.

#### 4. Attendance at the Rituals

Those belonging to the same church as the deceased are expected to attend all rituals performed for him/her. The same is also expected from the members of the same cooperative associations as the deceased.

There are three kinds of self-help associations specially organized for funerals: one consists of relatives, another consists of the church members, and the other is based on the place of work. People can belong to all or any of these different associations. When a member dies, his association(s) prepare the coffin and cloths, and members attend the rituals. If the deceased did not belong to any such association, his/her family and relatives must prepare everything for the burial, and the attendance is usually very small, consisting of relatives only.

Normally, a surviving family try to perform the whole series of rituals, but sometimes they cannot afford to do so due to finance and leave out a few rituals, such as the *yaodhoot* and the *tedo*. All the relatives of the deceased are expected to attend the *buru* and the *liedo* at least, but some may not do so because of the teaching of their Christian Church.

There are different roles to be played by attendants of the rituals. Women make the death announcement. During the *yaodhoot* and the *tedo*, married women bring food and prepare it for the dead person, the surviving family, and visitors. Men go to the former battlefield during the *buru*, because the participants act as if they were warriors and participate in a mimic battle. Some women are expected to wait for the *buru* procession returning from the battlefield, and others are required to prepare food in the dead person's compound.

## CONCLUSION

In the present study on the rituals for the dead in Luo society, I found that various Christian Churches operating in Luoland have had an influence upon the ways those rituals are performed. In my research site, there are seven Christian and independent denominations. African Independent Churches, in particular, have entered everyday life as they rapidly spread and split among themselves. The Roho have invented the

new *buru* for dead women, others maintain their own traditional ways, and yet others follow Christian teachings.

The Luo rituals for the dead provide the people with the occasion to express their feelings of pain and deep grief by bitterly crying and singing their own lamentations. On the other hand, it is also an occasion where the dead person's richness, greatness, and seniority are displayed.

The rituals let the people please the dead by serving food and showing their dance. They try their best to hold feasts for the dead as many times as possible, in spite of their income and simple life. For the surviving family of the dead, the *yaodhoot* and the *tedo* mean large expenses, while for guests they are great entertainment, in which they can meet friends, dance, and enjoy food. A person who comes with his cassette player earns some money by renting it to the dance party.

For some grooms or recently married husbands, a series of these rituals offer the only occasion to visit the bride's or wife's parents. The Luo used to hold many different marriage ceremonies between the both sides of affines. But, now as most of these ceremonies are left undone, there are many young men who have never been to their partner's home. When these rituals are held in the vicinity of their partner's natal home, such men can make the most of these occasions by visiting their present or future parents-in-law. By being invited to the latter's home, they will be formally admitted as the authentic husband.

Finally, I would like to mention two points regarding the background of changes found in the performance of the rituals: One is the expansion of Christianity, and the other is the ever frequent social interaction all over Luoland caused by the development of means of transportation as well as communication.

The recent development of transportation network prompted by new roads and increasing numbers of vehicles has facilitated the growth of small business, which in turn contributed to an increase in people's income. Thus, many people today can afford fares for public vehicles such as a small bus (*matatu*) or a big bus to take them to many rituals for the dead. This situation is also enhanced by the development of means of communication, such as postal service, telex, facsimile, and radio broadcasting.

People who attend rituals held in distant places naturally become informed of how the rituals are performed differently. Some may adopt it back home disregarding traditional ways. Thus, inventions and transformations of Luo culture are now emerging in ritual activities today, molding an intermixed product of Christianity and indigenous tradition.

To take the example of the Kanyamwa clan, people ceased, almost a century ago, to take a cock to their former battlefield during the *buru*. Some younger Kanyamwa people, not taught about this particular knowledge by their elders, recently started taking a cock to their forefathers' battlefield, just because they learned it somewhere else.

When I visited an old man to ask about how to mourn a dead person, he showed me his intense grief and said, "No other young person has once come to me to ask such a question as yours. They will some day forget every true way we have followed for so many years."

I sincerely wish my short description of the rituals for the dead, as I saw them in

Kanyamwa together with my many Luo friends, is reviewed and corrected by Kanyamwa people, young people in particular.

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