

Ghosts and Cleansing amongst the Luo People of Kenya in 2000

An explanation of how Christianity is
understood by an African people

intended to help missionaries and Bible teachers
in their task

Research carried out in conjunction with Global Mapping International

Jim Harries

Ghosts and Cleansing amongst the Luo People of Kenya in 2000

An explanation of how Christianity is
understood by an African people

intended to help missionaries and Bible teachers
in their task

Research carried out in conjunction with Global Mapping
International
February 2001

Jim Harries

Kima International School of Theology
PO Box 75
Maseno
Kenya

Email: [Jim Harries <jimoharries@gmail.com>](mailto:jimoharries@gmail.com)

Introduction

Many studies of ‘traditional African life’ have been made and Christian theology has been deeply researched in the West. What is little understood is how these two come together. How does the Christian Gospel brought by Westerners come to be interpreted by people from an African background? This study aims to show a part of how Christianity is understood and practised by the Luo, so as to raise the level of understanding of outsiders seeking to work with Luo Churches.

A hypothesis is proposed in Section 1. The second section explains the methodology underlying this field research. Section 3 explains the findings on *jochiende* (ghosts), followed by section 4 that looks at *puodhruok* (cleansing). Finally Section 5 looks at conclusions and recommendations for action and further research.

The field research was carried out in the Yala Division of Siaya District in Nyanza Province of Kenya in October and November 2000.

Thanks go especially to Dr. Stan Nussbaum for his many helpful comments in the course of supervising this research, to Kima International School of Theology where the research was written up and to my Christian colleagues in Luoland who helped me to get a better understanding of their lives and of their churches.

Word definitions

Puodhruok
Jachien (*Jochiende* pl.)

Cleansing
Ghost

Section 1. Hypothesis

The original hypothesis: **“Luo Christians filter Western theological input through Luo views of *jochiende* (ghosts) and *puodhruok* (cleansing) producing a form of Christianity that most Westerners neither grasp nor address.”**

That Western Christian visitors often fail to speak meaningfully to African churches is widely acknowledged. Discovering the foundations to this difficulty has proved hard. Language is certainly often a barrier to good mutual understanding. Some difficulties are ‘simply’ ascribable to language, but many run much more deeply through culture. Communicating the Gospel and Christian teaching across vast cultural chasms is no mean task.

In some circles in the West people are inclined to think that for Africans to understand, Christian teaching needs to be simple. It is hence implicitly suggested that Africans are simple people, with simple minds and simple lives. By contrast people of European origin live complex lives and have a sophisticated way of thinking. This fails to consider that there may be a ‘sophistication’ in Africa that is different but every bit as complex as that in Western nations.

This is a foundational premise in this project. Complexity in Western thinking often revolves around issues of rationality and technology. Such are arguably little developed or absent in ‘traditional’ Africa. Complexity in African thinking, it is here proposed, often revolves around issues concerning cleansing and spiritual beings. Such are little developed or absent in the ‘modern’ West.

It is the failure to grasp these issues and this complexity that makes Christian teaching from the West to be consistently misinterpreted or to appear like the babbling of fools. The acceptance or rejection of much ‘new teaching’ in Luoland these days often appears to me to be based on whether it is backed up by money and not on whether it is meaningful. This is hardly a good way to lay a foundation for a strong church.

Deep culture is more effectively learned by living with a people than through the studying of books. Yet this account attempts to give some basic insights to help a Western Christian teacher visiting Luoland to know what he is up against. The same insights are likely to be more widely applicable throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.

The two issues of *puodhruok* (cleansing) and *jochiende* (ghosts) were selected intuitively by the author as representing concepts that are particularly significant to the Luo way of life and belief. This short project is no more than a pointer to a vast field of research that has been little explored to date.

It is evident that the meaning of these two terms is broad. For the purposes of clarity I have chosen to guide the English reader by referring to them as cleansing (*puodhruok*) and ghosts (*jochiende*) through the course of this account. The Luo who I know would be much more likely to translate *jochiende* as demons or devils than ghosts. My choice of the term ghosts however is intentional. It helps to bring to light a part of the translation issue as this is an important part of

the meaning of this term that is often neglected in translations to English. Literally and traditionally *jachien* means ‘he who haunts’.

Numbers included throughout the text in brackets like this (18), refer to page numbers in my hand-written notes.

Section 2. Methods and Activities

I was able to make the observations that form the basis for this research for four full days per week for a period of five weeks through October and November 2000.

My aim was to be as unobtrusive as possible while attending church meetings and in the course of daily life (as I am living and working in rural Luoland with Luo people in a Luo home) while taking notes on what went on around me.

90% of my listening was done to people speaking Dholuo (the Luo Language). In formal meetings this was also sometimes being translated to Kiswahili. Most of the remaining 10% was in Kiswahili and a small amount in English. (Kiswahili was often used because my research was done close to the border with the Luyia tribe in Western Province of Kenya. Kiswahili is the national language for Kenya). I wrote most of my field notes in Dholuo to ensure maximum retention of content in appropriate language form.

Most times when Kiswahili was being used, it was translated to Dholuo, which was itself helpful as it gave me further insight into how people understand their languages. When it was not translated I took *kutakaswa* as equivalent to *puodhruok*. It was instructive to observe the interchangeability of terms such as *satani*, *mapepo* (evil spirits) etc. Interestingly, the word that should be the direct translation of *jachien*, that is *mzimu*, is rarely used in Kiswahili. When English was used it was also translated into Dholuo or sometimes Kiswahili.

My having already lived in this part of Luoland with the same Luo people as part of their family for almost 7 years meant that my presence was ‘normal’. Hence my participant observation was not restricted to certain events and periods of the day. I was not only there for the occasion of this research. I learned a great deal during informal conversations at meal times, with visitors, while travelling etc. I only very rarely asked directed questions, usually allowing conversations just to flow. My knowledge of Dholuo (the Luo language) and Kiswahili (the Swahili language) meant that I did not need to employ an interpreter. The more formal times and occasions at which I was observing and taking notes are recorded in Table 1 below.

This five weeks of observation has formed the foundation for this research. I had a short interview with four people on issues arising from the period of observation subsequently. In addition I also made careful studies of some written material in Dholuo. This includes three Luo monthly comics sold on the streets of Kisumu, two classic texts written by Paul Mboya on Luo customs and traditions and the song books of the Nomiya Luo and Luong Mogik Churches (for details see Reading List).

In addition to the 5 weeks of intensive research, the results below are also based on 6 ½ years living in this area, and of 3 years living in Zambia where I laid the foundation for my understanding of the African people before my coming to Kenya in 1993. My own Christian background no doubt also affects my results, which is fairly middle of the road British evangelicalism.

Method of Working with Data

One of the great strengths of participant observation is that it allows people to set their own agenda. At no stage in the course of my five weeks of research did I reveal what I was looking out for. I explained the research as being to help me to understand better how Africans live as Christians, by comparison with Christian lives as lived in UK. I told some people that I wanted to watch, experience and hear how Africans do things, so as to be a more effective teacher at Yala and / or KIST. Many of the people who I was learning from in the past five weeks were not aware that I was ‘researching’.

<u>Church visited</u>	<u>Details</u>
1. Luong Mogik (God’s Last Appeal) Church in Ahono village, Siaya District. (An indigenous break-away from the Seventh Day Adventist church)	Four consecutive Saturday services. (This Church worships on Saturdays)
2. Zion Harvest mission Church in Ulumbi village, Siaya District. (A Pentecostal Church - this is my home Church)	Four consecutive Sunday services.
3. Nomiya Luo Church in Sagam village, Siaya District	One Sunday service
4. New Hope Church, cell group in Sagam village, Siaya District	One Saturday afternoon fellowship
5. Anglican Church of Kenya, Rawa village Siaya District	One meeting of the group of “saved” Christians - called <i>lalruok</i>
6. Funerals conducted in Ulumbi village, Siaya District	One burial service. On another occasion I attended the watch-night service to a funeral up to 00.30 hrs
7. Joint service of different Roho Churches at Nyaminia, Siaya District.	Sunday joint service

Table 1. *Meetings attended and Christian denomination affiliation.*

Some would say that the great disadvantage of the participant observation method of research is its subjectivity. I do not deny the subjectivity of this research. Its great strength may be that it shouldn’t give the false sense of confidence that the results of objective research can sometimes bring.

Having made observations, I would go through my notes again within the next few days, noting places at which information was relevant either to *jochiende* (ghosts) or *puodhruok* (cleansing).

Typing out a weekly summary of the notes I had made to send to my Coach Dr. Stan Nussbaum helped me to refresh my memory.

I had the choice of either considering as significant only the contexts in which the above words themselves were used, or also when issues or topics arose which were related to the above words. I used a combination of approaches. *Jochiende* were mentioned frequently. It also became apparent that many synonyms were used for *jachien* such as *satan*, *devil*, the names of diseases, sinful actions or unsociable behaviour etc. I tried to focus especially on the word *puodhruok* or *puodho*. Many synonyms were used such as *luoko* (clean - verb), *ler* (clean, pure, holy, bright), *oso* (cleanse ritually), *loso* (prepare), which were all often referring to some kind of ritual cleansing.

The results of this research are tentative. This is especially for two reasons. Firstly because of the limited time that was available for this research. Secondly because of the fluidity of the language and understanding that I came across. I do not think that people here have precise definitions or watertight categories in their minds. There may be many internal contradictions in the way that they express themselves. This does not trouble them. It would therefore be mistaken for me to pretend that I have discovered some great objective truth that actually does not exist.

Many of the discoveries I have made are not new. They are there in the writings of other commentators on the inter-reaction between Christianity and African tradition and religion. This research however focuses on particular areas which I believe are key entry points for understanding Luo Christianity, and attempts to provide practical help to practitioners - such as missionaries seeking to reach the Luo people in particular and the African people in general.

Section 3. *Jachien* (pl. *jochiende*)

In the course of my field research I recorded 164 significant occasions on which *jochiende* (ghosts pl.) were mentioned or their action presupposed. I attempt to discuss and analyse these activities of the *jochiende* below.

It became apparent to me that *jochiende* (ghosts) do not form a distinctive category in people's lives. There is not a part of life that is concerned with *jochiende* and part that is not. They rather have their integral role in much of day to day existence and activities. There is a tendency for Western scholarship to separate understanding of events surrounding funerals from that of spirits of the dead. I have not honoured this separation. A funeral is an important event, as the way it is carried out will help to determine whether or not a troublesome *jachien* will come to *chien* (haunt) people.

The Identity of *Jachien*

Onyango Abuje tells us that "*Jachien* is different from either *chuny* [soul] or *mumbo* [spirit] in that it starts with man at birth but remains dormant until the man dies when it assumes its

recalcitrant role. It is the negative part of a man or animal which survives death.” (Onyango Abuje 1971:7) I also found that *jachien* was always negative.

The nature of *jachien* (ghost) these days seems to have become confused to the Luo people.

Juogi (a type of spirit known particularly to *ajuoge* (witchdoctors) in Luoland) have traditionally been very active in Luo society. These are of two types, *sepe* and *mumbo* (Atieno Odhiambo 1971:2). *Yesu oriembogi* (Jesus chased them away) explained an old woman in Yala. (98). Many people these days do not even know what *sepe* and *mumbo* are. (110)

Some *juogi*, who once had their particular identity, have now been subsumed in the use of Dholuo (the language of the Luo) as *jochiende* (ghosts). For example *nyawawa* is the name given to the chasing of spirits into the lake by making noise. The lake spirits are *mumbo*, but these days people talk of chasing *jochiende* into the lake. (116)

A very significant confusion is between *jochiende* (pl.) or *jachien* (sing.) and Satan or the devil. At least one source of this is the translation of the Luo Bible. The most recent translation of the Luo Bible (1976) frequently translates *jachien* for Satan, devil or demons. For example John 6:70 is *διαβολος* in Greek, which is *diabolos* or the devil. The NIV translates as devil, but the Luo Bible gives *jachien* (ghost). Matthew 10:8 refers to chasing out of *δαίμονια* being *daimonia* (demons) which the Luo gives as *jochiende* (ghosts). In some instances, such as Matthew 4:1 *diabolos* is given as *satan* in the Luo Bible. This also continues the confusion between devil (*diabolos*) and demons (*daimon*) that is found in English. (Kuemmerlin - Mclean 1990:798)

It is difficult to ascertain how large a role the translation of the Bible had in bringing this confusion. What is apparent is that in present day Dholuo, *jachien* is used as a synonym for Satan or the devil and *jochiende* (pl.) for demons. The same confusion does not carry over to Kiswahili where the word for ghost, *mzimu*, which should be used to translate *jachien*, is rarely heard in Christian discourse. *Pepo* is used instead. (*Pepo* is “A kind of evil spirit” Johnson 1939).

This confusion is significant as the term *jochiende*, that has already to some extent incorporated the identity of *juogi* (see above) is further expanded to include the identity of the devil and his angels. This has impact in two major ways. Firstly, the humble *jachien* is elevated into a major force in the heavenly realm who is the enemy to God. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the means traditionally used by the Luo to deal with *juogi* and *jochiende* are the means they are now using in their struggle against the devil.

Hence a Christian testifying in Zion Church said “*Jachien tichne ngeny*” (*Jachien* has many roles) and later the chairman said “--- *jachien biro e yore yore*” (*jachien* comes in many different ways). (92) This confusion was apparent throughout my period of research.

Jachien seems to be involved whenever any evil occurred. Hence at the Roho joint service (2) the translation from Luo to Swahili simply did not translate *jachien*. For example *jachien mar*

terruok (*Jachien* of adultery - Dholuo) was simply translated into Kiswahili as *usherati* (adultery). For the Luo people *jochiende* are involved wherever evil or suffering arise.

There is also potential for confusion between *jachien* and witchcraft. *Satani* is sometimes used as a synonym for witchcraft in East Africa. As the Luo translate *satani* as *jachien* this also appears to be a synonym for witchcraft. Witchcraft (*uchawi* or *uganga* in Kiswahili) is generally translated as *juok* in Dholuo. (E.g. see Capen 1998). Hence it is cured by the *ajuoga* (witchdoctor). As the traditional role of *juogi* is assumed by *jochiende* (see above), then so also is witchcraft. Hence it was said that “*ilokori bedo jachien*” (you change to become *jachien*) referring to someone who has the powers of a witch. (40)

Witchcraft as such seems to be much less significant amongst the Luo than amongst some of their neighbours, perhaps because of the special characteristics of *juok*. (The term *juok* is clearly of the same derivation as *juogi*, suggesting that the Dholuo understanding of witchcraft is that it is linked to the activities of the latter.)

There has recently been a scare in Kenya about devil worshippers kidnapping and eating children. One devil worshipper was apparently caught trying to catch and kill a child very near to my home (57). When I suggested that this was *jachien*, I was laughed at. Comments I have heard indicate that people consider this to be a foreign thing coming into Luo land. Hence even when speaking in Dholuo people sometimes use the English ‘devil worshipper’ and not *jo mo lamo jachien* to describe these people. ‘Devil worshipping’ seems to be understood as coming from the English speaking world. Hence (white) missionaries “were set upon by villagers on suspicion of being devil worshippers ...” at Namba Okonda in Seme a neighbouring Luo *piny* (district) as reported in a Kenyan national newspaper by Radoli *et al* (2000:19). Villagers were said to be suspicious that the missionaries “were devil worshippers involved in the abduction of children” so they “pounced on them with sticks, stones and other missiles and left them for dead” said a Mr. Tambarwa according to the Kenyan national Nation newspaper. One person who I interviewed said that those who participated in devil worshipping were people who *dwaro mwandu* (desired to be rich). (119)

The Luo people are not accepting that their own *jochiende* could be responsible for these atrocities of killing children. Hence outsiders are under suspicion. The incident described above is one of very few I have ever heard of where white missionaries are treated as witches. We have mentioned that the use of English in describing ‘devil worshippers’ is retained. As well as American missionaries, the other group who I have heard as being under suspicion is the Muslims who have recently come to Sagam village. (97)

Jochiende can be many things! On discussing how indigenous African Churches are often divided by disputes over money, an elderly Luo Roho worshipper said “*pesa en jachien*” (money is *jachien*). (2) In the Roho service subsequently it was said that there were many *jochiende* which are sins such as smoking pot and adultery. (2) *Jachien* appears to be the cause of resentment in people. (6) He is easily confused with *juogi* (8). There are *jochiende* of evil Bible characters, such as Cain and Judas. (11) A man in the Nomiya church service said “*dhano en jachien*” (a person is *jachien*). (30) A woman said the “*jachien okwala*” (*jachien* stole me) referring to her husband who had taken her away from true salvation (*warruok*). (32) You can

change to be *jachien*. (40) *Jachien* is a bad person. (71) There are *jochiende* who wear white clothes. (78) *Jachien* is a person. (86) He is an *ajuoga* (witchdoctor). (87) *Jachien* is a *ng'a malich* (fearsome person). (106) If the category of *jachien* subsumes that of *juogi*, then *jachien* can also be a snake. (78)

Jachien is the enemy to God, standing on the side of evil. He is also much more than that having roots as he does deep in Luo tradition.

Jachien and Power

The metaphorical description of the Christian life as a battle or war (*lweny*) is often repeated. It is a deeply seated and widely used image. A woman at Ulumbi explained that we are in *lweny*. The *lweny* pulls us this way and that. What we are battling against is death, illness and hunger. These are the things brought by *jochiende*. (32) It was frequently made obvious that our *lweny* is against *jachien* or (*jochiende*). Ephesians 6 is a favourite passage.

Jachien can sit on our shoulders forcing us to stoop. He can tell us that God is not with us, and deceive some of us. (88) *Jachien* can even take hold of (*mako*) preachers (*joyalo*), forcing them just to talk about their own lives and tell stories instead of proclaiming God's word. (107b) But also we were told "*Ka in e lweny kiting'o Yesu, kajochiende giwinjo arufne, gibiro tetni*" being "if you are in the battle and you carry Jesus, when the *jochiende* smell him, they will shake." (61)

Funerals continually interfered with other activities, especially Church meetings. People ascribe this to *liel* (funeral) and not *jachien*. Yet I reason that it is peoples fear that failing to attend to the dead will empower *jochiende* against them that forces them to travel far and wide and spend long periods of time at many funerals.

The power of *jochiende* is not indomitable. My late friend ('Tom') was born illegitimately to his mother while she was living at her father's home and she never married. Tom's mother had no brothers or sisters, and his grandfather had only one wife. According to Luo tradition Tom had no right to his grandfather's land that he was living on, because inheritance follows the male line. His grandfather had however said that this land should be his. Then Tom's grandfather died. Despite the fact that the wishes of a dead man are greatly respected through fear of his *jachien* should they be changed, a brother to the grandfather said at Tom's funeral that he would evict Tom's wife. I am not aware of the outcome of this case, but this man was clearly ready to counter his late brother's instruction on the issue of land. (5)

Jachien and Ritual

Many rituals designed to placate *jochiende* arise out of Luo *chik* (traditional law) and are followed arduously by Christians and non-Christians alike. On 22nd October 2000 following the Zion Harvest Church service at Ulumbi we buried a woman in the afternoon. The coffin was covered with sticks, and the lady's twin brother did not attend the funeral. (12) This is because someone's attending the funeral of their twin before the funeral mound is covered with grass and weeds, will result in his death. I later discovered that a daughter to the late was disallowed from

sleeping at her twin - uncles homestead. If someone else's child sleeps in a new homestead before all ones own children have at least spent a night there, one's own children will die.

The above restrictions are of the nature of *kwero* (taboo). Very many such taboos are associated with death and the dead. They are to prevent *jochiende* from haunting the living. (136) There are many of them and they are very penetrating and diverse in their impact. Describing their complex impact on community life would over extend this short essay.

On my having commented on the presence of some donkeys to a colleague when sitting outside of his home one Sunday afternoon, he explained to me that donkeys must be buried like people or they can also become *jochiende*. (64) This is because donkeys do the human work, such as that of carrying water. Animals can also become *jochiende*.

Jachien and Joy

Funerals and *jochiende* are not only about mourning and sadness, but also about joy. At least it seems that way, although where fear of the dead ends and joy at the social interaction that they enable begins, is extremely hard to know.

Funerals are events of dancing, singing, meeting friends and family, having a break from normal routine and eating and drinking. Hence even young people can prefer going to a funeral to many alternative activities such as our Bible classes! (44). The burial is not usually the final ceremony for the departed. Many return for some sort of memorial. This may well include a disco for free that goes on all night for young people in the area, such as the one that was planned (though never actually held) in the homestead where I am living on 26-12-00. (24)

Finally there is the interest and joy of discussing funeral arrangements. People like to talk. They like to talk about people. Time after time the major topic of informal conversation amongst the Luo is of people who are at, approaching or just past the point of death. The transition from living person to dead is the most critical in the social diary. (43)

I am not here saying that people are happy with *jochiende*, but rather that the necessity to do battle with *jochiende* (ghosts) by fulfilling funeral rites has its own benefits.

Jachien and the Pastor

Concern with the dead is all absorbing and critical for many Christian pastors. At the *lalruok* (fellowship) I attended at an Anglican Church, no less than six imminent burials were announced. (103a) A pastor I visited in Yala explained how he had been pre-occupied with funerals over the last week. (97) The pastor of Luong Mogik was only present at one out of four of the weekly services I attended. Two of his absences were due to funerals. Our YTC (Yala Theological Centre) Director was failing to keep appointments due to funerals. The Zion pastor at Ulumbi was dealing with one death after another, both family and Church related (13b, 67, 102).

This is not seen as an unusual burden for the pastors. On the contrary, it is accepted that a major part of the role of being a servant of God in rural Luo land is dealing with the dead, lest failure to attend to them results in more and more problems being brought by *jochiende*. This is deeply rooted.

Section 4. *Puodhruok*

In the course of my five weeks of note taking in ‘participant observation’ I made notes on *puodhruok* (cleansing) 124 times.

Of these 124 instances, 48 (39%) were in the Luong Mogik church during only 4 Saturday services. This church clearly takes the question of *puodhruok* particularly seriously. This quickly becomes apparent, as their members who happen to be *gak* (unclean) on the day of worship, sit outside and do not enter the church building.

The term *puodhruok* itself was not used on all of these 124 occasions. What became clear was that many religious and ritual activities were oriented to providing cleansing of one sort or another. These include baptism, circumcision, prayer, crying out to God (*yuagruok*), being preached to, etc. It is as if all of religious practice, which in a sense for the African people is all of life, is to do with *puodhruok*. *Puodhruok* is less a particular event or process, and more a way of understanding events and processes. This has made it difficult to set a focus to this research. On the other hand, if indeed *puodhruok* is a filter through which much of what goes on in life is understood, it is particularly worthy of study.

It would appear that the understanding of *puodhruok* in Western secular society is vastly different to that I have found amongst the Luo people. The importance of cleansing rituals is not known in the West. Even the terms ‘clean’, ‘cleansing’, ‘pure’, etc. are more likely to be used in a physical than a spiritual context. These terms have been co-opted by the scientific fraternity to refer to physical cleanliness or hygiene.

For the Luo, any failing in life brings a kind of ‘dirt’ that needs to be cleansed for the person to be helped. It is hard to give ‘proof’ on this from my five weeks of research. I can at best only give supporting evidence.

On one occasion a lady who had just passed a small examination (in a Bible course) exclaimed that *asepuodho* meaning ‘I have been cleansed’. She explained that having finished the course, she is now *ler* (pure, bright, holy) in that course. Ignorance was a dirt from which she had been cleansed. (99) A man who stood up and insisted that the Gospel be preached to a certain congregation appeared to be of the mind that until they were ‘preached to’ and not merely taught, they were still unclean. (2) Cleansing from serious sin is achieved through confession. (4) A homestead must be cleansed by the departure of married daughters before a son builds his own place (*goyo ligala*). A bereaved woman must be cleansed of *chola* before she is free to interact with people socially. This cleansing is done through being inherited. Some one with *dhoch* is heading for trouble, for example for an accident in a river (109) until this is ritually removed (this is known as *loko dhoch*, literally turning the *dhoch* around).

Puodho from What?

In most cases the *puodhruok* was from what could be broadly termed sin. The detail of this however varied greatly. These were the instances I found in my five weeks of participant observation, and the frequency with which they arose.

Being cleansed from:

- 22 times. Sin. (I have taken this as the default category)
- 10 times. Chasing away/from *jochiende*.
- 5 times. Keeping *kwer / chik* (traditional laws / taboos).
- 4 times. *Dhaw / ngur* (arguing loudly or murmuring).
Doho or sexual sin.
Using *manyasi/yath* (medicines).
- 3 times. Breaking *kwer / chik* (traditional laws and taboos).
Chola (spirit of departed spouse).
Not having a house at death.
Being unsaved.
- Twice. Satan.
Poverty.
Godlessness.
Defeat.
Dhoch (imminent misfortune).
- Once. *Juogi* (spirits).
Abuse of Christian sacraments.
Going to the *ajuoga* (witchdoctor).
Witchcraft.
Uncleanness of a woman's period.
Being unforgiving.
Contact with a dead body.
The state of not having been preached at.
Luoro (fear).
Tho (death).
Ignorance.
Tuo (illness).
Sigu (hatred).

It has not always been easy to know what someone was being cleansed from. There is a lot of educated guesswork in the construction of the above list. Yet it does give us an idea of the kinds of issues involved. On three occasions, cleansing was needed *from* salvation. This was in the Anglican Church *lalruok* where these days salvation (*warruok*) is no longer considered sufficient, but *kwo* (redemption) is needed.

Cleansing can work in both ways. For example, sometimes someone needs to be cleansed from breaking traditional laws whereas sometimes uncleanness was due to keeping these laws. The

former is the traditionalist position, whereas for (some) Christians it is actually keeping tradition that results in uncleanness. Chasing away *jochiende* often begins Christian meetings.

In only one case have I listed cleansing as being from illness. That is not to say that cleansing is not about healing. On the contrary, in every case it is about healing and prosperity, only I have listed the causes of these ailments that are being dealt with rather than the mere particular symptoms of diseases. For instance, in the case of a sick (possessed) boy, the sin of the parents had to be cleansed. (75)

How to *Puodho*

How then was *puodhruok* carried out? I have given a list of the methods used and an indication of their frequency below:

- 11 times. Confession of sin.
- 9 times. Being prayed for.
- 8 times. Chasing away *jochiende*.
- 6 times. *Kwo* (redemption).
Spraying of *pi maler* (holy water).*
Warruok (salvation).
- 5 times. Prayer and fasting.
- 4 times. Prayer.
Teaching.
- 3 times. Getting rid of people who should not be there, e.g. married women from their parents' home or unclean people from the church.
Shouting at the *juogi* or *jochiende*.
Being inherited (of a widow).
Burying a body.
Sacrifice.
Attending a Christian *chokruok* (meeting).
- Twice. *Yuakne Nyasaye* (crying out to God).
Hitting someone with a Bible.*
Draping or wrapping in flag.*
Rubbing body with flowers.*
Building a house.
- Once. Ordering someone to stop talking.
Telling lies.
Having Jesus.
Be circumcised. (Nomiya Luo church only)
Preaching (designed to promote an 'emotional' response).
Baptism.
Go to *ajuoga* (witchdoctor).
Yath (medicine).
As per the Bible.
Lamo (prayer, worship).
Spitting onto someone.*

Getting a white friend.
Love.
Acting dead. *

The items on the list marked with * are those that I only found in the Luong Mogik church.

Note that the category of sacrifice includes reference to the blood of Jesus. Animal sacrifice is carried out, but is rarely mentioned publicly. Telling lies can be a means of *puodhruok*, as it can cover over the thing that would result in impurity. I have mentioned burying someone only a few times. This is because at the time I was doing the observation I was not thinking of this as *puodhruok*. In hindsight I am realising that it is. The item that refers to ordering someone to stop talking, was a man who stood up at a funeral and started back-biting and inciting all sorts of issues. Building a house is of course just one example of how *puodhruok* is achieved through following traditional requirements. Getting a white friend refers to help that was on offer for orphans and widows. People were wary of this, but the potential financial availability will probably attract some.

Section 5. Conclusion, Recommendations for Action and Further Research

Crossing cultural barriers is not easy. A missionary moving to Luoland meets with a complex and strange worldview. This project attempts to reveal some of the insights required to cross the chasm and communicate Christian truth to this African culture.

Jochiende (ghosts) are part of everyday life for the Luo people. The importance of funerals arises largely from peoples' fear of them. Funerals are a major pre-occupation of many pastors, and the focus of many social interactions for the whole community. *Jochiende* come in many forms. Colds, illnesses, mishaps, snakes, people and even animals can be *jochiende*. The Luo people have many ways of dealing with them passed down by their forefathers, including the use of medicines, practice of rituals and keeping of taboos.

There appears to be a lot of confusion as to the identity of *jochiende* these days. As well as the traditional Luo ghost, *Jachien* (sing.) is known as the devil and *jochiende* as demons. The difficulty people have in distinguishing these two is a root cause of what some would term as 'syncretism' in the church. That is, means traditionally used by people to deal with troublesome *jochiende*, are now employed by Christians in their struggle against the Devil. *Jachien* is also seen as the source of witchcraft.

The war against *jochiende* is a favourite theme in many Christian circles. A combination of Biblically and traditionally based methods are used in these spiritual battles.

Puodhruok (spiritual cleansing) is an important process that acts as a filter through which the Luo people see much of their lives. This is made especially hard for Westerners to understand by the almost total absence of such an understanding in the modern West. For the Luo spiritual

activity, including that of Christians, is normally evaluated according to its strength in providing *puodhruok*.

Cleansing is mostly from sin. This sin is however defined as those actions that are contrary to a particular set of customary laws. These laws are an outgrowth of Luo traditional laws and taboos combined with some modern and Christian values. The breaking of this customary law is integrally linked with the occurrence of ill health, misfortune or suffering. Hence *puodhruok* in the broad sense is healing.

The means of cleansing are diverse. Confession of sin is a recurring one. Prayer and fasting and a host of ritual procedures also bring cleansing. Sacrifice and a variety of medicines can be used. Sometimes actions with particular symbolic meanings are considered effective. Otherwise cleanness is achieved by rectifying the aberrant behaviour, e.g. the ritual shortfall that brought the uncleanness.

Practical areas for action and further research

- African tradition provides diverse means for dealing with *jochiende*. These enter the church in so called syncretism. A study of them can be made a core part of a Bible college curriculum. How about a course on ‘dealing with ghosts’ that neither draws on enlightenment and reason or on the abstract spiritual warfare tactics of Western based Pentecostalism?
- References to spiritual cleanliness abound in the New and even more the Old Testaments. These days they are little understood and as a result are often passed over by scholars. The Luo understanding of *puodhruok* here researched may give a basis for understanding these Scriptures, especially concerning holiness and the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit.
- Formal research that is carried out tends to be dominated by the English language. One effect of this is that concepts that are not easily articulated in English, or do not exist in the Western worldview, are not seen. An example would be *loko dhoch*. Such a traditional practice of removing a problem from someone and putting it onto someone else is often not noticed by the English speaking world. Many Luo churches condemn it, as they consider that taking a problem from one person and simply putting it onto another is not Christian. Yet this term has enormous potential use in describing how Jesus took away our sins! To be truly accurate research on a particular people should occur in their own language first, perhaps later being translated to English.
- What makes a church a good church? There are many possible answers to this. Amongst the Luo an important part of the answer is that it must be a church that is effective in providing *puodhruok* (cleansing). There is much room for further research in how different methods of *puodhruok* are compared and contrasted and what it is that makes some effective and others ineffective.

- What happens in churches is of course a reflection on the world-view of a people at large. Issues of *puodhruok* (cleansing) and *jochiende* (ghosts) are important to society in general. Many people are concerned with development and socio-economic progress in Africa in general and Luoland in particular. The impact of this understood importance of *puodhruok* and *jochiende* on development in general needs to be investigated.
- *Jachien* and *puodhruok* are just the tip of the Luo cultural iceberg that has sunk many a Western missionary's "Titanic" sermon. Many other terms could usefully be researched in this way. A few examples that come to mind would be *dhano* (person), *Roho maler* (Holy Spirit), *Chodruok* (adultery or lust), *yie* (faith), *fweny* (vision) etc. As such words are carefully researched something like a Luo theological dictionary could be produced.

Appendix A

Biography

After three years teaching agriculture in Zambia Jim Harries returned to Britain (his homeland) and did an MA in Rural Development, an MA in Biblical interpretation and a Certificate in Missions. From 1993 to date he has been living in a Luo village in Western Kenya initially as an independent missionary and then under the Church of God through his affiliation with KIST (Kima International School of Theology) where he works part-time as the Academic Dean. Despite being sent by Baptist churches in UK Jim has worked most extensively with Pentecostal and indigenous churches amongst the Luo people. 12 ½ years on from his first arrival in Africa he has learned three African languages, being Kikaonde from Zambia, and Dholuo and KiSwahili in Kenya. Before joining KIST Jim was already working with a small indigenous Bible school reaching out to indigenous churches based at Yala. He continues to serve there from his rural Luo village home four days weekly.

Reading List

CAPEN, CAROLE A.,

1998 *Bilingual Dholuo – English Dictionary. Kenya*. Arizona: Carole A. Capen (pub.)

JOHNSON, FREDERICK,

1939 *A Standard Swahili English Dictionary* Nairobi: Oxford University Press

KADOLI, MUSA, MIREGA, RUTH and ODHIAMBO, ALLAN,

2000 '14 Arrested for beating preachers' In. *Daily Nation* Wednesday 8th November 2000.

KUEMMERLIN - MCLEAN, JOANNE

1990 'Satan in the Old Testament' 798 In: Mills, Watson, E (ed) *The Luttermonth Dictionary of the Bible* Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press.

MBOYA PAUL,

1983 (1938) *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi* Kisumu: Anyange Press

MBOYA, PAUL,

1978 *Richo Ema Kelo Chira* Nairobi: Afropress

OGOLA, ANTHONY OGOLA,

2000 *Ma Doko Tim Vol.1 No.19* Nairobi: Nam Dar Communications

OGOLA, ANTHONY OGOLA,

2000 *Ma Doko Tim Vol.2 No.8* Nairobi: Nam Dar Communications

OGOLA, ANTHONY OGOLA,

2000 *Ma Doko Tim Vol.2 No.10* Nairobi: Nam Dar Communications