

ABSTRACT

Gathered Storytelling: Death and Disease Among the Luo of the Nyakach Plateau

Dillon C. Stull

Director: William G. Hoy, D.Min, FT

Humans' particular experiences of sickness and death depend largely upon their respective cultural and religious beliefs. They also depend greatly upon the social practices of their community, which define expectations for how members of society are to respond when people are sick, dying, and dead. This grounded theory ethnography drew data from sixteen home-based interviews and examined the experiences of sickness and death as recounted by members of the Luo tribe from a rural community on the Nyakach Plateau in western Kenya. The study identified and described Luo responses to sickness and death and demonstrated that members of this community tend to face sickness and death not as individuals, but as a community. The Luo communal response to suffering is rooted in the Luo practice of gathering to tell stories. The content of shared stories, which are often spiritual at the core, are important in providing a common basis from which tribespeople communally identify and respond to each other's health needs. Furthermore, the physical act of coming together for storytelling prepares the community to likewise come together in material, spiritual, and emotional solidarity in order to confront sickness, death, and other hardships as a united body of people.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

Dr. Bill Hoy, Department of Medical Humanities

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Director

DATE: _____

GATHERED STORYTELLING: DEATH AND DISEASE
AMONG THE LUO OF THE NYAKACH PLATEAU

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

By
Dillon C. Stull

Waco, Texas

May 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Dying	15
Chapter Three: Spirits of the Dead	28
Chapter Four: The Community of the Living.....	52
Chapter Five: Gathering, Sharing, and Healing.....	65
References.....	72

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For assistance in completing this project, many thanks are in order.

I want to thank the community on the Nyakach Plateau. My life has been blessed by you in countless ways. Thank you to my interviewees, who eagerly welcomed me into your homes and shared with me beautiful stories about your lives. Thank you to my translator, who taught me much about Luo language and culture. Many thanks to Pastor Habil Ogola for hosting me and my peers as we lived in the village for a couple of weeks. It has been a blessing to receive your encouragement, hear your wisdom, and see your sacrifice in the name of God and for the sake of others. Thank you also for helping to work out the logistics necessary for these interviews to take place.

I would also like to thank those who were involved in the process of writing and defending this thesis. Dr. Bill Hoy, your guidance in the composition of this Honors thesis has made me a more thorough researcher and a deeper human being. Dr. Lisa Baker, you have been a key mentor for me from day one of my Baylor experience. Thank you for your continual support of my academic endeavors and for your desire for every aspect of my life to flourish abundantly. Dr. Chris van Gorder, I am appreciative of your help in exploring African religious themes and the liberality with which you gave me half a shelf's worth of books just minutes after meeting me.

My mother deserves special thanks for reading and editing every page of this thesis. Thank you for your love and commitment.

DEDICATION

For Pastor Habil, who is a blessing to many.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

While sickness and death are shared elements of all lives, humans' particular experiences of these things differ across cultures and times. A people's understanding of sickness and death largely depends upon individuals' respective cultural and religious beliefs. Social practices, which are intertwined with these beliefs, define expectations for how members of society are to respond when people are sick, dying, and dead.

This grounded theory ethnography examines the experiences of sickness and death as recounted by members of the Luo tribe from a rural community in western Kenya. The study identifies and describes Luo responses to sickness and death and demonstrates that the communal nature of these responses is rooted in the Luo practice of gathering to tell stories.

Background

The Luo people were formerly the second largest tribe in Kenya and are currently the third largest tribe, behind the Kikuyu and the Luhya tribes. They are a deeply spiritual people, as many Africans are, and have been largely Christianized. Due to Christian missionary work near Kisumu at the turn of the twentieth century and the large burst of growth in the Christian church since Kenya became an independent republic in 1964, the Luo have been largely Christianized (Oliver, 1952; "Christianity in Kenya," n.d.). The Luo are geographically situated near Lake Victoria in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The particular community in which this research took place is in western, rural Kenya on the

Nyakach Plateau, about 36 kilometers southeast of Kisumu and 12 kilometers southeast of Lake Victoria.

Collection of Interview Data

Data for this study was analyzed through a combination of classic grounded theory and ethnographic approaches (Charmaz, 2006). It examines Luo perspectives on the experience of suffering, and the data is drawn from sixteen home-based interviews that were conducted between May 21 and June 12, 2014. On the Nyakach Plateau, it is typical for friends and family members to visit one another's homes throughout the day; usually, these individuals joined the interviews for some length of time. Thus, sixteen home visit interview sessions resulted in a total of twenty-seven Luo tribespeople as interview participants. The ages of the interviewees ranged from 17 to 100 years old, and the majority were between the ages of 40 and 80. Most interviewees were married or widowed women who had several children and who had completed the equivalent of a middle school or high school education.

Religious affiliations of the interviewer and interviewees potentially bias the data obtained from the interviews. Interviewees were selected by community leader Pastor Habil Ogola, who chose interviewees in such a manner as to include in the sample every major Christian denomination present on the plateau. Ogola understood that the study would be examining Luo perceptions of medicine and spirituality, and perhaps his awareness of the purpose of the study influenced him to select more religious or more respected people for the interviews. Also, participants' knowledge of my association with the Christian non-profit organization Straw to Bread and the presence of my well-known Christian translator—pseudonymously referred to as Samuel for the remainder of this

study—may have caused respondents to adapt their answers so as to not betray any non-Christian sentiments or ideas.

However, there is also cause to believe these biases did not go wholly unchecked. The interviewees themselves were not expecting my visit, nor did they know the exact purpose of my interviews. The extent of the interviewees' knowledge about the purpose of the study was a short message I communicated to them briefly before I began to ask them questions: "These questionnaires are designed to understand Luo perspectives of spirituality and healthcare." Furthermore, a variety of perspectives, even within the Christian church, were obtained. Ten different Christian denominations were represented in the study. Since my translator indicated almost all Luos on the Nyakach Plateau are Christian, we did not find any interviewees who did not share a Christian perspective. There were very few—if any—Muslims on the Nyakach Plateau, as most live in bigger cities such as Kisumu that contain mosques. It is important to note that Luo and American practices of Christianity differ in many ways, as both have been informed by their respective local cultural and religious histories of thought and practice.

Most home-based interviews lasted between two and a half and three hours and consisted of two parts: a demographic questionnaire and a narrative questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire, which constituted the first half of the interview, included 137 short-answer questions that were intended to identify the interviewee within classifiable social and religious structures and modes of thought in the Luo community. The range of health care providers on the plateau was identified as including hospitals, clinics, traditional birth attendants, bonesetters, herbalists, traditional healers, and pastors. The interviewees were asked to identify the frequency with which they visit each of these

medical providers, the cost of doing so, the accessibility of such providers to them, and the providers they prefer in various contexts. Next, interviewees were asked to recognize which provider they prefer to visit for the treatment of specific kinds of illnesses. Finally, the demographic questionnaire directly addressed what people believe about the connections between the spiritual world and sickness or health. To complete the demographic questionnaire usually required about an hour. In this study, data from the demographic questionnaire was used to quantitatively estimate and to qualitatively describe Luo beliefs about traditional healers (i.e. “witchdoctors”).

The second part of the interview was the narrative questionnaire, designed to draw out personal stories that reflect themes in Luo perceptions of sickness and death in light of the practices and beliefs of the Luo community. This part of the interview included a semi-structured interview addressing three themes: religious beliefs, the intersection between spirituality and medicine, and Luo life in general. The narrative portion of the interview typically lasted one and a half to two hours and served as the core of the interview data.

This study was determined exempt from review by the Baylor Institutional Review Board according to category 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2). The exemption of the study results from the methodology of data collection and reporting: data was collected through personal interviews with human subjects whose names will not be disclosed and whose reputations are not at risk of being harmed by the disclosure of information collected in the interviews. When stories are told or cited in this study, pseudonyms will be used in order to protect the identity of the interviewees.

There is one interviewee, Pastor Habil Ogola, for whom an alias will not be used. This exception is intentional. Ogola is a prominent community leader among the Luo on the Nyakach Plateau. Ogola attended Grace Bible College, from which he graduated in 1973, and now pastors an Africa Inland Church (AIC) congregation. While all twenty-seven Luo respondents in this study identified themselves with some Christian denomination, Pastor Ogola has a more educated, systematized theological understanding of the Christian Luo world because of his formal seminary training. For that reason, especially on matters of Christian Luo spiritual beliefs, his name will be used in this work wherever his perspective is offered. Ogola directs the work of Bethlehem Home on the plateau, a ministry that feeds and educates orphaned children, cares for elders, and has numerous business ventures that support the community, including funeral tent making, catering, harvesting chicken eggs and goat milk, practicing sustainable agriculture, and more. The partnership between Bethlehem Home, which is operated by Luo individuals and U.S.-based nonprofit, Straw to Bread, supported the interviews.

The Grounded Theory Method

This study is a grounded theory ethnography. Grounded theory is a research method developed by sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss and articulated in their 1967 work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Charmaz, 2006, p. 4). Glaser and Strauss delineated the “systematic methodological strategies” that compose the grounded theory research method (Charmaz, 2006, p.4). Grounded theory suits social science research that aims to elucidate previously uninvestigated social phenomena because it focuses on “*developing* theories from research grounded in data rather than *deducing* testable hypotheses from existing theories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 4). The

researcher avoids imposing external or foreign criteria on the observed phenomena by not relying upon previously constructed conceptions of these ideas. Thus, the grounded theory method of this study, which “helps us to see things as they are, not as we preconceive them to be,” allows for a primarily Luo conception of the experience of suffering to arise out of the data (Glaser, 2014a, para. 9).

A major strength of grounded theory is its flexibility. Charmaz (2006) defines grounded theory methods as “systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (p. 2). The “guidelines” offered by grounded theory methods are not a set of “formulaic rules,” but instead are “a set of general principles and heuristic devices” that undergird the flexibility of the research method by delineating principles for the collection, analysis, and synthesis of data (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). Grounded theory is fitting for a study of Luo theological, cultural, and social understandings of death and sickness because there has been little academic work on understanding these Luo ideas or related subjects. It would be difficult to construct a positivistic study of Luo culture in which a hypothesis is tested and verified, especially as an American researcher. Furthermore, the results of such a study would only demonstrate that the hypothesis either does or does not fit. The nuance evident in human life would not be mirrored by similar nuances in the conclusion of the study. On the other hand, grounded theory parallels the natural means by which humans learn to navigate social situations. Glaser (2014a) claims grounded theory “comes naturally in our everyday private life” (para. 6). For the task of understanding the lives of human beings and their culture, grounded theory is a fitting method of investigation.

Since Glaser and Strauss first formulated the methods of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss have split ideologically on the question of verification in the research process. This study follows the classical approach to grounded theory espoused by Glaser, who “remained more faithful to the original version of grounded theory” by continuing to think about grounded theory methods as being “inductive only,” excluding any process of hypothesis development and verification from the research method (Cooney, 2010, p. 19-20). Charmaz (2006) lists some key elements of grounded theory, as originally held by Glaser and Strauss and as continues to be held by Glaser:

- (1) Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis.
- (2) Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses.
- (3) Using the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis.
- (4) Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis. (p. 5).

The step-by-step process of the grounded theory method as employed in this study will be delineated below.

Data Collection

As an American with little previous contact with the Luo culture, I did not know what interview questions would best facilitate an understanding of the Luo experience of suffering. As the interviews were conducted in May and June of 2014, new questions became important as previously unknown ideas and phenomena were discovered. The structure of grounded theory allows for innovation throughout the research process

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967), so the questionnaires were modified accordingly. For example, I only began to ask interviewees about *nyawawa*, a phenomenon in which evil, disease-inflicting ancestral spirits are believed to noisily pass through the village at night, after I learned of its existence.

In accordance with classical Glaserian grounded theory methodology, what is treated as “data” in the study surpasses merely the formal verbal responses of interviewees. In this study, “data” also includes three things: (1) ethnographic observations including body language and setting (2) academic literature on the Luo people; and (3) texts and evidences such as blog posts, websites, and videos that reveal valuable information about Luo culture. All of these sources of data must be understood in their contexts and according to the motivations of their respective authors. Texts and responses are not viewed as “objective sources of data;” rather, the relationships between the researcher, research subjects, the material communicated, and the contexts in which it was communicated can be seen “analytically as another source of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 38). The broader understanding of “data” maintained in this study is consistent with Glaser’s statement: “All is data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 16).

Coding

After data collection, the next important step in a grounded theory analysis is coding. The process of coding begins by labeling statements and ideas in the interview data with words or short phrases that define emergent groupings. This aspect of coding is a way of sifting, sorting, and synthesizing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). More importantly, however, the process of coding “begins to unify ideas analytically” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 71) as a theoretical framework for thinking about the data groupings

in relation to one another begins to emerge. The goal is that this theoretical framework “fits the empirical world” by “crystalliz[ing] participants’ experience” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 54) in a manner that has explanatory power.

An effective way to ensure the theoretical groupings remain grounded in the data is to draw category titles and descriptions directly from what the research subjects say in the interviews. Charmaz (2006) recommends watching for “participants’ special terms” in order to use them as what she calls “*in vivo* codes” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55).

Furthermore, the coding language employed to label social phenomena should reflect the activeness of the social world itself. Charmaz (2006) suggests “coding with gerunds” in order to help the emergent theory retain a “strong sense of action and sequence” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 49).

Memoing

The next step in turning data into an analytical grounded theory study is called “memoing.” Memo writing is the process of writing short analyses of the codes in such a way as to facilitate the emergence of the larger theory. As the researcher writes memos about the emergent theoretical groupings, connections are built between them. Well-written memos should lead to the destruction of old labels and the creation of newer, more explanatory ones. As successive memos are written, the codes begin to reveal deeper, underlying social activities that suggest theoretical categories. Through memos, the researcher relates data, codes, and theoretical categories to one another in such a way as to facilitate the synthesis of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For this study, memo writing took place in an ongoing thesis journal.

Synthesis

Finally, grounded theory requires that theoretical categories be synthesized into a cohesive theoretical framework that explains the social phenomena observed in the collected data. As theoretical categories are emerging through the researcher's cycles of coding and memo writing, the researcher then begins to do "theoretical sampling." This means that the researcher begins to gather data more discriminately, seeking data that will inform the specific categories that have emerged from and are grounded in the collected data, which in this case is interview data. Charmaz (2006) describes this as "seeking and collecting pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories" in the emerging theory (p. 96). This process occurs until "theoretical saturation," the point at which "no new properties emerge" as part of the grounded theory because the categories have been "saturated" with data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 62).

An important element of grounded theory that pervades every step of the analysis is "constant comparison." This means that throughout the processes of coding, memo-ing, and synthesizing, data and categories are being constantly compared. This is connected to Glaser's idea—mentioned above—"All is data." All data, new and old, whether collected by the researcher directly or whether reported in the literature, should have some weight in the analytic conversation from which the research theory emerges. The categories must be constantly compared in order to ensure their soundness.

Application

The methodology of grounded theory facilitates the application of this study to the social world. Since the conclusions of a grounded theory study arise directly from the realm of human interaction, their application within that realm is also promising. Oktay

(2012) says, “Because grounded theory creates theories that are derived directly from real-world settings, it has the potential to produce theories that can be used by social workers to guide practice” (p. 5). Glaser (2014a) states that the scope of application for a grounded theory study is confined to “data from which it is generated” in addition to “similar areas of concern” (para. 5). Since the practice of medicine—at least in this era—depends upon human social interaction, the results of grounded theory studies of the social world often apply to “many areas of medical concern” (Glaser, 2014a, para. 5). Perhaps the results of this study will inform the cross-cultural interaction that takes place between the American nonprofit organization Straw to Bread and the Luo ministry Bethlehem Home as they partner to maintain the newly erected Bethlehem Home Hospital in addition to the many other community partnerships taking place on the Nyakach Plateau.

Ethnography

This study welds well-regarded sociological methodology of grounded theory with anthropology’s traditional “workhorse,” ethnography. Charmaz (2006) states that ethnographic data are a valuable addition to a grounded theory study when it is possible to collect such data. She suggests this often happens by researchers “joining [their] research participants while at school, physical therapy, a support group, or just hanging out with friends” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 3). The ethnographic data included in this study include my own experiences with Kenyan Luo people at mealtimes, during interviews, during times of celebration and mourning, and walking through the village in the middle of the day. It is helpful to accompany a grounded theory study with an ethnographic dataset because that dataset, collected from real people and living social interactions,

“gives priority to the studied *phenomenon* or *process*—rather than to a description of a setting” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 22). The ethnographic perspective allows the researcher to see not only what the data are, but also how they are set in motion in the realm of interpersonal interaction.

Thesis

The study revealed that the Christian Luo people on the Nyakach Plateau tend to face suffering not as individuals, but as a community, “pulling together” all that is available to them in order to meet collectively identified needs. The Luo practice of storytelling reflects the way in which the community faces suffering together. The daily action of gathering people to tell stories mirrors the people’s gathering of material, spiritual, and emotional resources to confront sickness, death, and other hardships. The content of the stories defines the Luo worldview and thus provides a common basis from which to communally identify the needs that must be met. Those stories that play a primary role in the formation of the Luo understanding of sickness and death are—at the core—spiritual, and, therefore, mysterious, fantastical, miraculous, and supernatural. The act of physically coming together to tell stories imitates the spiritual unity of the Luo people that serves as the root for their resiliency amidst hardship.

The Luo experiences of death, disease, and healing are animated by cultural and religious notions surrounding three primary subjects: death, spirits of the dead, and the community of the living. The topics of the following three chapters will be divided according to these subjects.

Chapter two will describe the Luo people’s experience and perception of death as formed by the stories of the Bible. Luo funeral practices will also be described, as they

illustrate the gathering of people and resources according to expectations for burial, celebration, and bereavement.

Chapter three will explore traditional Luo notions regarding spirits of the dead. The Luo practice of herbal healing, *nyaluo*, as well as a Luo phenomenon surrounding sickness, *nyawawa*, both relate to a Luo understanding of ancestral spirits. The Luo pass down knowledge of these things through the stories of elders. The Christian influence stigmatizes the traditional healing practices of “witchdoctors.” Common superstitions create chaos as the village allegedly responds to disease-bearing spirits of the dead as a community.

Chapter four will illustrate the solidarity of the Luo in times of hardship. A number of social practices facilitate the “pulling together” of people and money in order to assist needy community members. The slow pace of Luo culture and the practice of gathering to tell stories create time for significant interaction with family members and neighbors. The Luo people are loyal to one another; this is especially evident in times of hardship. In this chapter, it is especially obvious that among the Christian Luo people on the Nyakach Plateau, many forms of support constantly surround the suffering community member.

A Note on Writing Style

In honoring the peculiarly narrative style of communication among the Luo, I have chosen to frequently employ an ethnographic-narrative form of writing in this thesis; I believe this best demonstrates the gratitude I experience in having been entrusted with these stories. This writing style will allow me to take the liberty to describe my own experiences with the Luo on the Nyakach Plateau, even sometimes using first-person

words not frequently found in scientific studies. As Glaser said, “All is data,” and this includes my personal experiences among the Luo tribe. As an ethnographer, I present the conclusions of my research scientifically and soundly, but I also illustrate the Luo culture in such a way as to bring the stories to life. It is with intentionality that certain parts of these chapters include poetic or narrative language—the purpose is to reflect Luo culture, in which storytelling is central and is rooted in the fantastical and the supernatural.

While remaining a work of observation, description, and analysis, this work should also be as vibrant as the Luo people from whom the data for this theory of the Luo experience was drawn. While the language of narration employed in certain parts of the work may appear unscientific, I have elected to use this style where it will best draw the reader into Luoland—not only the physical setting, but also the personal, conscious experience of it. In doing so, I hope to present a truer account of the world as seen by a Luo individual.

Welcome to Luoland.

CHAPTER TWO

Dying

“Time Has Come”

Samuel, a 20-year-old Luo man, tells a story in which he and two other members of his family “fell sick” one night. Taken to the hospital ward, they received care for a couple of ambiguous illnesses that Samuel describes generally as “headache” and “malaria.” Night came. Suddenly, several people came and surrounded Samuel, restraining him forcefully. His arms tied, his eyes covered, and his mouth gagged, Samuel attempted to writhe away from them. “Time has come,” they told him. A host of lights surrounded him, as if he were in the middle of a city. But once again, the people insisted, “The time has come and we must perform our duty. Can we please turn the lights off?” “No, give me a few minutes! No! Please wait!” Samuel yelled. This dialogue repeated four or five times until, finally, Samuel’s body lurched forward in his hospital bed and he came to his senses, realizing his interchange with the men had been in a dream.

Samuel understood himself to be on the brink of death, and his sickness was something much like a severe case of the flu—he called it “headache.” On the Nyakach Plateau, which I will sometimes refer to as “the plateau,” death is a threat to those even with mild sicknesses. Many of them have witnessed the deaths of close friends or immediate family members. The memory of these stories causes them to readily associate death with sickness, injury, and disease.

In each interview, I asked my interviewees to tell me about a time when they had helped someone who was sick or dying. Only one respondent, a teenage girl, had never helped someone who was sick or dying. On the other hand, twenty-one interviewees indicated they had indeed done so—often in situations of fairly severe medical distress. Those cared for included grandparents, parents, children, cousins, neighbors, patients, and strangers. In five of the stories, interviewees, three of them herbalists or bonesetters and two of them with no medical experience, assisted strangers in medical situations. Regardless of medical experience, the Luo people are generally eager and willing to aid community members who need their help. One interviewee reflects this in his statement, “Whenever there is a need and he can help, he comes out.”

In many of these stories, the people receiving care—whether from a westernized medical institution or from a traditional herbal healer—did recover from their illnesses. In other cases, however, health was not restored, and they passed away. Stories were told of children dying, a baby dying in childbirth, a cousin dying, husbands being beaten to death by criminals with machetes, a mother dying, and an HIV-positive neighbor dying. One mother lost three of her children in two weeks: out of her own understanding, she reported the first died of malaria, the second of “chest problems,” and the third of “leg swelling.” When one man’s relative took a drug in an abortion attempt, he plowed through sloshy mud using a wheelbarrow to transport her to the hospital. The Luo people know what it means to be on the brink of death because most of them have directly witnessed and cared for extremely sick or dying people.

Prevalence of Disease at Large

Compared to other places in the world, Luoland, the region around Lake Victoria containing the majority of the population of the Luo tribe, has a generally high prevalence of disease. The Geissler, et.al. (2002) study of self-treatment among Luo children found the average child reported having 25 illness experiences within a time frame of just 30 weeks. So, on average, 57 children in the study felt ill on an almost weekly basis.

Deaths due to preventable diseases like malaria demonstrate the wide disparity in health care accessibility between Kenya and most places in the developed world. In a mortality surveillance study performed in western Kenya, Desai et al. report the following mortality rates due to malaria in 2003: 13.2 per 1000 person-years in children under the age of 5, 0.5 per 1000 person-years in children between the ages of 5-14, and 1.5 per 1000 person-years in children ages 15 and up (2014). To put these statistics into perspective, the mortality rate due to cancer in 2013 in the United States was approximately 1.9 per 1000 person-years (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014, p. 1). Although the study conducted by Desai et al. demonstrates that mortality rates due to malaria have declined since 2003 in two of the above age groups, the year in which this study was conducted was one through which all of my interviewees lived. Many of them have witnessed the deaths of their relatives due to malaria, and most—if not all—of them have also been infected with malaria themselves.

Table 1 has been included below for further comparison of mortality rates between Kenya and the United States (World Health Organization, 2014). There are higher mortality rates in Kenya due to acute conditions and HIV/AIDS, while there are

higher mortality rates in the United States due to chronic conditions. On average, the experience of death in Kenya occurs more quickly and unexpectedly than the experience of death in America.

	Kenya		USA	
Total Pop.	43,178,000		317,505,000	
Mortality		Rate		Rate
All Causes	369,400,000	855.5	2,656,300,000	836.6
Diarrheal Diseases	23,400,000	54.2	14,900,000	4.7
Unintentional Injuries	27,900,000	64.6	109,200,000	34.4
Malaria	12,000,000	27.8	0	0.0
HIV/AIDS	54,500,000	126.2	7,900,000	2.5
Nutritional Deficiencies	16,400,000	38.0	6,600,000	2.1
Malignant Neoplasms	25,400,000	58.8	627,900,000	197.8
Neurological Conditions	5,800,000	13.4	308,700,000	97.2
Cardiovascular Diseases	31,600,000	73.2	815,700,000	256.9

Table 1. Mortality Rate Comparisons: Kenya & the United States (WHO, 2014)

Death in Recent Kenyan History

A number of notable events in Kenya's recent history have resulted in the death of Luo people en masse. The AIDS epidemic, which ravaged the country most devastatingly from the mid-1980's through the early 2000's, is one such event. HIV no longer rages through Luoland as it once did, but the Luo people currently have the highest relative prevalence of HIV among tribes in Kenya (Kenyon, 2014, p. 1). The disease that killed

many Luo individuals in the recent past still remains a threat today. However, the suffering caused by HIV/AIDS in the Luo community extends beyond those who were infected with the disease—it includes the social impact of their loss. AIDS created gaps in families across Kenya, eliminating a large portion of an entire generation of Kenyan parents. Bollinger et al. demonstrated that AIDS primarily killed adults 20 to 40, leaving an estimated 300,000 orphans in Kenya due to AIDS alone (as cited in Hornsby, 2013, p. 650). Many children became orphaned, and there remained few adults to care for them. As a result, there is still a pressing need to care for orphans in Kenya. Bethlehem Home is a Christian ministry on the Nyakach Plateau that partners with Straw to Bread, a US-based nonprofit, to provide for hundreds of orphans and elders in need.

Other events in Kenya's history involve violence. Inter-tribal fighting ensued following the 2007 presidential elections in which the Kikuyu candidate Kibaki dubiously defeated the Luo candidate Raila Odinga (Hornsby, 2013, p. 764). Homes and people were burned, and many Luo in the Nyanza Province were shot by the police and by members of other tribes (Hornsby, 2013, p. 765). Outside the context of the formal interview, Samuel stated that most of the fighting occurred in bigger cities like Kisumu, i.e. diverse urban settings with a conglomeration of tribes, but implied the violence left an impression on the collective psyche of Luo even in rural locations (personal communication, June 2, 2014). While I lived on the plateau in June 2014, several anxious translators and I watched a political rally on the small, box television in Pastor Ogola's living room. The translators made many comments about the political proceedings we watched together and explained to me a number of recent events in Kenyan politics. Even the rural Luo people on the plateau are not entirely removed from what happens outside

the confines of their local community. Instead, they can be seen as being involved in the larger Kenyan political sphere.

Many elders in Kenya also remember the Mau Mau revolt from 1952 to 1956, which occurred prior to Kenya's independence in 1963 (Hornsby, 2013, p. 19). This uprising primarily involved the deaths of Kikuyu warriors, but was another enduring scar of violence in the memory of Kenya's history, as those warriors died in the tens of thousands (Anderson, 2005, p. 59). This violent event and others in the nation's ongoing history of colonial and tribal tensions remind the Luo people that death remains a threat.

Daily Threats of Death

Death's nearness to the Luo community, however, is not confined to the realms of disease or political instability. Death threatens to take the lives of the Luo simply because they often lack the necessities of daily life. One interviewee shared about the difficulty of obtaining water. Wells commonly dry up during seasons of little rainfall, which comprise six months of the year; the two dry seasons take place, roughly, from January to February and from July to October (Kisumu, "A Land of Opportunity", 2012). At that point, families must trek to a neighboring village for water or purchase water from the market. Since the journey is typically made with bottles and jugs for filling, people sometimes need to hire a motorcycle driver to transport them long distances. Otherwise, they walk. Many interviewed families reported consistently lacking food or money to buy food. Many have also had difficulty in the past with the structural soundness of their homes, especially during the rainy seasons. Not only is the rural Luo community on the plateau afflicted with much disease, but also it also experiences drought, exposure to the

elements, and poverty. The Luo live at the doorstep of death. Death is much more tangible to those who cannot drink water if it does not rain.

Death Leaves Gaps

As will be described in chapter four, the Luo identify themselves communally: familial and tribal loyalties are immense. The death of each member of the tribe is described as leaving a gaping hole in the Luo community.

Death disrupts the bonds of the family and the society. An interviewee whose husband, a police officer, was killed by criminals asked, “Where did death come from? It takes the good ones. It is so bad.” Like most of the other interviewees, this respondent referenced the curse of God on Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden when explaining the presence of war and disease in our world. She answers the question of death’s existence intellectually, but still wrestles to understand it emotionally. She also mourns the damage that death does to the community, taking those whom people love and those who hold important roles in the family, in the workplace, and in society. Ultimately, her personal struggle with the death of her husband ended in finding peace through prayer and in the support of the gathered church congregation.

My interviewees frequently used the word “gap” to describe the mark inflicted by death on the family and the community. Death leaves not only emotional gaps, but also economic gaps. Especially when fathers, mothers, and able-bodied adults die, it is important that the community cooperate to fill the gaps left by their absence. Money must be earned, jobs must be done, and children must be provided for in order for life to go on. To fill these gaps, the Luo “pull together” what they can offer, mobilizing all available resources to help those in need.

The practice of gathered storytelling occurs daily in homes and on the streets. Gathering to share stories forms the attitudes necessary in order to successfully gather themselves for the sharing of tangible resources, which are needed to fill the gaps left by death and sustain the stories that are one another's very lives.

Death Strengthens Community

Death can even bind the hearts of the Luo to one another and to God. The Luo community walks through life together, passes through the same death that all Luos have passed through, and rejoins on the other side of death, forming the community of ancestors. Therefore, no part of the process is carried out entirely alone. Gladys, mentioned above, lost her daughter, son, son's wife, and son's five children all within one year. When asked what gave her hope after this barrage of family deaths, Gladys responded, "God was in [my] heart and He knew the way [my] children had died is the same way [I]e would die." The mournful deaths of many of her family members reminded Gladys of the inner solidarity she has with God and also of the cohesion within her community—past, present, and future. She will one day walk the same path that the deceased in her family, clan, and tribe have walked and will join with them in the afterlife (Shiino, 1997).

The Scriptures reveal truth about God and the world He has created. Samuel perceives the reality of death's inevitability, a message communicated in the Scriptures. In this way, Samuel identifies with the truth of the Bible's words and is bound more tightly to God as a result. Death reminds the Luo of their place in the story of God and of their membership in the Luo society at large. Because of the place of the dead in the Luo

community, the deceased even continue to affect those in the community of the living. This idea will be discussed in chapter three.

Luo Funeral Ceremonies

The complexity, grandeur, and scale of the traditional Luo funeral celebration suggest the reflectiveness of the Luo people on the subject of death. The traditional Luo funeral includes fourteen ritual observances of the dead (Shiino, 1997, p. 213-214). Included in the rituals are vigils, meals, gatherings of family, friends, and church members around the gravesite (which is usually positioned next to the house), the shaving of heads, and provisions for the widow's future, among other things, all of which depend on the social standing and personal attributes of the deceased (Shiino, 1997, p. 214, 223). Depending on the age, sex, and occupation of the deceased, the death is announced (i.e. the wailing and drumming begins) at different times of day, and slightly different timelines for burial are adopted (Shiino, 1997, p. 214). When an individual dies, every member of the community has a role. Women announce the death and serve food while men prepare the grave and perform war-like spiritual rituals called *buru*; this practice is being eliminated by Christian denominations. Other relatives attend a pre-burial vigil, and family, neighbors, church members, and coworkers attend the dancing and feasting that ensue in the week following burial (Shiino, 1997, p. 226, 216). While the majority of funeral rituals occur within the first week or two following a death, the completion of rituals usually does not come to pass until a few months (or even a year) after the death (Shiino, 1997, p. 221).

Many of these funeral customs are being eliminated as Christian beliefs and practices are being integrated with the Luo tradition. Nevertheless, Christian Luo people

still operate according to a distinctly Luo worldview. For example, many Christian Luo people still hold the belief that the spirits of the deceased must be appeased or warded off for the good of the community. In a season of drought, famine, or sickness, common Luo thoughts include: “How have we offended the ancestors? Was there any part of their lives not satisfactorily laid to rest when we conducted their funerals? How can we scare away these evil spirits that are bringing hardship?” However, some Luo Christians are pushing against this mode of thinking that assumes curses come from spirits of the deceased. This is discussed more in chapter three.

History also demonstrates the significance of the funeral in Luo culture. S. M. Otieno, a prominent Luo lawyer, died in 1986. Following the death of Mr. Otieno, a battle ensued between his widow and his eldest surviving brother over the issue of who would be allowed to bury the body, and where (Van Doren, 1988, p. 339). To the westerner, such a question seems foreign, maybe even trivial. However, Van Doren (1988) cites two reasons, one spiritual and one social, why the issue was important enough to cause demonstrations in the streets of Kenya’s cities (1988, p. 329). Carole DuPré states that the Luos believe the funeral is vital to keep in touch with deceased ancestral spirits and especially for avoiding the unpleasant consequences (i.e. “illness, drought, and death”) that can befall those who do not pay proper respect to those who have passed away (as cited in Van Doren, 1988, p. 337). Van Doren (1988) asserts that socially, the funeral “reassert[s] and reinforce[s] group solidarity” among members of the same ethnic group (p. 345). Luo notions of death are rooted in an understanding of how the world operates spiritually, and responses to death involve the action of entire communities. These topics will be discussed in chapters three and four, respectively.

“They Die in the End”

The Luo understand and acknowledge that death is inevitable; this acknowledgment of death’s inevitability is a source of peace to the bereaved. One interviewee, pseudonymously referred to as Gladys, told a story of the death of her late husband over twenty years before. She identified key elements in her own process of coping with the death of the one she loved most dearly. Good advice and encouragement from friends and family members were important aspects of dealing with grief. However, she says the primary thing that brought her peace was the understanding that “there is no person who is permanent in this world. People have to die.” “Even those who are well off,” those who have plenty of food, a reliable home, and good health care, “they die in the end,” she said.

Our friend Samuel made an illuminating remark in his interview. Recounting the story of his cousin’s death in the hospital, Samuel said he had worked through feelings of depression, confusion, stress, and loneliness by saying, “O God, you wrote that disease can be prevented, but death cannot be avoided.” In the heart of a Luo, faith in God’s goodness supersedes the desire to understand why death exists in the world. The Luo read the Bible’s various comments on death and understand its inevitability in an imperfect world. By framing death (and all of life) within an understanding of faith in God, the Luo come to fully trust that all is for a purpose.

Part of the Luos’ acceptance of death stems from their self-contextualization within a Biblical perspective of the world. They accept death because God is in control and yet there is death. Part of what marks the Luo worldview is an unshakeable perspective of faith in God, especially in hardship. Instead of blaming difficulties and

troubles on God, they instead lean on His protection and provision while turning to the Scriptures when seeking answers for the questions of life's adversities.

Interviewees consistently expressed their understanding of the ubiquity of sickness through biblical references. In response to the question of why they believe sickness and death to be in the world, interviewees explicitly referenced the Garden of Eden and the sin of Adam and Eve in eight out of the sixteen interview sessions. The depth of their explanations varied, but they consistently attributed death, sickness, or both to the sin of humankind.

Death is seen as an aspect of the world created and ruled by God. The Luo understand God to be both the granter of life and the bringer of death. One respondent claimed, "it is only God who keeps people healthy." Health comes from God. Another respondent said, "Even God promised we have to die and we are dying because of disease." Another stated people are either sick or healthy "according to how God has put it." Just as health belongs to God, death and sickness belong to God. I asked every interviewee the following: "Recount a moment in which you felt God powerfully touched your life." One mother responded with a story of her two children, who had simultaneously become very sick and subsequently died in the same week. The woman praised God for having touched her life so powerfully. Samuel later explained to me that her rejoicing was because "she understands that God is the one who gives, and He is the one who takes away" (personal communication, May 21, 2014).

Several of the interviewees' explanations of disease associated sickness with physical factors, e.g. "germs" in the air and water or a preventative "tetanus shot." Even when explaining sickness according to physical causes, however, the Luo continue to

perceive spiritual meaning behind disease. Samuel acknowledged dirty water, for example, to be an immediate, causal source of illness, but he also offered the theological explanation that the devil, who enjoys that humans get sick, works in and through the physical realm. Two other respondents also indicated the belief that the devil brings disease to the world. One of these, Pastor Ogola, correlated disease also with the following factors: “population, primitiveness, and poverty.” Another respondent believed disease to be especially prevalent on the plateau because of “unbalanced diet,” or malnutrition, yet explicitly stated, “It is God’s plan that we have got life, health, death, and disease. All these are plans of God. God planned that there must be disease, God planned that people must be healthy, and God planned that people must die.” While holding to empirically measurable causes of disease, the Luo simultaneously perceive spiritual forces working through the circumstances and events of their everyday lives, and the Biblical narrative anchors the Luo in their interpretation of events in the world in which they interact.

One interview asserted, “All people are sick... each and every person is sick.” Two other interviewees similarly stated, “Nobody is healthy.” When the interviewees make such claims, they are confident of the truth of their statement not because they have conducted an epidemiologic study, but because of their theological understanding of the place that disease holds in the world. The Luo worldview results in creative tension the experience of the seen world with the understanding of what cannot be seen. The two are inextricable, co-mingling in their approach to the questions of life. Death is no exception to this.

CHAPTER THREE

Spirits of the Dead

Welcome to Luoland

As my translator and I walked from one home to another, I could not help but notice the serenity of the Nyakach Plateau. To the eye, it looked much like a painting. The colors came in strokes: the curving muddy road and its parchment-brown ruts, the leaning trees and their healing emerald leaves, and the arching sky's capacious blue, which appeared to call me as if, by gazing upon it, I could soar up into it. To the ear, it was just barely louder than the painting it would have seemed to be had I not felt my lungs swell with the warm air, saturated with rays of sunshine. Birdsong from the east danced above our heads betwixt birdsong from the west, the light trills forming a paper-thin canopy in the air, such that Luo villages separated by location even became the same place. Goats and cows quietly chomped on the low grass that sprung up all over.

I noticed—my weary feet were the first to tell me—that each hut and house was surrounded by space. Lots of land. It was the giant stage on which the Luo enact their lives. To the outsider, it would appear as if these men and women took their place in front of an empty auditorium. (Well, maybe in front of several frenzied chickens and a few of the lazier farm animals.) As I listened to them describe their lives, however, I realized I was being watched. The place was not empty, but brimming with occupants. In Luoland, there is a constant audience of tens of millions. Imagine a larger stadium than any that has been built on this earth—brimming with spectators.

One would not guess it on a typical sunny afternoon. Perhaps the brilliant orange, green, yellow, and blue wraps adorning the Luo women would give it away, or the bouncing songs that are played and sung during celebrations. But as people are reclining under shade trees, tilling their gardens, and stirring their pots of *ugali*, who would know?

The crowd that I have described as being present for the proceedings of Luoland includes the community of the ancestors. This community consists of those who have been a part of the breathing body of united tribespeople that has stretched throughout the millennia. Old members of the community may have passed from this life, but they are believed to have not left Luoland. This is true in both a figurative and a literal sense. For one, the memory of all who have died is preserved through traditions and tales. On the other hand, it is commonly believed that dissatisfied or non-Christian spirits will persist in the community, bringing curses and diseases. Thus, the Luo see many aspects of their lives today as being directly associated with the spirits of dead Luo tribesmen.

In more recent history—that is, in the past fifty to one hundred years (Oliver, 1952, p. 175; “Christianity in Kenya,” n.d.)—the unseen spiritual audience perceived by the Luo has grown to include one very important figure and the people who have been part of His story. This figure is the Christian God, whom they have come to know through hearing the stories told in His book, the Bible, about Him and those who believe in Him. The Luo understanding of God and how He relates to them will be discussed in chapter 5. The Luo people’s lives are illuminated by these stories, which include traditions, heroes, remedies, and explanations for many things that occur in the world. For the Luo, the present and the past are being woven on the same “loom” and with the

same “thread.” In Luoland, stories come to life, for we find ourselves truly in the middle of them.

The Community of Ancestors

As the Luo community spans death and life, the living and the dead interact in specific contexts. In some contexts, the spirits of the dead are beneficial to the living; at other times, these spirits are seen as haranguing the living. For example, in the practice of herbal medicine, the spirits of the ancestors are helpful, revealing knowledge that leads to health. In many other instances, however, interactions with the spirits of the dead take the form of curses. As a result, many of the Luo often come to attribute sickness or some other misfortune to the evil, lingering spirits of unappeased ancestors.

Nyaluo Herbal Medicine

Many Luo people perceive deceased ancestors to be actively involved in Luo practices of herbal healing. Prince and Geissler (2001) describe the method by which herbal medicine, *nyaluo*, is passed down through the generations. Specially selected children learn from grandparents who know the proper use of Luo herbs. Grandparents acquired this knowledge from their grandparents or from direct spiritual communication with the deceased, who have guided these grandparents to herbs and plants in the bush, instructing them regarding their use toward the end of healing. In this way, Luo interaction with the spiritual community of the dead is limited, but significant in that it brings healing to the sick and endows with knowledge those who are chosen to learn it (p. 456-461).

The practice of herbal medicine is still prevalent among the Luo on the Nyakach Plateau and in much of Luoland. When asked how many herbalists practice in their

community, interviewees responded with answers up to ten. “Community” was not clearly defined in my question, but their responses affirming the presence and estimating the prevalence of herbal healers in the community indicate that the Luo practice of *nyaluo* does remain alive today. Among the 27 individuals I interviewed, I found that three practice herbal medicine to some degree.

It is not completely clear whether or not the Luo perceive their understanding of herbal medicine to be at odds with a Christian worldview. The three herbal healers I interviewed associate themselves with the Pentecostal Assembly of God, Voice of Salvation & Healing, and AIC denominations. These are all Christian denominations, and the first two are charismatic. At least two other interviewees regularly visit an herbalist. In only one response was visiting an herbalist explicitly associated with the spiritual beliefs of the patient. Some said people visit herbalists only when they fail to recover from their illness after taking western medicines. Others said people visit herbalists regularly for specific ailments such as “stomachache,” “swelling,” “aching,” or “malaria.”

Two other respondents mentioned that those who see herbalists do not believe the hospitals can heal well. One of these respondents mentioned the elderly among this group. This is perhaps an indication that the belief in the healing power of the herbs was implicit in the responses of the four interviewees who articulated that the primary group to visit herbalists is the elderly. That multiple respondents would mention they know community members, primarily the elderly, who do not believe the hospitals can heal well implies that there persists to some degree in the Nyakach Plateau Luo community the idea that western medicine is ineffective. Interviewees imply that people who believe

so turn to *nyaluo* for effective healing. However, this view appears to be a minority view, as 100% of my interviewees indicated their own belief that Western medicine is indeed effective in bringing healing to sick patients.

Pastor Ogola responded that those who visit herbalists are “the poor and those who believe in the healing power of the herbs.” In Ogola’s interview, he told a story in which he helped a woman in his congregation give birth to a child. The family had “called all the herbalists to come pour water on the child,” but Ogola, as her pastor, prayed over the woman giving birth. He prayed, “God, if it is your will, make this woman whole.” Then, “when he said, ‘Amen,’ the baby came out.” Ogola concludes the story by reflecting, “All the herbs that had been collected did not do anything, but prayer was effective.” From this story, it remains ambiguous whether Pastor Ogola would morally condone the use of herbal medicine for the Christian. What he does believe, however, is that the power of God through prayer is greater than the power of any Luo herbal tradition.

Traditional Healers

The traditional healer is shrouded in secrets. It was difficult for me to obtain much information at all regarding these diviners in the Nyakach Luo community because “there is a stigma against visiting traditional healers in this community.” When I asked my respondents how often they personally visit a traditional healer, every single one of them without hesitation said, “Never.” Some laughed at the question—it is an uncomfortable subject to broach with the Luo because the practice is taboo and non-Christian. Perhaps my interviewees also thought it odd to talk about Luo traditional healers with a young, white Christian from America. Even so, we talked briefly about the practices of

traditional healers, or witchdoctors, and I found it ironic that many of my interviewees, despite having “never” visited a traditional healer, were able to answer many of my questions about them.

It is difficult to count the number of traditional healers on the Nyakach Plateau, but there are probably several. I asked my interviewees, “How many traditional healers are accessible to you?” The responses varied quite a bit: “one,” “very few,” “ten,” “many.” One response casts some insight on this variation in responses: “I do not know because people are hiding. Sometimes, your best friend may be a traditional healer and you may not know. There are many in the village, but they are hiding.” Patients will “go secretly, not wanting to be identified,” but also the traditional healers themselves will keep their trade a secret. The pervasive understanding in this community is that the work of traditional healers does not please God and therefore should not be accessed by those who fear Him, the Christians.

Patient Population

Some proportion of the Luo people on the Nyakach Plateau continues to visit traditional healers. When asked, “Is it common in this community for someone to go to a traditional healer,” only two of sixteen respondents to this question indicated that it is not common. Five others communicated that there might be some who see traditional healers secretly, but they were not sure who those people were or how many of them participated in these spiritual healing practices. The other nine who responded to this question stated that there are indeed Luo who continue to consult traditional healers in times of need. While some of these respondents claimed “many” continue to see such healers, others said there are only a “few” Luo people who continue to visit them.

The elderly and those who do not believe in God are seen to be those who most commonly continue to go to traditional healers, but a few interviewees indicated that the practice is increasing among some of the Luo youth, as well. As with those who see *nyaluo* herbal healers, some of the utilization of traditional healers stems from that Luo population who prefers the traditional healers. These people “believe that the traditional healers can cure them well,” “believe [traditional healers’] herbs work better than hospital medicine,” and “do not believe the hospital can cure them better.” Of those who use traditional healers, there are two kinds: “some people go to the health center first” and then visit a traditional healer if they do not feel better, and “some opt to go to the traditional healer rather than the clinic.” One interviewee indicated that the population of those who see traditional healers correlates with “those who do not have faith in God” and “the superstitious.” Three respondents indicated that some Luo youth visit the traditional healers—two of these respondents made nearly identical statements that “in the past, only the elderly did, but today, even the youth do.” It is not merely an outdated practice, but continues to be found relevant to Luo society today.

Cures

The traditional healer can address a wide range of problems, or perceived problems, in people’s lives. For example, the power of traditional healers extends to relationships. “The owner or father of the home may choose to see a traditional healer when he sees his home is divided and led astray. Someone may tell him to visit a traditional healer to set his home back in place.” On the road to Kisumu from the Nyakach Plateau, I also saw advertisements for herbalists who claimed the ability to make someone fall in love with the person who would visit them and pay for their

services. Two of my interviewees also talked about the ability of traditional healers to help regain or improve one's material possessions. For example, one might call a traditional healer if he has "lost a property or cows" or if he wants "something he owns to get better." The traditional healer can play a number of roles in a community, all of which are closely associated with the spiritual realm.

For the non-Luo reader, it is important to clarify what is meant by the term "herbalist." Pastor Ogola distinguishes between three kinds of herbalists:

- (1) Those *nyaluo* herbalists who learn the practice of herbal medicine from their parents and grandparents.
- (2) Those spiritual healers who discover new herbal remedies from dreams and visions and then test the effectiveness of these new remedies on themselves or family members before using them on others.
- (3) Those who begin to practice herbal medicine for the purpose of making lots of money.

Ogola says, "The last herbal Nyaluo herbalist is not genuine. [These are] those who push themselves into those practices because of finances. Those are not good Luo herbalists." About them, he also says, "The third person is a bad one. They are witch doctors in Luo herbs and Christians should not go to them. They make a lot of conflicts among the communities so much. They are false Luo herbalists" (personal communication, February 18, 2016).

Traditional healers perform certain rituals in order to spiritually discern the root of a problem or disease. Two interviewees described one ritual by which this is accomplished: a traditional healer will light a candle, cover the visitor with a piece of red

cloth, and pray. One of the interviewees who described this ritual also claimed that if a patient is experiencing pain in some part of his or her body, the traditional healer will “take a razor blade across where the pain is occurring” prior to the use of the candle and the red cloth. In another ritual, a traditional healer will adorn himself with a “furry hat” and use a bag of stones or a collection of odd items in order to determine the source of the patient’s problem.

After ascertaining the spiritual root of someone’s problem, a traditional healer determines some course of treatment. This treatment may involve herbal medicines or it may involve more exotic remedies. Sometimes, the traditional healer will require the patient to obtain something for her own treatment. This may include, for example, a black cat or the ear of a lion.

Cost

Traditional healers charge sizeable amounts of money for their services. Ogola says, “Traditional healers are so expensive that you cannot imagine. They get money through cheating and conning men and women” (personal communication, March 1, 2016). Payments to traditional healers often come in the form of a bull, sheep, goat, or other valuable livestock. Traditional healers may even demand two or three of these animals. Cattle in Kenya cost between KSh 20,000 and KSh 25,000. Goats cost between KSh 12,000 and KSh 14,000. Male goats cost between KSh 7,500 and KSh 8,000 (H. Ogola, personal communication, March 1, 2016). On a smaller scale, according to the drugs that are used in the treatment process, traditional healers charge KSh 200 to KSh 1,000 or more. For more powerful treatments and solutions, traditional healers charge upwards of 10,000 or even 30,000 Kenyan shillings.

To allow the foreigner to understand the value of these amounts of money, Pastor Ogola provided some price comparisons. Eight kilograms of sugar, enough to last a family for 30 days, costs KSh 1,000. On the plateau, KSh 1,000 can also be used to purchase “two long trousers.” He said, “KSh 1,000 is very big money to have in Kenya. It is [uncommon for a] person [to] possess KSh 1,000 in his or her pocket everyday” (personal communication, March 1, 2016).

One interviewee offered the following response after being asked how much it costs to be treated by a traditional healer:

It is too expensive: even 30,000 KSH. For example, there was a traditional healer he used to see at Sondu—if you pay him 150,000 KSH, he can kill a person in 7 minutes. If you pay him 100,000 KSH, he can kill a person in 15 minutes. If you pay him 50,000 KSH, he can kill a person in 1 hour.

This response indicates two things and suggests a third. The first, we have already mentioned: the fees charged by traditional healers can be high. Second, the work of the witchdoctor is primarily spiritual. The witchdoctor does not leave his house and go kill someone himself. Rather, he relies upon spiritual powers in order to accomplish his work. The third thing suggested by this anecdote is that the community perceives that the traditional healer really does have the ability to effect the things requested by the petitioner. Perhaps the traditional healer has been successful in similar endeavors previously. The cost is overwhelmingly difficult to pay, suggesting that since people are occasionally willing to pay these prices, they do expect the actions of the witchdoctors to be effective.

Effectiveness

When asked explicitly about the effectiveness of the traditional healers, however, the interviewees indicated incredulity at the methods and results of these witchdoctors. To four interviewees, I posed the question, “Are these remedies effective in curing illnesses?” Three interviewees responded, “No,” and one said, “They are not always telling the truth.” This same respondent recounted a story in which a traditional healer used herbal medicine to determine who in the village was “pure” and who was “impure.” “If someone was pure, nothing would happen, but if you were impure, the drug would follow you.” This interviewee, however, stated a second time that he does not trust traditional healers because “most of them do not say the truth.” In this case, the problem in the village was not resolved—there had been some cows stolen, which were not returned to their owners—but the traditional healer made 25,000 KSH from the villagers nonetheless.

A profitable direction for future research would likely be to investigate the role that the Luo ascribe to spiritual beings whom the traditional healers and general populace believe to be involved in these rituals. I include traditional healers in this chapter because they are associated with curses, with herbal medicine, and with spirits other than God. The Luo suggest, by their hesitancy to discuss matters of traditional healing, that the spiritual things associated with it are evil—dubious at best. It is certain that for Christians, their practices are unacceptable. One interviewee cites that to go to a traditional healer or witchdoctor is condemned by the Bible. As a result, people who do so may be possessed by evil spirits. However, one interviewee, herself a bonesetter on the plateau, treated a traditional healer with a broken bone. She witnessed as he healed a

madman of his madness, and she believes that traditional healers “work also through God.” While the traditional healer and his practices do not seem central to understanding Luo life today, they nevertheless remain an important window into historical Luo culture and into spiritual beliefs that persist today.

Possession by Evil Spirits

Interaction with the dead is often described as occurring in a negative context. There are beliefs that persist surrounding their understanding of curses, the burial of the dead, and discord between the dead and the living. For example, many Luo believe that when someone does not receive a proper burial, the spirit may haunt his or her own family members in the form of sickness or madness. Schwartz (2000) identified that just as living community members may manipulate and affect social and family life, they continue to do so post-mortem.

One way in which deceased ancestors are perceived by the Luo to continue to affect the living is through the possession of some people by evil spirits. Pastor Ogola explained that people who are “possessed” might be seen “acting like an animal or walking around anyhow.” As he discussed this phenomenon, he made reference to the “bad things that grandparents did,” which “can resurface in someone.” He added, “The devil of your parents can come back to you if there is space for them in you.” Another interviewee mentions that the person possessed by an evil spirit “may not know what [he or she] is doing:” perhaps the evil spirit will carry the person “far away to another country” or perhaps the evil spirit will imbue the person with extraordinary strength so that he or she will “beat everyone in the home.” As healthcare providers work among the

Luo people, it will be necessary to reconcile the Luo understanding of ancestral spirit possession with modern western psychiatry.

The Luo people associate evil spirits with traditional healers, or witchdoctors, who are not the same as herbal healers. Since the Bible condemns seeing witchdoctors, “if someone goes to see a traditional healer or witchdoctor, they can be possessed by these evil things,” meaning evil spirits. However, the perceived power of the traditional healer continues to draw some to visit traditional healers in order to obtain or secure various things in their lives, including health and other gains.

Nyawawa

The phenomenon of *nyawawa* is the periodic procession of disease-inflicting ancestral spirits through the village and the process of scaring those spirits out of the community. This phenomenon serves as a striking example that the Luo commonly understand sickness to be associated with evil spiritual agents at work in the community of the living.

My interviewees described and explained this phenomenon to me. This, in itself, is worth noting. I was amazed by how open the Luo people seemed to be with me both in general and specifically on this topic. How can they expect me, as an American, to understand this African ancestral spiritual phenomenon they call *nyawawa*? For the most part, they are aware that this is a phenomenon unique to their region—or at least that this phenomenon does not occur where I am from. In fact, they would laugh at me—perhaps by how perplexed I looked while I took notes on what they were saying—when I asked so many (odd) questions about *nyawawa*. Only one respondent was surprised to hear that

nyawawa does not occur in America. Nevertheless, they graciously responded to me, a young, white American.

Respondents described the evil spirits as acting in certain ways, the villagers as acting in other ways, and the phenomenon happening with a certain timeline and frequency. Respondents offered various reasons why the phenomenon occurs. The spiritual—or some would call it “superstitious”—reason will first be explored. After that, further reflections on the phenomenon from a prominent community pastor, a young, college-aged English-Luo translator, Luo literary voices, and online blogger voices will be examined.

What is nyawawa?

During *nyawawa*, evil spirits pass through the village in a parade-like fashion, proceeding down the street and attempting to enter the houses in the community. The spirits only come at night, ushered in by “a certain wave of wind” ... “that brings noise.” In Kiswahili and in Dholuo, the words for “wind” and “spirit” are very similar—even identical. In Kiswahili, *upepo* means “wind,” and *pepo* means “demon.” In Dholuo, *yamo* means “wind,” and *yamo* can also mean “evil spirit.” This use of *yamo* to talk about evil spirits is “especially common in South Nyanza, and less so in central and northern Luo regions of Kenya” (Harries, 2009, p. 1-2).

Respondents attributed many types of sounds to this “noise,” but all eight respondents on the subject of *nyawawa* focused on noisiness as a central attribute of the event. Respondents said that one can hear the spirits “in the air” and “No footsteps are heard, only other noises.” Two respondents describe the sound of shaking: one said, “Everything seems to be shaking” during the phenomenon, and another said, “[The]

house seems to be shaking.” The houses in this community are simple, composed of one or two small rooms. The walls are made of thin wooden beams plastered with mud; the roofs are often tin or thatched with grass; and the floors are dirt. The evil spirits might “knock on the door” as they pass by, even shouting things such as, “Let us come to this home” or “Give me my child, give me my child.” The evil spirits are an imminent, personal threat to the health of a household, looming uncomfortably nearby. The spirits may be heard “beating drums,” “using whistles,” “crying,” or making lots of “funny noises.” These spirits cannot be seen, but are understood to “pass near the house” because these noises are heard “all over the house.”

When this happens, the villagers respond by attempting to scare the spirits away from their homes. To do this, they beat containers, roofs, or drums because “It is believed that where there is noise, [the evil spirits] do not belong.” Apparently, this excludes the noise the evil spirits themselves are making. The language of “scaring” the spirits is specifically employed when the Luo describe this activity. In addition to beating things, people shout to the spirits, “calling names” to fend them off. It is also important to note that while all villagers make noise to scare the spirits away, children and youth, i.e. those quick enough to run to the street, do this especially. Perhaps these are derogatory names to further intimidate the evil spirits. Perhaps, however, the respondent was saying that people are calling the name of God for help while they are under the peril of such spiritual attack. What can be certain is that some do indeed “pray in the name of Jesus for these things to leave.” The racket of all this activity is quite loud: one respondent noted that when these spirits pass, “there is no peace in the whole village” and “people do not

sleep.” It would be interesting to ask how long the noise of this phenomenon lasts. Certainly, the fear remains in their hearts longer than the noise clangs in their ears.

Many Luo on the Nyakach Plateau understand *nyawawa* as a sort of battle or encounter between the living and the dead. However, others, including community leader and pastor Habil Ogola, perceive this phenomenon to be an illusion perpetuated by superstition. There are several ideas of how the occasion becomes a truly spiritual event. These will be discussed later, but I mention these ideas here in order to point out that to differentiate between “what the spirits do” and “what the people do” during *nyawawa* is quite possibly a false distinction. Both the spirits and the people are making noise—this noise is putatively both the sign of the spirits’ presence and the attempt to keep them away. As villagers hear the noise, they run out and start making more of their own.

After *nyawawa* occurs, many people get sick. Naturally, the cause of these sicknesses is understood to be spiritual. The ancestral spirits involved in *nyawawa* are ancestral spirits that “lack a place to enter into.” They cannot enter Heaven because they “died when they did not know God.” Many of these spirits “were not ready to die,” i.e. they died suddenly in a murder or car accident, for example and “they want people to follow them,” to the grave out of evil jealousy. One respondent claimed that the spirits are “from the seas,” meaning “from Lake Victoria,” the largest adjacent body of water to Luoland in western Kenya, and also mentioned that the evil spirits want “those who are not strong in faith to die with them.”

The Common Explanation

The general understanding is that the spirits are “sent by Satan” or are in some way “coming through the power of Satan” to torment the community of the living. The

mission of these spirits is to “disturb people and withdraw them from God to satanic ways.” As one Luo person explained, “They come with many different diseases... They are satanic diseases because it is believed that these are the people who died long ago.” For the Luo, there is not a hard and fast boundary line dividing spiritual and physical health. That the Luo perceive the bodily disease allegedly inflicted by the evil spirits as a legitimate way these spirits “withdraw [people] from God to satanic ways,” quoted above, demonstrates the connectedness of the whole person in the Luo worldview. As disease in one’s life can have spiritual origins, spiritual change in one’s life can have physical origins. Luo Christians have also learned to see healing and even sickness and death as evidence of God’s nearness in their lives. However, many Christian Luo people believe disease can cause one to turn from God. Death can steal people away before they put their faith in Christ. In these ways, sickness can be seen as a direct affront of the Devil. Further research investigating the Luo understanding of trials and temptations further elucidating the role of the Devil would bring clarity to this element of their worldview. What is evident here is that when sickness is coupled with the fear of *nyawawa*, disease is seen as primarily evil. When sickness is coupled with the fear of God, disease can be seen as a blessing, as discussed in chapter two.

Diseases Associated with Nyawawa

Nyawawa brings many different types of diseases. In the past, this range of diseases that one could acquire from the evil spirits in *nyawawa* was called *nundi*, pronounced “noon-doo.” Respondents emphasized that following *nyawawa* “there are very many people who get sick” with “many diseases.” One goes so far as to say “most people do fall sick” following an event of *nyawawa*. Others, however, point out that

sickness often targets children specifically. Another respondent tells a story, saying *nyawawa* came while a relative was extremely ill, and “he died when [the spirits] came.” I found no evidence in the literature of an attempt to compare the incidence rate or prevalence of sickness before and after the occurrence of *nyawawa*. If one were to do so, I suspect the difference would not be significant. Nevertheless, there is a real perception that occurrences of sickness and death suddenly spike following each *nyawawa* event, even if this perception is based in psychological biases rooted in Luo tradition. I do not deny that some spiritual explanations of earthly phenomena may be legitimate, but I merely point out what this illustrates about the underlying psyche of the Luo people. As the Luo confront sickness, suffering, and death, the spiritual world is a legitimate cause of ailment and healing. This view is overwhelmingly held publicly in the Nyakach Plateau community.

Respondents described several specific types of sicknesses brought by the evil spirits of *nyawawa*. First, there are skin diseases. Adults can get “measles,” which they describe as “spots all over the body.” Children often get a “cough” and, like adults, also frequently get “measles.” One respondent says *nyawawa* can bring “big spots all over the body, which can cause death.” Another speaks of something that sounds even stranger to western medical ears: “A long time ago, the outer skin would come off and you would only be left with the inner skin.” Others report that after *nyawawa*, “people’s bodies are swollen,” some people “turn mad,” and some people “turn deaf.” Another perspective is that the spirits only have an effect on those who believe that they do really bring disease. One respondent testifies that “she does not beat containers and shout” because she does

not believe in the spirits; in turn, “she has not been affected by any disease” from *nyawawa*.

Healing After Nyawawa

In order to cure the diseases that result from *nyawawa*, people turn to an array of treatments, including Western medicine, Luo herbal remedies, and prayer. One interviewee said that in order to cure the many people who are sick and whose bodies are “swollen,” the Luo use both “injections,” meaning intravenous (IV) therapy, and “herbal medicines.” She herself is an herbalist, and she claims that “there is a drug they use to wash people, especially children,” to heal their sicknesses. Evident in Luo treatment practices is a willingness to employ available forms of healing, whether of Western or Luo origin. She also says the pastors in the community will “pray and conduct door-to-door visits from home to home” in order to identify and help sick people following *nyawawa*. As seen throughout this chapter, the spiritual realm continues to be a perceived source of healing to which the people must turn in times of sickness and suffering. Chapter 3 talked about the significance of communal support structures in bereavement and aid. Further research into the impact of *nyawawa* on neighborly social support structures would elucidate the meaning of *nyawawa* to the Luo people and would inform our understanding of what these communal support structures are and how and why they function. Do people help one another differently after an occurrence of *nyawawa* than during normal seasons of sickness? How so?

Origins

There is evidence suggesting *nyawawa* first began in 1969. One interviewee does not recall a specific year in which she first heard it, but remembered it happening “a long time ago.” Another respondent offered a more specific answer, stating she first heard it when she was “five years old,” which was in “1969.” Roger Kurtz mentions this occurrence of *nyawawa* in his explication of the African poem “Song of Nyarloka” by Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, who is considered one of Kenya’s “leading literary lights” (Kurtz, 2002, p. 100). The poem opens with a scene of chaotic noises from *nyawawa*:

Clangour of tin-pans
broke last night,
screams of abuse
self-protecting
directed by the elders... (as cited in Kurtz, 2002, p. 104).

Kurtz (2002) explains, “The particular *nyawawa* on which Macgoye bases her poem occurred in 1969, when there was an outbreak of cholera near Kisumu” (p. 105). This date is consistent with the claim of the elder cited above. No interviewee made any mention of an instance of *nyawawa* prior to 1969, and Ogola also reported that he had also heard the one in 1969 (personal communication, March 29, 2016).

It is significant that the first occurrence of *nyawawa* coincided with a major outbreak of disease. The causality between *nyawawa* and disease can be seen from two angles. The responses of my interviewees suggest that the evil spirits cause disease as they parade through the community during *nyawawa*. However, Kurtz (2002) defines *nyawawa* as “a traditional Luo practice in which a community drives away evil with loud

noises and shouts, banging on pans and so forth” (p. 105). Kurtz’ description of *nyawawa* implies the phenomenon is more accurately understood as being initiated by the villagers—specifically, the elders of the village—in response to a particularly widespread bout of sickness that has already occurred, not that is inflicted by the spirits as they pass through the community. According to this understanding, *nyawawa* is not the coming of the evil spirits; rather, it is the expulsion of the evil spirits. “The noise and shouting drive out the spirits, who pass from one village to the next until they eventually end up in Lake Victoria,” expelled from the community (Kurtz, 2002, p. 105). This element of *nyawawa* is common to the descriptions of both Kurtz and my interviewees: the Luo people perceive their noise and commotion as getting rid of the evil spirits who have inflicted suffering, disease, and death on them.

Another significant instance of *nyawawa* occurred in the early 1980’s. One of my interviewees indicated that this was the first *nyawawa* he witnessed. Born in 1969, he was “fourteen years old” when he first heard of *nyawawa*. So, according to his account, *nyawawa* occurred in 1983. It seems, however, the actual date was in 1982. Habil Ogola was living in Kisumu in 1982 and recounted his memory of the event:

I first heard of it in Kisumu when my two sons were very young. It was noon. I was at the hospital when I heard it in Kisumu—it sounded like it covered all of Kenya... 1982 was the first time I heard about it.

This *nyawawa* was also potentially related to a large disease outbreak. The World Health Organization reports that since 1971, several outbreaks of cholera have occurred in Kenya (World Health Organization, 2010, p. 1). The late 1970’s and early 1980’s saw notable incidences of cholera cases, 1982 being the highest in this period with over 3,000

reported cases (World Health Organization, 2010, p. 1). Unfortunately, the data on this two-page “Cholera Country Profile” do not contain information regarding the geographic locations of these cases within Kenya.

Ogola’s account of the 1982 Kisumu *nyawawa* is the only time I have read or heard of it not taking place at night. All accounts of *nyawawa* in my interview data address the phenomenon as something that occurs at night. Further research into the frequency and history of daytime *nyawawa* events is needed in order to interpret the meaning of this shift to exclusively nighttime *nyawawa* events.

The data suggest *nyawawa* to be a memorable event for children as young as five years old. A teenage respondent, born in 1996, remembered the first occurrence of *nyawawa* happening in 2001, when she was five years old. Notably, this was also the age at which respondent 6 remembers *nyawawa* first happening, through these “childhood memories”.

Frequency

The frequency of these occurrences reported by my respondents is between six months and three years. Three respondents claimed that it happens at least annually. Two of them specifically refer to *nyawawa* as happening “during drought,” which is often at the end of the dry seasons. Western, rural Kenya has four seasons: two rainy seasons and two dry seasons. The first dry season lasts from January to February; the first rainy season from March to June; the second dry season from July to October; and the second rainy season from November to December (Kisumu, “A Land of Opportunity”, 2012). One of the respondents who referenced the times of drought believes the frequency of *nyawawa* has decreased over time: shifting from as much as every couple of weeks to

about once a year. On the other hand, four respondents reported *nyawawa* happens every two or three years. One of these four respondents also said the frequency of *nyawawa* has decreased over time. Another one of these commented on the predictability of the phenomenon, saying it has become identifiable by “a strong wind that brings noise, after which people start beating their containers... A long time ago, they could not predict whether they are coming or almost coming.” Here, again, there is an association with wind and spirits. Indirectly, then, wind can be associated with disease, as these evil spirits are seen as bearers of sickness. Only one respondent of eight, referring to the evil spirits of *nyawawa*, claimed that “they come frequently” now, whereas “a long time ago, it used to take a long time between occurrences.”

Prior to this study in May and June of 2014, the most recent report of an instance of *nyawawa* was fall of 2013. Out of the eight interviewees asked when *nyawawa* last happened, five respondents said or implied “last year.” One of these indicated October specifically, and another indicated “five months ago.” A different respondent reported the last event was in March of 2014, but Habil Ogola said it last happened “two years ago,” which would have been in 2012. One respondent simply replied, “Recently.” While there is some discrepancy in this information, it is reasonable to assume the last occurrence had taken place sometime toward the end of the second dry season of the previous year, i.e. October of 2013. Perhaps some of the discrepancy arises from varying geographical location within the village.

Praying

When describing the diseases brought by *nyawawa*, one respondent claimed, “A long time ago, the outer skin would come off and you would only be left with the inner

skin.” Of this person, the translator said, “This current world we are living in, whenever he hears such things, there is nothing he can do but kneel down and pray.” For the Luo, the experiences of death and sickness are spiritual at their foundations. The spiritual understandings surrounding these experiences stem from both traditional animistic and Christian biblical narratives. These narratives are shared as people gather to tell stories in church, in the marketplace, and at home.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Community of the Living

The Layers of the Luo Web

The third primary theme related to the Luo experience of suffering that emerged in my interviews is the role of the community of the living. Here, “community” must be defined, for I have identified that the Luo understand their world to be occupied by several types of “neighbors,” and I will outline these as I understand them. First, the Luo identify both human and divine neighbors. Regarding the divine, there is an understanding that the world is pervaded by God’s presence. Regarding human neighbors, the Luo would further distinguish between the community of the living and the supernatural community of the dead. Many Luo believe the world to be occupied by various evil spirits, which are the spirits of ancestors who are not at rest in Heaven. The spirits of the living and of the dead affect one another’s wellbeing, both directly and indirectly. Within the community of the living, the Luo further distinguish between the local, denominationally affiliated church and the community at large. Finally, the living community at large can be understood in two primary ways: broadly, in terms of the clan or the tribal allegiance, or locally, in terms of those neighbors who reside in a fairly small geographical vicinity. There is a bit of grey area in this final distinction because most of the people on the Nyakach Plateau are biologically related as clansmen—however, clans tend to reside across multiple communities.

Tribal Identity

When discussing social dynamics in Kenya, it is important to always keep in mind the role of the tribe and the power of tribal identity. Hornsby (2013) identifies tribal loyalty, usually in the form of inter-tribal wars, skirmishes, or disagreements, as being one of the guiding principles of Kenyan history since independence from Britain. Political tensions in Kenya run high during election time, as the tribes form a number of political alignments. There are seven primary tribes in Kenya, the Luo being the third largest at 13% of the nation's population (Kenya, n.d.). Even the largest tribe, the Kikuyu, makes up only 22% of the population. In order for any of the tribes to have political dominance, which often translates to economic security and a social advantage, tribesmen must unite with each other and align themselves with other tribes for a time. However, the tribal loyalty of the Luo is not merely out of economy, but is part of the Luo tradition.

One way for the Luo to distinguish themselves is by some mark on their physical appearance. This "mark" or "sign" of being a Luo person takes a number of forms. I will discuss two, both of which remain prevalent in the Nyakach Plateau Luo community today. The obviousness with which Luo people tend to identify themselves as such is consistent with their extreme willingness to provide help and support to one another.

One can identify a Luo person if he or she is wearing a cylindrical woven hat that has a red cross with square dimensions. Not all Luo wear these hats, but only Luo who are part of the Roho (which means "Spirit" in Swahili) charismatic denomination. As I journeyed across the Nyakach Plateau during my time in Kenya, I saw many of these hats every day. Ogola was able as a youth to recognize a fellow Luo tribesman in Tanzania,

far from his home in Kenya, because of this distinctive garb. He said he “saw a man with a cross hat, part of the Roho people” and “knew that was a Luo in Tanzania.” Ogola then “decided to follow this person so that he would not die,” another indication that Luo people find strength for survival by harnessing communal ties. This method of identification is also beneficial in times of medical emergency: if an elderly person falls on the side of the road, the Roho hat will help those assisting the sick person to know where he or she should be taken, i.e. to which church they should be taken in order to receive help in time of emergency.

A second—and more extreme way—the Luo have historically set themselves apart from other tribes is by removing a set of lower front teeth from Luo who reached the age of 50 years old. According to one interviewee, in the past, it was Luo custom “to remove the six lower teeth when one reached the age of fifty.” Dietler (1993), however, says the removal of teeth was “a ritual practice for young boys” (p. 256). My translator explained to me that for the women, only the molars on one side were removed. While Shiino (1997) claimed the practice ended after Kenya’s independence from Britain (p. 225), which occurred in the year 1963, one of my interviewees reported having his teeth removed in 1985, twenty-two years later. This interviewee reported that the practice did not stop until the early 1990’s. The interviewee explained that the purpose is “identification” as an aged Luo person. “If teeth were not removed,” Jonathan told me, “one might be grouped in another ethnic group.”

Generous Giving

Luo people have a broad base for intra-community support because of this complex, layered web of affiliations. While the Luo of the Nyakach Plateau generally

live in extreme poverty, the resources they do have are shared liberally with fellow villagers.

The *harambee* is a prime example of the communal pooling of resources. Though more fully explained in chapter two, funerals are of great importance to the Luo people. The Luo are willing to make great sacrifices in order to care for the dead. At the same time, funerals are expensive. Families are expected to purchase a respectable casket, pay for mortuary services, and provide food for many funeral guests. As a result, two things often happen. First, families will often sell possessions of great value—even portions of land—in order to obtain the money necessary for a proper funeral (Hoy, 2013). Secondly, the community will conduct a *harambee*, a collection of money and resources (e.g. maize) from local neighbors, relatives, churches, and other groups, in order to raise the necessary funds. The “respectability” of a funeral is often identified by the quality of the coffin a family is able to purchase. Between burying the dead and feeding attendees, funerals can “easily cost 30,000 Kenyan shillings, a sum equal to 10 years’ income for many families” (Hoy, 2013, p. 84). To see a demonstration of respect for the dead brings gladness to the community and plays a role in comforting the bereaved family.

Alongside the gathering of money for a funeral *harambee* is a gathering of friends and family to be physically present. An interviewee pointed out that “many visitors came” on the day her late husband was buried. Another, whose late father was an Africa Inland Church (AIC) pastor, noted that “very many bishops came from all over Kenya... along with very many church members” to attend her father’s funeral. She comments, “Seeing the number of people who came and how they interacted with them gave them peace in the midst of the hardship.” Although it is not easy to travel across Kenya,

especially as one travels through the rural towns and villages, the Luo (and, in this case, other Kenyan) people understand bodily presence to be an important aspect of comforting the bereaved.

The activities of visitors at the homes of the bereaved demonstrate emotional and spiritual support: in the darkness inside the walls and under the roof of the hut, visitors display sorrow at the family's grief; outside, in the area surrounding the hut, visitors joyously celebrate the life of the one who has died. Guests enter "inside the home, pray all night, and then collect money during the day." While several of my teammates and I stayed at the home of Pastor Habil, we had the opportunity to enter into the house of a couple who had just lost their beloved daughter, Susan. She was buried the morning we visited.

After visiting the gravesite in the front yard of the household, we were instructed to step into the dim hut and offer a brief word of consolation and a Luo handshake to her parents. (By observation, we discovered that the demonstration of respect through the handshake occurs by touching the left hand to the crook of the right elbow while shaking hands with the right hand.) Between sobs, the couple thanked our group for attending the funeral. Perhaps because we were foreigners, the bereaved were the ones who spoke for the majority of the time we were inside the hut, though it was merely minutes that passed. Exiting the hut, we were seated and fed. Kenyan music was played loudly on a stereo system underneath the small shade tent where the food was being served. Many people lounged about in plastic chairs, and a few children and teenagers danced and ran around the yard. It was a celebration. One interviewee recounts that, despite the weight of her grief due to someone's death, "when the funeral is over, she feels joy." Through the

grieving process, there is an emotional generosity toward the bereaved, manifesting itself both in the quiet dimness of the mournful hut and in the boisterous celebration of the grounds surrounding the house.

Susan, the deceased girl, had taught our team other lessons about generosity during her life. Each year when Dr. Lisa Baker traveled to the Nyakach Plateau with her team of students and medical professionals, Susan came to visit the clinic with numerous bouts of “oxygen crises,” as Dr. Baker called them—localized pain due to sickle-shaped blood cells. The evidence of sickle cell disease presented as a result of the capillaries becoming blocked, preventing the surrounding tissues from being nourished with oxygen. Since sickle cell disease is incurable, there was not much Dr. Baker could offer Susan other than vitamins and pain medication. In 2013, Susan entered the clinic feeling ill. Dr. Baker again prescribed her some vitamins and painkillers, this time including an antibiotic. Understanding there to be no promise of a next meal for Susan, Dr. Baker asked if anyone on the team had a nutrition bar. One student offered a CLIF bar and slowly, students assisting Dr. Baker tore off small bits of the CLIF bar, taking care not to overwhelm Susan’s body with its nutritional richness. After eating half of the bar, Susan felt better. Dr. Baker bagged the rest of the bar for her to carry home. However, before even leaving the room, Susan walked over to a friend and gave him what remained of her food. There is much to learn from Susan’s generosity. It also illuminates Luo generosity in a new way; even children give sacrificially.

Children are sometimes called upon for significant medical assistance. To begin with, there is not a clearly defined boundary between medical care and everyday life. Furthermore, when it comes to matters of health, the Luo turn to anyone who is available.

In one story, eighth-grade Habil Ogola helped a mother give birth to her child on the side of the road while walking through the village. While her husband and Ogola were escorting the mother to Nyabondo Hospital, the mother stopped and said, “I cannot walk now,” indicating that her labor had begun. Ogola narrates, “Her husband ran to the hospital to inform them, but [I] had to look after her in an open place with no home” at which the delivery could be carried out. Although Ogola was scared of the process of giving birth because “he had never seen it before,” he nevertheless “gave some help” as “the woman instructed him how to help” her throughout the process. Triumphantly, Ogola tells the end of the story: “The baby grew up and got married.” The preservation and perpetuation of life on the plateau partly depends upon a deep bond of trust that unites community members, especially in times of need. Oftentimes, formal medical assistance is not available, causing the Luo to make use of whomever or whatever is available. In these moments, communal trust is drawn upon for help and communal trust is further strengthened through the sharing of these challenges.

The Luo are very generous with material resources, and as they hold them, they continually bear in mind the needs of the community. Several years ago, Straw to Bread began to sponsor water tanks and rain gutters at certain houses in the community in order to sustain poor families with great need in times of drought. The tanks collect water off the tin roofs of the houses and hold more than enough water to sustain a family through an entire season of drought. Thus, when Straw to Bread’s correspondence with these Kenyan partners revealed that the tanks were empty just weeks into the drought, there was concern and confusion on the part of the American donors. The reason the tanks were already empty was that the families with tanks were letting relatives and other

members of the community also use their tank water. Luo generosity is a beautiful gift in their society, and it is important that the structures of institutions on the Nyakach Plateau are composed in such a way that the goals of long-term efforts are accomplished in light of, through, and thanks to this generosity.

Inherent in the Luo understanding of generosity is the reality of sacrifice. Habil Ogola reflected this sacrificial giving of oneself for another when “someone was two percent anemic and was going to die,” but “he got down on the bed and gave blood” to save that person’s life. It was a success, he reported: “The person is still alive.” Part of the terror of giving blood is that one has only a certain amount of blood, and one needs that blood in order to *survive*. It is scary to relinquish a portion of that life-giving substance to another, for it may be the end of one’s life. The giving of material wealth is similar among the poor on the Nyakach Plateau. They have very little material wealth, very little “blood” to give to one another, yet they continue to give it, and they do so with a joyful liberality.

A “Royal” Pace of Life

The slowness of the plateau is part of what makes it a fertile setting for the cultivation of strong communal relationships. The unhurried pace of activities allows the Luo people to give one another undivided attention and upholds the cherished practice of storytelling with people they love.

My own experience with the Luo with respect to their time was astounding. Most mornings and afternoons, I walked with my translator across the plateau to interview a community member in their home. Often, when we arrived, the mother or father of the household was leisurely working in the yard or field, tending to livestock or tilling the

ground. Sometimes, they were inside the house, perhaps cooking or lounging. When we arrived, I asked the older members of the family—whether grandparents, parents, or adult or adolescent children—if they would be willing to answer a series of questions regarding their religion, culture, and experiences in healthcare. “It should take about three hours,” I told them. Without hesitation, each gladly welcomed me into his or her home and assented to my interview. They continued through the interview questionnaires even when they, chuckling, grinning, and perplexed by my mode of thinking, found a number of the questions odd or entertaining. After one of the interviews, a family told me to stay as they steeped some tea for me. I drank it slowly, petting the cat and learning more about their lives off the record of the formal interview.

Not a person complained or grumbled about my presence or about the length of the interview. On the contrary, many used words such as “blessing” and “gift from God” to describe my visit to their home. Some of this language may have stemmed from their perception of Americans and economic hope. However, there was no immediate benefit to my being there—we simply talked in their homes. I perceived great humility and joy in their willingness to sit for three hours with a translator and a stranger. I experienced a taste of that glue that cements together their daily lives: glad and unassuming generosity of presence with one another. The trust and mutual enjoyment that strengthen their community are enabled in part because of the Luo slowness. In fact, this academic work is largely a product of the Luo pace of life, which facilitated my lengthy conversational interactions with them.

The leisurely pace of Luo life is also an expression of dignity. When I traveled to Kenya in 2013, I learned from a conversation with a clinic translator that the village

people see themselves as walking in a distinct manner from the city people. Kelvin had accused us foreigners of walking too quickly, as if we were like the “city-slickers.” Out in the village, he claimed, the Luo walk “royally,” strolling down the road with a stately easiness. The following year, I could not help but realize the fittingness of Kelvin’s statement. As my translator guided me around the plateau, I could not help but imagine a kingly robe and crown upon him—there was something about his walk that was intentional and noble.

When Western health care professionals practice medicine on the Nyakach Plateau, this pace of life is a vital consideration. For patients to be treated with dignity, doctors should work—as much as possible—with an intentional attentiveness and generosity of time. Patients will understand that the doctors are internalizing the conversation about the patients’ health. Patients will feel connected to the doctor as a member of the community. This is important in building trust and bridging the gap between clinical advice and medical compliance at home. As discussed regarding the Luo people’s traditional use of herbal medicines, it is important to the Luo that the source of healing and the healthcare context occur intertwined with the communities of the living and even of the dead. While Western health care practitioners and donors see great value in treating a large number of patients, this strategy for cross-cultural healthcare interactions will not endure unless a foundation of trust has been laid by the doctors’ willingness to simply sit, listen, and “dance to life at village-rhythm.”

The whole of the village seems to move with this same viscosity, save the *pikipiki* motorcycles that rattle up and down the dirt roads. In the village center, a sort of “town square,” people stand about the streets. On some days, several rows of tables are arranged

for market. The geography of the plateau calls for slowness. Since subsistence agriculture is the norm, homes are situated on tracts of land of a few acres, meaning that homes are located much farther apart than in an American suburb. After walking the distance to arrive at the home of a friend or a family member, one does not rush to leave the place. Sheep, goats, cows, and chickens meander about the fields or graze while tied to a fence or tree. In the same way, people seem tethered to one another, grazing on life's green stories as they tread this earth, which silently gazes up at the placid blue skies.

The Practice of Storytelling

For the Luo, the practice of storytelling is a central one that permeates their daily lives and forges a sense of unity within various groups in their community. From the practice of telling stories stems three aspects of the Luo experience: enjoyment, consolation, and loyalty.

Storytelling is one thing many Luo people most enjoy about life. In response to my question about what they most enjoyed about life, “telling stories” was explicitly mentioned in five of the sixteen interviews. One person recounted the practice of storytelling in his family, “In the evening hours after everyone has performed their duties,” they sit around the house and “tell stories about how the day was, the people we learn with in school, how we performed in school, childhood stories, stories we love.” Another talked about how “stories and advice” are most enjoyable—“when you are stressed, you can ‘story’ with somebody and be encouraged by sharing with other people.” There is a positive association of the act of storytelling with emotional support between interlocutors.

The language of the Luo people, Dholuo, has richly accommodated for the practice of storytelling. In order to inform one's audience that a story is about to be told, Luo use a number of phrases. *Winji*—listen. *Chikuru itu*—lend me your ears. *Neuru!*—look! *We anyisu*—let me tell you. *Mos*—just a minute (H. Ogola,, personal correspondence, 4 February 2016). Speakers use one of these five phrases in order to indicate that they are beginning a story. The cultural development of these ways to formally couch a story within a conversation implies the importance of the practice of storytelling within the Luo culture.

The architectural arrangement of Luo homes facilitates storytelling. Most houses are partially partitioned into two rooms, perhaps three if it is a bigger house. Crossing the threshold of the doorway, one will typically find a front room in which a number of chairs are arranged in a ring. At these circles of chairs, couches, and stools, I was seated in order to conduct the interviews for this project. There were upwards of ten seats in many of the cozy living rooms I entered. Off the front room is the bedroom, partially bounded by the mud wall through the center of the dwelling. While the walkway between these two rooms is sometimes covered by a piece of fabric, there is usually no door to fully separate the two rooms. Children, even parents, sleep on the same floors, cots, and beds. Life is shared. As families, friends, and neighbors dine together and sleep together, they gather around the chairs in the living rooms and participate in the practice of telling stories about their lives.

Staying at the home of Pastor Habil, I experienced this practice firsthand, though, I imagine, in a much more explicitly pastoral way. Each evening, after the proceedings of the day, Pastor Habil would call his wife, family members, translators, and guests for a

time of prayer and the delivery of a devotional message from the Bible. He intended this practice of prayer, teaching, and remembrance to unite and provide direction for all who were under his care. Stories unite and illuminate the lives of those sharing in their meaning.

An important time when stories unite and illuminate is during times of death and bereavement. The practice of storytelling serves as an avenue through which community members console those whose loved ones have died. Visitors comfort the bereaved when they “sit together,” “ask questions” about the death, and “tell stories with each other.” The families of those who die remember the deceased; the memory of the dead sustains the process of healing as the families forge new lives despite the gaps left by the deaths. As cited above, one interviewee said “when the funeral is over, she feels joy.” Stories bring hope to grieving families by honoring those who have died.

Stories of death also reflect a deeper current in Luo culture: the identification of each Luo individual with all Luo individuals—even the dead. The Luo understanding of the world is shaped by the stories of elders and ancestors. One interviewee stated he approaches the elderly members of the community in order to understand events that have to do with sickness, death, and spirits. The wisdom of the elderly and deceased has already been discussed with reference to *nyaluo* herbal remedies. While the “remembrance” of the dead is not directly communicative *with* the dead, merely *regarding* the dead, it cultivates in family members a sense of connection with the deceased, though such a memory may come at the cost of further grieving for what was lost. Luo community stretches across the boundary line of time, joining the dead and the living as active participants in Luo community in all times.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gathering, Sharing, and Healing

Living Stories

I leaned back on the three-legged stool on which I squatted, furiously transcribing Cynthia's story on my MacBook under the corrugated metal roof of her two-room house. Her shaky, elderly voice captivated me as she told me about "a miracle she saw." Her eyes were electric as she recounted what had happened. She had been outside next to her house when the clouds marched over the plateau just in time for afternoon tea, as usual. Suddenly, however, "there was a thunderstorm, which struck her." Mechanically, I nodded to my translator before realizing what he had just told me. Lurching up in my seat, I stopped him, "Wait—you said she got struck by a *lightning bolt*?" "Yes," he responded, "a lightning bolt."

That instant, not too far in the distance, a peal of thunder came ripping down the plain directly behind me. The tin wall behind me buzzed with the shockwave. When I say that in Luoland we find ourselves right in the middle of the stories that are told, I mean that quite literally.

Cynthia continued on, telling the story of what had happened to her a number of years ago. Falling to the ground, she had belted out some final words, "God, help me!" Scooping her up off the ground and bringing her inside, her grandchildren sat down around her. At this point, Cynthia had lost her eyesight, was having difficulty speaking, and was experiencing terrible nausea. She also recounted having trouble remembering

where she was. Her family gathered some neighbors; all together, they prayed that Cynthia would become well again.

For about an hour she remained without sight or voice. Eventually, however, she came back to her senses, joyfully shouting, “I am alive again! I am alive!” Her body still hurting (at one point, she mentioned her heart failing as well), she was taken to Nyabondo, where a drug was applied to the strike-wound on her back.

I have never experienced a surround-sound speaker system that surprised me more than the rolling thunder that accompanied Cynthia’s story. In the same way that her account seemed to blur the line between the moment in which it happened and that in which she shared it with me, so does life on the Nyakach Plateau seem to blur the line between the supernatural and the natural.

The Word of God Understood Mystically

The Luo love stories. Eight interviewees directly spoke of stories—all were in a positive manner. Three of the eight spoke of the power of stories to help people overcome the grief resulting from the loss of a loved one. The other five mentioned stories when I asked them what they most enjoy about life. Three of these five answered both stories and the Word of God. The Luo people love to sit down and tell stories with friends and family. Much of Luo life is spent “storying” with others. It is such a part of the activity of life that Samuel used the word “story” as a verb while translating for two different interviews.

Religion permeates Luo stories. One interviewee stated the things he most enjoys about life are “having the Word of God,” “telling stories—good stories,” and “when there is no sickness and disease.” Another said, he “feels encouraged by the stories of people

being transformed that are found in the Bible.” The Luo are encouraged by telling and hearing stories with gathered church congregations and with visitors. They value stories that inspire and uplift.

The Luo perceive God to be in and around all that occurs in the world. Their lives are situated within the grand story of the biblical narrative, and they discern God’s nearness in all circumstances. He is the one to whom they instinctively cry for help when struck by a lightning bolt. He is also the one to whom they pray when they need their circumstances to take a turn for the better. The Luo do not pray to a distant God, but to One in their midst. One respondent said, “You can go to God through prayer, and when you pray, you find that God is powerfully in you and powerfully touching you.”

Nine of the twenty-seven interviewees used the phrase “Word of God” in their interviews. Seven of the nine did so in response to my asking them what they most enjoy about life. The Luo perceive God not only as being near to them, but also as being utterly enjoyable. Three of the nine who used the phrase “Word of God” alluded to at least one of the following—church, preaching, or the Bible—when describing it, but the majority of the interviewees described God’s Word in a mystical sense. One interviewee stated, “The Word of God is a wealth to those who have known it and a help to those who have discovered it.” Another spoke of the Word of God as “a way to everything” such that “we can take anything to God and open the way through His Word.” One man said it is “food to his soul, a light to his path, his wisdom.” When I asked him specifically what he was talking about when he used the phrase “Word of God,” his response was, “Life eternal. Everlasting life. The eternity of everything. Where all things are based.” The Bible shared by Jews and Christians puts it this way: “No, the word is very near you; it is in your

mouth and in your heart so you may obey it” (Deuteronomy 30:14, New International Version).

Mbiti (1969) says that in African religions “there seems to be a force, power or energy permeating the whole universe. God is the Source and ultimate controller of this force” (p.16). Spirits and some human beings can access limited measures of this energy for the good or ill of the community, but God is the sustainer of all. One anonymous New Testament writer describes Christ as “sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:3, New International Version). The Christian Luo people are familiar with these ideas because they have gathered in churches and homes to share biblical and tribal stories. Furthermore, as they discern God in all things, their whole world becomes indelibly spiritual.

Living in a Religious Universe

Mbiti (1969) says, “For Africans, the whole of existence is a religious phenomenon; man is a deeply religious being living in a religious universe” (Mbiti, 1969, p. 15). Mbiti’s statement is consistent with my observations of the Luo people on the plateau. It also helps to make sense of the historical appeal of traditional healers. If individuals see their sicknesses as spiritual at the core, to seek medical attention that explicitly involves the spiritual realm seems fitting. However, with the growth of Christianity among the Luo people, spiritual phenomena are being interpreted in ways that depart from traditional understanding.

The Christian Luo person understands the Bible as the anchoring narrative to explain this world. Since Luo culture has long been saturated with religious speech, thought, and action, it is natural for Luo individuals to continue to do so. Africans

understand that “to live is to be caught up in a religious drama” that begins before birth and continues after death (Mbiti, 1969, p.15), and the driving narrative of Luo life is a combination of the biblical story and the stories of their traditional tribal religion.

Community, Ritual, and Healing

The Luo people experience the spiritual world communally, not just individually. Somé (1999) said in African cultures, “community is important because there is an understanding that human beings are collectively oriented” (p. 22). She said “healing, ritual, and community” are “vitaly linked” in African cultures (Somé, 1999, p. 22), and her proposition holds true with the Luo. Somé (1999) defines “ritual” as (1) “the weaving of individual persons and gifts into a community that interacts with the forces of the natural world” and (2) “a gathering of people with a clear healing vision and a trusting intent toward the forces of the invisible world” (p. 22). In this way, the practice of gathered storytelling is a Luo ritual, drawing community members further into the supernatural world by weaving together the life stories of individual persons into the healing that is brought by the solidarity of community.

Social Unity in Religious Assembly

Gathering is an important part of African cultures in general. Though not a description of Luo, the Karamojong tribe of Uganda often call together many assemblies for the purpose of making military, economic, legal, political, and social decisions. Knighton (2005) claims, “None of these [assemblies] can be understood without attending to their deeply religious nature” (p. 133). Even where the functions of these assemblies are unclear, the assemblies can be understood as “constituting an identifiable

culture by instituting a social means to unity” (Knighton, 2005, p. 133). I suggest the frequent practice of gathered storytelling is a significant social means to unity in the Luo tribe. Tribal loyalty is likely strengthened by the shared stories that give rise to shared perceptions of the world; the act of sharing those stories draws people into unity.

Communal Spiritual Experiences

The Luo community often encounters the spiritual world as a group. For the Luo, gathered storytelling is a communal spiritual experience because of the inherently religious nature of all of life. Another example of this from my interviews, however, is *nyawawa*. During this event, the whole village joins together to bang pots, pans, and iron rooftops in hopes of securing the health of the village by scaring off evil spirits.. This is yet another community gathering that has resulted from storytelling—the passed down spiritual stories of the evil spirits that come during *nyawawa*.

Gathering to tell stories creates a forum for interchange between the elders and the youths of the community that allows knowledge to be passed down. Without a chain of relationships between the old and the young, the Luo would not, for example, inherit the knowledge and practice of *nyaluo* herbal medicine. Gathered storytelling thus facilitates the transmission of knowledge that is vital to the preservation of the culture.

“Making the Burden of Suffering Lighter to Bear”

The practice of physically gathering creates an understanding of communal solidarity and presence that alleviates the daily burdens of life. The eagerness of the Luo people to share stories with one another is a reflection of the same attitude that motivates their generosity as they share in the sufferings and needs of their neighbors and relatives.

When the means to meet certain needs are not available, Christian Luo individuals pray to God. The acts of serving one another and praying with and for one another are deeply healing for the individual, and thus for the community. Mbiti (1969) says, “By getting together as a group to solicit God’s help, the people not only strengthen and encourage one another in the face of distress, but they make the burden of suffering lighter to bear” (p. 72).

Furthermore, gathered storytelling helps to soothe the pain of death through explanation, provision, memory, and presence. The Luo find peace in a biblical understanding of death, which is that God has decreed death cannot be avoided. Moreover, when death leaves gaps in the community, the physical, emotional, spiritual, and economic pulling together of resources “cinches” the hole left in the web of society. At Luo funerals, gathering to tell stories and memories in the home of the bereaved family is an important ritual of memory. Remembering those who have died helps comfort the family grieving the loss. Gathering as a church congregation for prayer and worship encourages those who are troubled in some way. For the Catholic Luo, there is also a weekly remembrance of death in the receiving of the Eucharist and the sharing of the story of Christ’s sacrifice.

Good Medicine

The practice of gathered storytelling catalyzes healing in the community by bringing people together and by providing a time and place to share one another’s lives as recounted through stories. Often, what the sick and the dying need most is simply someone’s caring presence. Perhaps the circle of chairs arranged for conversation in the living room of each house in the village is the finest medicine on the plateau.

REFERENCES

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). *LCWK9. Deaths, percent of total deaths, and death rates for the 15 leading causes of death: United States and each state, 2013* [Data file]. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/lcwk9_2013.pdf
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London, England: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Christianity in Kenya. (n.d.). In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Retrieved from <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20111026151630675>
- Cooney, A. (2010). Choosing between Glaser and Strauss: An example. *Nurse Researcher*, 17(4), 19-20.
- Desai, M., Buff, A. M., Khagayi, S., Byass, P., Amek, N., van Eijk, A., ... Hamel, M. J. (2014). Age-specific malaria mortality rates in the KEMRI/CDC health and demographic surveillance system in western Kenya, 2003–2010. *PLoS ONE*, 9(9), e106197. <http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0106197>
- Dietler, M., & Herbich, I. (1993). Living in Luo time: Reckoning sequence, duration, history and biography in a rural African society. *World Archaeology*, 25(2), 248-260.
- Geissler, P. W., Nokes, K., Prince, R. J., Achieng' Odhiambo, R., Aagaard-Hansen, J., & Ouma, J. H. (2000). Children and medicines: Self-treatment of common illnesses among Luo schoolchildren in western Kenya. *Social Science & Medicine*, 50(12), 1771–1783. doi: 10.1016/S0277-9536(99)00428-1
- Glaser, B. (2014). Applying grounded theory. *Grounded Theory Review*, 13(1). Retrieved from <http://groundedtheoryreview.com/2014/06/22/applying-grounded-theory/>
- Glaser, B. (2014). Choosing grounded theory. *Grounded Theory Review*, 13(2). Retrieved from <http://groundedtheoryreview.com/2014/12/19/choosing-grounded-theory/>
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing.
- Harries, J. (2009). *Understandings of pneuma in East Africa, that point to the importance of 'vulnerable mission' practices from the West*. Retrieved from

<http://www.pneumafoundation.org/resources/articles/JHarries-VulnerableMission.pdf>

Hornsby, C. (2013). *Kenya: A history since independence*. London, England: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.

Hoy, W.G. (2013). *Do funerals matter? The purposes and practices of death rituals in global perspective*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Kenya. (n.d.). In *The World Factbook*. Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ke.html>

Kenyon, C. R., Vu, L., Menten, J., & Maughan-Brown, B. (2014). Male circumcision and sexual risk behaviors may contribute to considerable ethnic disparities in HIV prevalence in Kenya: An ecological analysis. *PLoS ONE*, 9(8), p. 1. <http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0106230>

Kisumu, "A Land of Opportunity". (2012, November 22). Kisumu's climate. Retrieved from <https://kisumucitycouncil.wordpress.com/2012/11/22/kisumus-climate/>

Knighton, Ben. (2005). *The vitality of the Karamojong religion: Dying tradition or living faith?* Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Kurtz, J. R. (2002). Crossing over: Identity and change in Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's Song of Nyarloka. *Research in African Literatures* 33(2), 100-118.

Mbiti, J.S. (1969). *African religions and philosophy*. Nairobi, Kenya: Heinemann Kenya Ltd.

Oktay, J. (2012). *Grounded theory: Pocket guides to social work research methods*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Oliver, R. (1952). *The missionary factor in East Africa*. London, England: Longmans, Green and Co.

Prince, R. & Geissler, P. W. (2001). Becoming "one who treats": A case study of a Luo healer and her grandson in western Kenya. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*. 32(4), 447-471. doi:10.1525/aeq.2001.32.4.447

Schwartz, N. (2000). Active dead or alive: Some Kenyan views about the agency of Luo and Luyia women pre- and post-mortem. *Journal of Religion in Africa*. 30(4), 433-467.

Shiino, W. (1997). Death and rituals among the Luo in South Nyanza. *African Study Monographs*. 18(3-4), 213-228.

- Somé, M.P. (1999). *The healing wisdom of Africa: Finding life purpose through nature, ritual, and community*. London, England: Thorsons.
- Van Doren, J.W. (1988). Death African style: The case of S. M. Otieno. *American Journal of Comparative Law*. 36(2), 329-350.
- World Health Organization Global Task Force on Cholera Control. (2010, April 29). Cholera country profile: Kenya. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/cholera/countries/KenyaCountryProfile2010.pdf>
- World Health Organization. (2014). *Estimated deaths ('000) by cause, sex and WHO member state (1), 2012* [Data file]. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/estimates/en/index1.html