

(Text in *devanāgarī* cf. Böhtlingk, *Sanskrit-Chrestomathie*, 1909, p. 19)

- 1) Nāsad āsīn no sad āsīt tadānīm
Kim āvarīvaḥ kuha kasya śarmann
nāsīd rajo no vyomā paro yat
ambhaḥ kim āsīd gahanam gab-
hīram
- 2) Na mṛtyur āsīd amṛtaṃ na tarhi
Ānīd avātaṃ svadhayā tad ekaṃ
na rātryā ahna āsīt praketaḥ
tasmād dhānyan na paraḥ kim-
canāsa
- 3) Tama āsīt tamasā gūlham agre
Tucchyenābhv apihitaṃ yad āsīt
'praketaṃ salilaṃ sarvaṃ ā idam
tapasas tan mahinājāyataikam
- 4) Kāmas tad agre samavartatādhi
Sato bandhum asatī niravindan
manaso retaḥ prathamam yad āsīt
hṛdi pratīṣyā kavayo manīṣā
- 5) Tiraścīno vitato raśmir eṣām
Retodhā āsan mahimāna āsant
adhaḥ svid āsīd upari svid āsīt
svadhā avastāt prayatiḥ parastāt
- 6) Ko addhā veda ka iha pravocat
Arvāg devā asya visarjanenāthā
kuta ājātā kuta iyaṃ viśṛṣṭiḥ¹
ko veda yata ābabhūva
- 7) Iyaṃ viśṛṣṭir yata ābabhūva
yadi vā dadhe yadi vā na²
Yo asyādhyakṣaḥ parame vyo-
mant
so aṅga veda yadi vā na veda.

¹ *Kuta iyaṃ* ist wegen des Metrums kontrahiert *kuteyam* zu lesen (Böhtlingk, *Sanskrit-Chrestomathie*, p. 389).

² Das Metrum legt die Vermutung nahe, daß hinter dem zweiten *vā* ein zweites *dadhe* ausgefallen ist, *ib.*).

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PATTERNS AND STANDARDS OF WEALTH IN AN AFRICAN PEASANT COMMUNITY

(A Study of Culture Change)¹

Patterns and standards of wealth, and also polar attitudes towards poverty, are formed among the Kenya Luo, as in the case of many other peasant societies, in relation to the soil. This is natural since the soil provides for the peasant the chief means of livelihood, determines his mode of existence and social security. Whereas however among the European peasants the amount of land counted, the number of acres or morgen in possession of the individual family, providing the chief criteria of wealth, the position was different in Africa. In this vast and unevenly populated Continent, where the supply of land was practically unlimited and human labour scarce, it was the latter that became the chief economic asset. Since however the supply of labour was practically family labour, or to be more specific, the number of wives, it was the size of polygynous household that focussed the popular imagination as was accepted as a standard of wealth, comfort and security. *Udi mangeny kuom dichwo achiel* or many womans' houses and one polygamous husband — as the Luo would say, or a single polygynous family consisting of a husband and several wives became the much desired family unit. In Luo it is called *doho* and its owner *jadoho*, or a rich man having many

¹ The present essay is a summary of a larger work published simultaneously in Polish in „*Studia Socjologiczne*“ Nr 2 (37), 1970, where fuller documentation can be found.

wives and a large progeny as well as a number of cattle is a respected citizen whose social position and prestige is based on wealth and many privileges accruing from it. Thus it is wealth and not rank (which is based on seniority of the line and age within the kinship group) which expresses social position among the Kenya Luo.

It would, however, be not difficult to show that the concept of *doho*, though still in current use, is nevertheless increasingly divorced from the reality of Luo life. The majority of modern marriages are monogamous which is not the result of any legal prohibitions, but is due to economic reasons. With the prohibitive price of a wife (calculated to ab. \$ 300 in 1946—8) only a very few Luo young men could afford two or more wives. Yet this did not seem to affect the prevailing family ideal which was centred on the *doho*.

But the Luo associate wealth not only with many wives and cattle, but also with a large number of children. Here again the current ideal and standard of wealth and security, as expressed in a large number of (mainly male) progeny, is incompatible with present-day realities of the Luo life, both the prevailing conditions of land and also the rising demands on education.

In order to explain such discrepancies between the ideal and the real we must turn to history. Under tribal conditions in pre-European period with almost incessant state of unrest and frequent warfare it was in fact necessary to keep a certain number of young men as a reserve and protection of the lineage land and cattle. Acting as a defence against foreign aggression, these young men at the same time conducted raids on other peoples' homesteads and cattle for which they in turn procured wives for themselves. Female progeny was also important, though for different reason, mainly as providers of the marriage cattle for the male members of the lineage. Here however the tribal lore demanded that a certain balance should be kept between the number of boys and girls born within lineage, for the preponderance of the latter would be regarded as unwarranted and detrimental to lineage interest. It would be a sign of demographic recession, for the girls after their marriage to alien and naturally hostile (*jasigu*) lineages will contribute to their strength by bearing children and working for these foreign groups.

Undoubtedly, there is some truth in these claims, especially when we view it against the background of the early phase of culture contact. Although tribal wars were abolished and peace introduced by the Administration, there was no security as far as land was concerned and its ownership was regulated by some sort of crude tribal *laissez-fairism*. Despite of fixing tribal and large clan boundaries, the old system was maintained as far as the smaller landowning groups were concerned. Consequently, land never acquired selling value, could not be bought or sold, but only inherited from the lineage. Very powerful sanctions of supernatural character were mobilised against all those who would break the ancient tribal rule and offered their land for sale. In this way a strange system developed whereby land belonged to local lineages, and only those lineage groups which had abundant manpower and large progeny enjoyed the full security of ownership. On the other hand, those lineages which were demographically exhausted and whose birth rate was falling, were losing *pari passu* their title and effective rights to own land which was taken over by demographically stronger lineage groups.

This self-regulating mechanism worked fairly smoothly as long as land was in plentiful supply. But with the rapidly increasing population and the already exhausted supply of land the position was becoming increasingly difficult. In 1946—1948 when the writer conducted his field studies, overpopulation was already felt in many parts of the Luo country. Large families with many children were already at that time in complete disharmony with the actual position on land and were, in fact a great obstacle to the improvement of the standard of living and general progress and modernization. More children meant not so much more wealth and better security, but on the contrary, smaller holdings, diminishing yields *per capita*, and consequently overall poverty. But this did not seem to affect the current stereotype of a large family with as many children as possible, which continued to be the much desired family pattern. Even an educated young man, a teacher with whom I discussed the matter, who was living on his salary and seemed to understand the difficult position on the land, told me that he had planned his own family as a „minimum family“ consisting of five children only.

It will thus be seen that the historical explanation of the phenomenon, though of some avail, yet cannot explicate the position fully. History can tell us little why such notions and stereotypes, as the Luo ideal of wealth and security, maintain themselves with vigour and tenacity despite the fact of their ever widening disparity with the prevailing conditions and actual life. For these stereotypes are unquestionably loosing touch with the reality, are lagging behind it, become outdated and disharmonious with current trends and processes. History can tell us something about their origin and the initial situation in which they were invoked, but cannot really explain to us their present day significance and meaning, their actual function and purpose. In order to understand this, we need a different type of analysis.

It is thus suggested that in addition to historical explanation, functional and sociological interpretations is needed in terms of the present-day reality. This in the case of Luo, and perhaps many other Africal societies undergoing the process of rapid change, would amount to something like this. Under the stress of the changing tribal situation the position and security of certain powerful interest groups within the society is endangered, causing them to mobilize forces and ideologies at their disposal to defend their threatened position. Among the Luo such a powerful interest group within the tribal society was the conservative cattle owning male group whose social position and power rested on the existing marriage system. This, as we already know, was based among the Luo on the passage of cattle, giving the male group the monopolistic position, as all the cattle, nominally at least belonged to them. Thus land and cattle were the mainstay of their social position and influence, though it would be perhaps true to say that by defending it, they were fighting a loosing battle against modernization of fundamental institutions of Luo life, emancipation and new role of women, in brief, doing away with the last vestiges of ancient pastoralism and introduction modern efficient agriculture. Such explanation may be of course too brief and succinet, but may hope that it has shown the reader what I think is the correct line of attacking this problem.

In summing up the position, the problem may be stated once more in more general terms. Such fixed and ossified stereotypes,

as the Luo attitude towards wealth and security, lagging behind the reality of modern life, seem to be highly characteristic for any situation of intensive, far-reaching social change. Using the well known Mannheimian model they can be regarded as current ideologies rather than utopias, that is to say, they represent doctrines which are essentially conservative, looking back rather than towards the future, seeking to preserve the existing state of affairs, rather than to change it. As such they are orientated towards the past, rather than towards the future and thus working towards the change of the existing system. It may be added in this connection that the writer's impression from the field was that conservative ideologies were far more wide spread and developed in an African society under the process of change, that the future orientated ideologies, despite the action of numerous polititians and social reformers.

Finally, it would be claimed that although the facts described in the present essay refer to the historically closed period, and the gaining of independence by Kenya in 1963 has undoubtedly introduced new realities, basic processes and tendencies, analysed in the paper still hold true.