

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE SOCIALIZATION PROCESS: A STUDY OF RAMOGI HILL.

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ABSTRACT

Ramogi hill is held with a lot of reverence among the Luo, the bottom-line being that it was the stopping point of their fore- father, Ramogi, upon his entry into Kenya through Uganda from Southern Sudan. As a result, several myths exist among the Luo which revolve around the various cultural sites found in the hill. This was a study of the significance of the myths associated with the hill and their implication for the socialization process in the Luo community. The objective of the study was to identify the various myths associated with Ramogi hill and discuss their role in the socialization process in the Luo community. The data for the study was collected through face to face interviews with informants aged seventy years and above. Purposive sampling and snowballing was used to identify the informants. The myths collected were then analyzed to establish the morals transmitted through them and their implication for the community. The functionalist theory was instrumental in the analysis of the utilitarian function of the myths. The findings reveal that the hill is a symbol of the community's culture and socialization process. The various cultural sites and the myths that surround them echo issues that are central to the community's belief system. They give prominence to virtues such as generosity, respect, sanctity of marriage, communalism, caution, good organization and condemnation of evil, all of which were essential for acceptability in the community.

KEY WORDS: *Ramogi Hill, Luo, Socialization, Myths, Culture*

INTRODUCTION

The Ramogi hill is a hill of multiple implications. For the archaeologist it is a historical site rich in traditional artifacts which tell of a people's early life. The geologist would be struck by the diverse rock structures found in the region. The historian would be fascinated by the historical monuments that define a people's history. For the literary artist, however, the hill is a testimony to a people's culture and the socialization process that characterizes it. Socialization in this context is regarded as a way of fitting one into a social fabric (Miruka, 1994). The name Ramogi is not only equated to the hill as a physical feature but is the name of the fore-father of the Luo community.

It is situated on the northeastern shores of Lake Victoria basin in Kenya, East Africa. The hill is overgrown with a forest considered sacred and thus is respected by communities living in the lake region. To the South-West of Ramogi hill lies Lake Sare, and to the North-East, Lake Usigu. Lake Victoria lies to the South and West of the hill while the vast Yala swamp lies to the north of the Forest. The swamp separates Ramogi Forest in which the hill lies from the Samia Hills further to the North West. The sacred Forest covers an area of about 283 hectares (Sigu, Omenda, Ongugo & Opiyo n.d).

The area around the forest is inhabited by the Luo community. The Luo are the third largest ethnic group (13%) in Kenya, after the Kikuyu (22%) and the Luhya (14%) (Gordon & Raymond, 2005). They speak Dholuo as their mother tongue. Historically it is believed that they migrated into Kenya from Sudan following the river Nile into Uganda and finally to Kenya (Ochieng, 1985:17). It is for this reason that they are referred to as river Lake Nilotes. The Luo are cousins to Acholi, Padhola, Alur and Langi who camped in Uganda as they migrated and the Dinka, the Anywak and Shilluk who settled in Southern Sudan (Ayieko, 2005).

The Luo community and that of their cousins were headed by *Ker Ramogi Ajwang'*, who was both the spiritual and community leader (Ayieko, 2005). In Ayieko's view, it is from *Ker Ramogi Ajwang'*'s influence that the Luo refer to themselves as *nyikwa* Ramogi (grandchildren of Ramogi). This study was interested in Ramogi not as a mere physical feature but as a prehistoric site of the Luo, quite telling of the people's cultural values and their socialization process. In particular, the study was interested in the myths that surrounded the various cultural sites found within the hill and their implication in the socialization of members of the Luo community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various scholars have conducted studies based on the Luo community in general. However, these studies have tended to be either historical or scientific in interest and approach. Ogot (1967) for instance, traces the history of the Luo community outlining their process of migration all the way from Southern Sudan to the present. As a historian this approach definitely serves his interest.

Foresters have also conducted research in the forest, Sigu, Omenda, Ongugo & Opiyo (n.d) for instance, investigated the frequency and distribution of cut stumps, forest structure coupled with latent regeneration to assess the level of rule enforcement as applied in the sacred grove and other parts of the forest. Their study varies significantly from the present one because of it is interested in the forest as a natural resource whereas the present study focuses on the social significance of the forest.

In her study of the Luo community, Ingrid (2002) examines various aspects of culture that define the Luo as an ethnic community. Her focus is on aspects like their orientation, history and cultural relations, settlement, religion and marriage among others. Much as her study bears a relationship with the current one, there is a difference in the sense that the present study highlights aspects of socialization of the community as implied in the myths associated with Ramogi hill.

Adopting a different perspective, Omolo (2010) outlines the lineage of the Luo community all the way from Southern Sudan to the time when they settle on Ramogi hill. His focus is on the various Luo ancestors and the migratory movement from Southern Sudan. Contrary to Omolo's approach, this research was interested in the socialization process as facilitated by the myths surrounding Ramogi hill as the stopping point of the fore-father of the Luo.

From a cultural perspective, Odwar (2005) examines the Ramogi dance and Luo cultural values. Like the current research Odwar's study is interested in an exposition of the cultural values of the community. However, the difference lies on the fact that whereas she focuses specifically on the Ramogi dance, the present study focuses on the myths associated with Ramogi hill.

Theoretical framework

The study relied on the Functionalist theory of oral literature proposed by Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown. This theory expounds the view that any cultural activity must have a utilitarian value for its people. For the purpose of this research, this theory was considered ideal since the researcher's interest was in the utilitarian function of the myths about the various cultural sites on Ramogi hill as a socializing agent.

Functionalists see the society as a stable entity perpetuated by various cultural activities. Narratives are then seen as embodiments of the beliefs, customs, rituals and structures that need to be maintained. They are also charged with the role of censuring deviants (Miruka, 1994).

The theory in effect proposes an absolutist way of looking at life as a construct maintained by selected immutable principles and perhaps processes that must be perpetuated. However, it is worth noting that societies change and accommodate contemporary thought. For the purpose of this research the theory was used to investigate the socialization process of the Luo community as reflected in the myths.

Methodology

The research was mainly qualitative. It began with the identification of resource persons who were knowledgeable about the hill. These were persons considered knowledgeable because they had grown up in the area surrounding the hill, had often gone there on hunting expeditions. In addition, they were aged seventy years and above thus could be viewed as custodians of the community's wisdom. Purposive sampling was used to identify these informants. However, in certain instances snowballing was also used to identify other informants particularly those who had gone on hunting expeditions on the hill.

Face to face interviews were used collect the myths. Tape recording was done during the narrative sessions. The myths collected were transcribed, and then translated for the researcher's use. Observation of the cultural sites was done through a tour of the cultural sites to ascertain the existence of the cultural sites.

Data collection techniques

The primary data was generated through content analysis of the collected myths. Nachmias (2009) defines content analysis as any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages. According to Kothari (2009), content analysis consists of analyzing the content of documentary material such as books, magazines and the content of all other verbal material which can be either spoken or printed. Prior to the 1940s, content analysis was mostly quantitative analysis of documentary material concerning certain characteristics that can be identified and counted. However since 1950s content analysis is mostly qualitative analysis

concerning the general import or message of existing documents. Benard Berelson's name is often associated with the later type of content analysis.

Qualitative content analytical approaches focus on analyzing both the explicit or manifest content of a text as well as interpretations of latent content of texts- that which can be interpreted or interpolated from the text, but is not explicitly stated in it (Granhein & Lundman, 2003).

In the current research, analysis and interpretation of the collected myths was done to identify the nature of socialization that was accorded to members of the Luo community. This was accomplished through use of the functionalist theory.

Data analysis

The data collected through the analysis of the content of the various myths was then coded according to the specific morals conveyed by the myths and the relevant circumstances to which they applied to establish the social values upheld by the community as a way of ensuring conformity. The functionalist theory was applied in the analysis to establish the utilitarian function of the myths.

Discussions

The various myths surrounding the cultural sites on Ramogi hill go beyond mere entertainment. They are a reflection of the community's core values which if maintained would ensure a harmonious existence among the people since they echo their social creed, the 'Ramogi identity.' Indeed, this is a fact inscribed in all the myths related to Ramogi hill.

Pong (Grinding stone) – 'From a grinding stone to a sacred object'

Owil and Idhi, sons of Bala and were both staying with their families within the precincts of the grinding stone. Shortly after Owil's wife had just had a baby, she went to grind some grain at the grinding stone. She however met Idhi's wife who refused her the chance to sharpen the grinding stone in readiness for grinding. A dispute arose between the two and in the process, Idhi's wife pushed Owil's wife making her fall on her back onto the grinding stone. As a result, she bled to death. Owing to the emerging circumstances, Owil and the clan members who were sympathetic to his cause were compelled to leave their established home in Got Ramogi and go back to their relatives in Sudan. The grinding stone thereafter became an isolated and sacred site from where people could take oaths in case any disputes arose within the clan. For instance, if something evil happened within the clan or whenever two clan members had an argument over an issue, the parties involved would go and swear at the grinding stone. The parties involved in the dispute would each take a hammer stone (Nyatieng') and hit the grinding stone. The guilty party would bleed after performing this act thus confirming their guilt. The place was therefore associated with ancestral spirits that would torment anybody who committed evil in the society.

The fact that Owil and Idhi were both staying with their families within the precincts of the grinding stone paints the idea of communalism and the value of kinship. The Luo were a close knit community which shared resources. The grinding stone for instance is shared between the two families. However, occasionally the peaceful existence among family members was disrupted as in the case of the

quarrel which arose between Idhi and Owil's wife. Idhi's wife is inconsiderate, she involves in a fight with a woman who has just given birth, not caring about her delicate situation. In the fight, Owil's wife falls back on the grinding stone and bleeds to death. The stone which was supposed to enhance sustenance now becomes a weapon that leads to death. Owil's wife who has just had a baby dies just shortly afterwards. This brings to mind how close life and death always are. Owil and the sympathetic relative's return to Sudan is an indication of their denouncement of evil. By his departure, he moves as far away from the evil spot as possible. Staying on in the hill would have been a constant reminder of the past

Evil deeds are also shown to sour relationships and bring separation. The grinding stone thereafter becomes an isolated spot. This contrasts the beginning when it had been a point of convergence. It shifts from being an ordinary site for grinding to a sacred spot where people would take oaths whenever any dispute arose in the community. The vicious nature of the grinding stone is recognized, it is now inhabited by spirits which could recognize and punish evil for instance, if something evil had been done within the clan or when two clan members had had an argument over an issue. The parties involved would go and swear at the grinding stone. The grinding stone is now bestowed with supernatural powers. The disputing party would be required to hit the grinding stone with the hammer stone (nyatieng') the verdict would be automatic. If one was guilty, a blow on the grinding stone would result in a flow of blood from the person reminiscent of the flow of blood from Owil's wife. In this regard, the stone was therefore a powerful socializing agent. It ensured that the community members treaded with caution and sought a harmonious living since the verdict by the grinding stone was not only accurate but also embarrassing.

It also sheds light on the people's philosophy on life and death that is, the community believed in an afterlife in the form of ancestral spirits. These spirits had the power to mediate between warring parties and their verdict was often fair and accurate.

Loch (Peg) – “The tethering peg that blossomed into a tree”

The tethering peg (Loch) played a significant role in the community. Initially it was meant for tethering Idhi's cow. At this point it was believed that 'Loch' could not grow into a big tree. However, with time it grew into a big tree which the community named 'Mwanda'. Idhi now guarded the tree jealously ensuring that no one cut it down. Idhi's treatment of the 'Mwanda' tree depicts the human tendency to guard that which they regard as ridden with positive potential. The budding of 'Loch' into a big tree depicts that even that which may appear insignificant at the beginning may in real sense possess certain hidden potentials. This moral in turn presents a lesson to the community not to belittle or be contemptuous towards that which in their opinion appears useless. In human interaction, this view stresses mutual respect among individuals. To Idhi, the blooming of Loch is a mark of good cattle husbandry and subsequently a mark of prosperity. As a result, any son born to Idhi was given a scion of the 'Mwanda' tree when they established their home. This was not only a sign of good will but also a nod towards prosperity. It also brings out the virtue of generosity and is testimony to the fact that people should assist each other on the path towards success. As a parent, this action captures the responsibility of a parent towards a child. The construction of one's own home is a step towards independence. However, before a child achieves total independence, the parent provides the stepping stone. Idhi does this through giving each son a scion from the 'Mwanda' tree so that they too could practice good cattle husbandry and move towards prosperity. The leaves from the tree were used as medicine for sick calves thus ensured continuity. The calves signify new life and potential multiplication of the herds. Their being in good health thus ensured prosperity.

Soon the utilitarian function of the scion is recognized by the whole village and they too go for the scion from Idhi's sons who of course give it to them. In this way they too benefit from the good will of the scion. This wide spread generosity is a pointer to the communal nature of the Luo community particularly their concern for each other's welfare. Prosperity is thus not just restricted to Idhi's home but becomes a communal affair. The significance of the Mwanda tree is then taken a notch higher; it also ensured stability in marriage. It was believed that while walking cows to a prospective wife's home, a young man who whipped the cows with a twig from the 'Mwanda' tree was assured that the woman would never leave him no matter how difficult their marriage life turned out to be. This perspective depicts the community's attitude towards marriage. Marriage was a mark of status. To be deserted by a wife was disgraceful. 'Loch', in the connotative sense implied that a wife was to remain pegged to her matrimonial home. Like the scion, her presence ensured a family's stability and steps towards prosperity.

Asumbi – 'The rain maker'

Lwanda Asumbi was a rock considered as a rain making spot for the village. It consisted of holes in the rock. The holes are designated as male and female and each had a lid. In order to bring rain during a drought, sacrifices in the form of a goat (a white he-goat) and a brown cockerel would be slaughtered roasted and eaten at the site. The blood of the goat and cockerel was poured into the male and female holes. During the sacrificial process, song and dance was conducted in praise of the two stone lids that covered the male and female holes.

The belief in the power of Lwanda Asumbi points to the helplessness of man in the face of nature. Due to his limitation as a human being, supernatural forces were consulted to intercede and restore social order. Sacrifices were a way of communicating with the gods. It was these sacrifices meant to propitiate the supernatural forces that enhanced the bond between humans and the divinity. Man used the goat and the cockerel in his possession, each of which had to be without blemish to appease the spirits that is; the he-goat had to be totally white whereas the cockerel had to be brown. The choice of the goat and the cockerel both of which are male signify the primacy of the male gender in the society. The man was the head of the family and even in times of need, he had to be on the forefront in fending for and protecting his family. Rain is a symbol of regeneration- new life and hope. With the coming of rain the people's hope was rekindled for its presence portended posterity and prosperity. Likewise, the rain making holes are designated male and female. This is in acknowledgement of the significance of both genders in procreation. Indeed, during the rain making ritual the blood and alcohol was poured into both holes. The songs and dances were also sung in praise of both holes.

The fact that Oketch Adams a primary school teacher from Alego who takes away the two lids turns mad is testimony to the presence of divine powers. Even though he takes back the lids and a he-goat to propitiate the spirits, his sanity is not restored. His plight explicates the fact that those who tempt the spirits through mischief come to no good. In any case, a man cannot rise above his community.

Rapogi (Sharpening stone) – ‘A medium for consultation during war and hunting’

The sharpening stone is said to have belonged to Ramogi and was used to sharpen spears when the community wanted to go to war or hunting. Prior to such activities the stone was consulted by elders and if it ‘requested’ for a sacrifice, the sacrifice had to be performed by use of a female goat and a cockerel to ensure that no one got hurt during war or that the hunting expedition yielded positive results. The sharpening of the weapons prior to the war points to the precision with which the community conducted its activities. No serious activity was undertaken without prior preparation. The consultation of the stone and the sacrifices rendered at the stone’s ‘demand’ emphasizes the significance of the divinity. To a large extent the outcome of human activities was predetermined by supernatural powers. However, propitiation of these powers through animal sacrifice could negate possible negative consequences. The choice of a female goat is symbolic of provocation of maternal feelings characteristically aroused in times of uncertainty or when one is faced with danger. These feelings of love or pity showered upon the warriors or hunters give vent to the instinct to protect. The cockerel is symbolic of the warrior or hunter about to undertake the risky venture and who now offers himself for the mother’s mercy. Indeed, it was the males that always went to war.

Like the Asumbi rock, the ‘rapogi’ would be consulted during prolonged droughts thus further validating its supernatural powers. The fact that the Legio Maria sect priest from Unyejra (a local area) attempted to burn the sharpening stone claiming that it was infested with evil spirits and ended up being struck by lightning the very day testifies to the magnitude of the supernatural in the rock. Those who wrestle with the divine spirits come to no good as in the case of the priest. The community thus held all that had been declared sacred in reverence.

‘Dhiang’ – ‘From a living to a petrified ritual cow’

Dhiang’ is the Luo word for cow. Ramogi had a cow and a calf. One evening as the cows were returning home, the cow and calf ran towards the gate and out of the compound instead. Since it was very late, Ramogi ordered that the cow and calf be left alone and instead be searched for in the following day. When Ramogi’s sons went out in search for the cow and the calf, they discovered that both had turned to monuments of stone.

This myth is a caution against neglecting what one possesses. Though it may not be known why the cow and calf ran out of the compound, Ramogi’s instruction that they be left alone results to his loss. The cows would have been more useful to him as animals than as monuments of stone. Delayed action thus yields unpleasant consequences. It makes individuals to be unable to arrest situations. Consequences of unruliness is also captured, the cow and the calf are transformed because of their stubbornness. For the community, the implication was that individuals should think out possible consequences of their actions before undertaking them. However, for every problem there is always a solution or away of minimizing the effect, the place where the cow and calf turned into stone was thereafter considered sacred and became a sanctuary for herbs and concoction for cows that showed signs of trouble or the potential of becoming uncontrollable. This is symbolic of the community’s belief that situations should be arrested before they go out of hand. Once symptoms of negative actions are seen, immediate action should be taken to avert possible a bad end.

Luanda Laure.

This place contained water in a rock crevice. It is believed that it was at this place that Ramogi bathed. The place was also used as a meeting ground whenever Ramogi wanted to meet the wider community. The place not only had a personal significance for Ramogi in the sense that it was meant for his personal use, but was also significant to the wider community. The fact that Ramogi summoned the community to a meeting at this spot, gives insight into the mode of leadership at the time. The people had to heed to the elder's call. At the same time there was organized leadership structure. Information flowed in a systematic and organized way from the leaders to the subjects. Important issues that affected the community were discussed at an organized forum presided over by the elders.

In front of Luanda Laure was the 'Limbo' tree. This was a vantage point from which enemies from Alego, Sakwa and Yimbo could be detected and repelled. The political scenario thus depicts meticulous organization. Watch out posts such as the 'Limbo' tree ensured the security of people.

Luanda Alego.

This rock was Ramogi's relaxation point, the name derived from an old man called Alego. Initially, an old man called Alego would sit and bask in the sun on Luanda Alego. However, when Ramogi arrived at Got Ramogi, he was compelled to leave the area. Alego's departure from the place to pave way for Ramogi reveals the high regard with which leaders were held. Alego does not put up a resistance even though the place had been his favorites spot but quits peaceful. The belief that a sacred spring flowed under the rock marks the sanctity/ purity of the place.

Conclusion

For the Luo community the hill is a symbol of their culture and socialization process. The various artifacts and myths that surround it echo key issues in the societal belief system. The community's virtues are given prominence in most of the myths and are instrumental to the socialization of the community members into individuals acceptable to the society.

Such virtues include kinship, communalism, the perpetuation of good deeds, fellow feeling and generosity as implied in the myth of the grinding stone and the tethering peg. The sanctity of marriage was also upheld since marriage was a status symbol. Punishment of vices was observed so as to restore social order.

Recognition of divinity and its role in human life was also emphasized. This is exemplified through the belief in an afterlife. The spirit world was thus propitiated to ensure good relationship between man and the divine. This was necessary because the spirits exerted a lot of influence on human activities.

Emphasis was also placed on precision and prior preparation before undertaking events as depicted in the myth of the sharpening stone. This was the community's way of inculcating in the people good organizational skills.

Arresting situations before they go out of hand was also encouraged as reflected in the myth of the cow and the calf. In this way negligence was condemned.

At interpersonal level, respect for elders was stressed upon. This is reflected in the myth of Lwanda Alego. This also captures the community's respect for authority. The existence of look out posts from which enemies could be sported also emphasizes good organization and leadership.

Even today the hill has a lot of significance for the African independent churches such as Legio Maria, Nomiya and Roho which visit certain sacred spots in the hill to evoke divine intervention in human problems.

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