

The Tradition of *Ramogi*: Beliefs and Practices of the Levirate Amongst the Luo in Bondo Division, Bondo District, Western Kenya

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Abstract

This paper explores the beliefs and practices associated with the levirate institution. The fieldwork was carried out in September 1997 amongst Luo males in Bondo Division, Bondo District, Nyanza Province, Western Kenya. The methods of data collection were essentially qualitative in nature since the major interest was to determine peoples' perceptions and knowledge about the levirate and how these blend with other wider beliefs in the Luo community. In particular the major concern of this article is to apprehend how *the tradition of Ramogi* (*ker* or leader) is explicitly and implicitly manipulated in a bid to confine women within the institution of the levirate. The findings indicate that the levirate union is declining in the study area. Western influences in the form of Christianity, formal education, new technologies and urbanization are some of the factors that have led to this decline. However, the study found that the levirate is still practiced to varying degrees in the rural areas of Bondo District. This is because the local people, and especially the males, continue to believe that the levirate is inevitable, natural, universal and mandatory. Specifically, the origins and justifications for the existence of the levirate institution evoke a mythological dimension of the Luo culture and any violation of this tradition constitutes a transgression. Thus, all individuals in Luo society are consciously, or otherwise, aware that if such a prohibition is ignored, resisted or rejected, it will bring ill health and magical harm to an individual.

Key words: Beliefs, practices, levirate, Luo

Introduction

According to Potash (1986a), the levirate refers to a relationship in which children are affiliated to the deceased and this intimates that there is a clear difference between the institutions of the levirate and widow inheritance. This is primarily because widow inheritance should ideally denote a relationship "in which the genitor, or the biological father, is also the pater, or social father" (Potash 1986a: 6). In African societies the institution of the levirate has three mutual features (Potash 1986a). First, levirate relationships are routinely with an agnate of the husband. However, there are several exceptions to such a cultural imperative. For instance, among the Nandi in Kenya widows have a great deal of liberty primarily because they may choose a consort who is unrelated to the late husband. Culturally, the agnates of her deceased

husband cannot interfere by questioning her decision (Oboler 1986:68). Similarly, among the Barabaig of Tanzania the levirate is discretionary for both the widow and her husband's brother (Potash 1986a).

The second characteristic of levirate relationships is that they are all socio-culturally apprehended and recognized as being legitimate. The third characteristic is that all the children are considered as belonging to the deceased husband and not the levir (cf. Potash 1986a; Potash 1986b; Obbo 1986; Oboler 1986; Lanberg 1986; Ocholla-Ayayo 1976, 1989). According to Potash (1986b), there is a further distinction between levirates and marriages. For example, a widow has no uxorial obligation to the levir. Thus, she need not cook for him or perform other services. Also, she does not perform agricultural labour that he can control. Lastly, a widow has a greater freedom than a wife. This means that she can determine her own domestic routines or extra domestic activities (Potash 1986b: 63).

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Among the Nandi, as in other African cultures, a wife must display a great deal of public deference to her husband. However, a widow has a personal autonomy approaching that of a man (Oboler 1986:68). In most African societies the routine duties of the levir, according to Oboler (1986:77), is first to sire children if the widow's family is not already considered complete, second to manage the property held in trust for her minor sons, third to assist her by providing labour for clearing, ploughing, planting and harvesting and fourth to contribute to the maintenance of her household through occasional gifts of cash or small consumer items. Lastly, Potash (1986b) adds that the case of social fatherhood is linked with bride wealth, which gives a man rights to a woman's sexual and childbearing capacities. Upon his death, these rights are passed onto his "brother" which ensures first that the bride wealth is protected, second that the widow and children are secure under a male guardian, and third that their identity as a household unit is protected.

The major concern in this paper, therefore, is to explore the beliefs and practices associated with the levirate institution and how these blend with other categories of beliefs in the wider Luo society. The other concern is to apprehend the major reasons why patriarchal Luo traditions and customs must confine widows within the levirate milieu where they cannot freely choose a spouse of their own nor refuse remarriages and childbearing activities.

The Setting

This research was carried out in a number of villages in Bondo Division, Bondo District, Nyanza Province, Western Kenya. The research site is situated along the shores of the expansive Lake Victoria while River Yala transverses most parts of the area. There are other smaller seasonal rivers and streams but which become only active during the long rains from March to June, with peak periods in April and May, and during the short rains from October to November.

Methods

The major research instrument was the questionnaire and the interviews were conducted in the local Dholuo language although many informants were proficient in Kiswahili and English. The interviews were conducted by two male and one female local research assistants affiliated to KEDAHR¹ which also provided funds for the fieldwork. The interview guide consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. This is because the major interest was to collect both descriptive and quantifiable data.

Results

Socio-cultural characteristics

The informants who provided the information described in this paper were 50 males and they ranged in age from 30 years to those who were well over 90 years of age. The youngest informants were aged 30 years (N=9) while the oldest ones were 100 years (N=2). Specifically, 36% of the informants were in the age cohort of 30-35 years, 30% were in the age groups of 51-70 years and 71-90 years, respectively, while informants who were above 91 years constituted 4%. Furthermore, the data indicates that there was an equal proportion of these informants in monogamous unions (N=25) as those in polygynous ones (N=25). On the other hand, 26% (N=13) of these informants had married and were currently living with widows. The longest duration of such levirate marital ties in my sample was found to be over 16 years as mentioned by 6% of the informants. The shortest duration was between 1 and 5 years and this was the case of 10% of the informants (Table 1).

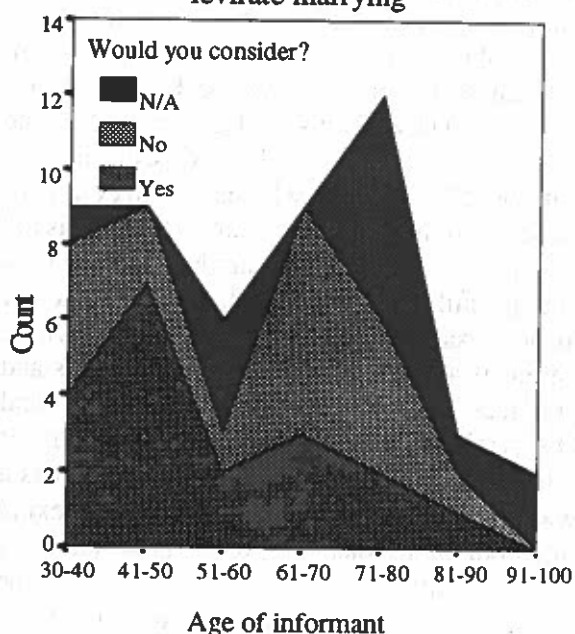
The informants not married to widows were asked if they could ever enter into levirate relationships and 76% (N=37) stated that they could never marry a widow. Logically, such informants were then asked if they could at least ever consider marrying a widow (Fig. 1).

¹ Kenya-Danish Health Research Project

Table 1: Duration of levirate marriage by age

		How long have you been married to a widow? (years) (%)					Total
		N/A	1 – 5 yrs	6 – 10 yrs	11 – 15 yrs	Over 16 yrs	
Age of informant	30 – 40 yrs	8 (16.0%)	0	1 (2.0%)	0	0	1
	41 – 50 yrs	9 (18.0%)	0		0	0	
	51 – 60 yrs	3 (6.0%)	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.0%)	0	3 (6.0%)
	61 – 70 yrs	9 (18.0%)	0	0	0	0	0
	71 – 80 yrs	6 (12.0%)	2 (4.0%)	0	1 (2.0%)	3 (6.0%)	6 (12.0%)
	81 – 90 yrs	2 (4.0%)	1 (2.0%)	0	0	0	3 (6.0%)
	91 – 100 yrs	0	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.0%)	0	0	2 (4.0%)
Total		37 (74.0%)	5 (10.0%)	3 (6.0%)	2 (4.0%)	3 (6.0%)	

Figure 1: Age by considering entering levirate marrying



The tradition of *Ramogi* (*ker* or leader)

The data reveals that men in Bondo Division believe that the levirate is still functionally mandatory, essential and universal. This is because the institution of the levirate belongs to the *tradition of Ramogi* (*ker* or leader) (cf. Ojwang and Ocholla-Ayayo 1989). This is the tradition that was handed down the generations from a mythological ancestor of the Luo known as *Ramogi*¹. Intrinsically, it implies that

any contravention of this tradition is considered an abomination. In the words of one informant "any violation of this tradition is a sin or locally, *kwero*". Therefore, each widow is culturally expected to enter leviratic relationships. Apart from evoking the *tradition of Ramogi*, informants had other assorted reasons. For instance, some stated that levirate relations act as a means of cleansing both the home and the widow herself. This is because it is believed that the death of a husband normally thrusts a widow and the homestead (locally *dala* or *pacho*) into a condition of ritual impurity (cf. Nangendo 1996a, b). Specifically, the homestead becomes ritually polluting (locally *dala ogak*) while the "widow is very unclean" (locally, *chi liel ogak*) or she has what is called *chode* or *kola*.² Thus, in this ritually contaminating status a widow and her homestead become symbolically laden with numerous mystical dangers to other people and the society at large. In fact, it is constructed that such a widow may not get into contact with any of her kith and kin. "And this can be a very difficult life to lead", concluded one informant.

On the other hand, the presence of another man in the homestead after the husband's demise is very indispensable. In particular, the widow's children require a man in the homestead that they can call "father". In fact,

¹ According to Ojwang and Ocholla-Ayayo (1989), *Ramogi* (*Ker*, or leader) is responsible for leading the Luo "people into the Yimbo area on the shores of Lake Victoria, sometime in the later medieval period. *Ramogi*

died in Yimbo (and Got *Ramogi* in Yimbo is a symbol of his historic role), having achieved the feat of settling his people at a permanent location."

² Juma (1996) calls this as *chodo kode* that apparently translates to "the evils of a dead husband".

one of the major responsibilities of such a father is to rebuild a new house (locally *loko ot*) or "a (new) home" (locally, *go dala*) (Okoth-Okombo 1989) for the widow. This is because in the cultural idioms of these people if a widow completely repudiates remarriage then her male offspring will never construct a house for her nor establish a homestead for himself. Moreover, a son to an unattached widow can never buy for her any bodily items such as apparels before she is remarried. On the other hand, she cannot visit her married daughters homes nor shake hands with her sons-in-law. Similarly, she cannot cook food for her married children neither can she accept and consume food prepared by any menarche women in the villages. Conversely, she may not enter into another woman's house especially if that woman has young children.

Informants likewise pointed out that widows must engage in the levirate because amongst the Luo it is unheard of for a widow to die and then be buried without having been remarried. Were this to happen, the cadaver (*kitundu*) of such an unmarried widow must be subjected to copulation¹ with a stranger (locally *jakowiny* or *jamwa*) before it is entombed (cf. Juma 1996). It also appears that if a widow refuses remarriage and yet goes ahead and engages in sex all her male children would die as a result of *chira*. An elderly informant added the following remarks:

If a widow completely refuses she would eventually die prematurely. This is because she would have been cursed forever, as she would suffer from *chira*. If she adamantly declines to remarry it also means that she had decided never to engage in sex for the rest of her life. Further sexual activity invites *chira*. Lastly, she becomes a curse to the lineage of her dead husband. However, no Luo widow ever refuses because the levirate was laid down by the Gods: *Ramogi*.

¹ Juma (1996) comments that the worst and most pathetic situation for a widow is to die before being remarried. Specifically, the fear of ritual cohabitation with a non-Luo or *jamwa* is what prompts Luo widows to enter into levirate relationships.

Informants were, consequently, asked to give a physical description of *chira*. According to the informants the most common physical manifestations of *chira* include progressive weight loss, general bodily weakness and fatigue. Also, *chira* may manifest itself through such diseases as kwashiorkor or marasmus, headaches, coughing, diarrhoea, giving birth to children of the same sex, infertility, barrenness, children dying as well as children and adults contracting incurable diseases (cf. Ocholla-Ayayo 1989; Mulemi and Nangendo 2001, Gottlieb 1992, Browner *et al.* 1987; Ringsted 2003; Wanjala 2003).

Forms of the levirate

The information shows that there are three potential forms of levirate relationships that are still currently practised by the Luo in Bondo Division. These forms include, first, the one involving a widow who is still in her reproductive years but who has yet to deliver or has never delivered any children. Second, is the levirate involving a menarche widow with young children and, third, the levirate of menopausal widows. Each of these levirate unions is associated with particular beliefs and practices as well as ritual obligations and observations. For instance, one informant remarked thus: "The levirate of menopausal widows does not necessarily entail sexual intercourse. In fact, the mere presence of a potential suitor or one of his garments in the house of a widow throughout the night signifies that the levirate has taken place. Alternatively, a potential suitor can even simply buy a token gift such as a pack of *ndawa* (cigarettes) for an old widow and that would symbolize that she had fulfilled the demands of the levirate". In a related approach, Potash (1986a) reports that the Luo fear copulation with a menopausal widow since it is believed that this might result into death.

Our informants stated categorically that widows in their society are culturally allowed and expected but often compelled into one of these three types of levirate relationships after the death of their spouses. Specifically, a good proportion of the informants were insistent that

a widow, especially a young menarche one, had no excuse of not remarrying a relative (locally, *anyuola*)¹ of her deceased husband. She has to marry a relative "otherwise *jakowiny* (stranger) would introduce bad genes into the dead man's lineage", concluded an elderly informant. As it was likewise explained, the main reason is that a menarche widow without children must remarry so as to start her *childbearing cycle* by *having children*. On the other hand, a menarche widow with young children must remarry in order for her to complete her child delivery process by continuing to *have more children*. Specifically, in the cultural traditions of the Luo "a woman must give birth so as to release all the eggs from her body".

Also, it was claimed that a young widow is made:

Comfortable with the presence of a man in the homestead. As a matter of fact the presence of a man in the *ot* (house) is enough to confine the widow from unnecessary movements. Also, once remarried she is able to give birth to many children as stipulated by the traditions. Moreover, it is a very painful experience to loose bridewealth just because the widow migrates to find a man elsewhere

These data thus underscores the significance of children, and especially male children, among the people of Bondo Division. This is because the information shows the following three things. First, levirate unions actually become permanent once a son is born, second, the birth of a son is a clear signal to the community that the levir (locally *jater*) is now a legitimate consort of the widow, and, third, such a son is normally named after the deceased husband more so if he passed away without having had a male offspring. In fact, a number of informants suggested that all the

children born out of levirate unions are usually referred to as the dead man's children and not the levir's. Therefore, such children "commemorate and perpetuate the name of the deceased husband" as some informants asserted.

A middle-aged informant had the following comments that are actually emblematic of the perceptions of our male informants:

Widow remarriage is a Luo tradition that must never be denounced or abandoned. In fact, when I die I would also want my wife to be remarried. If my brother dies, I have no other alternative but to marry the widow. I cannot just remain aloof while she is suffering and living in hardships. I have to help her and the only appropriate way is through remarriage. Once the community decides that I should remarry my brother's widow, it becomes inevitable and I cannot avoid it.

These views actually capture the powerlessness of men and women when viewed against the backcloth of the authority and legitimacy of the institution of the levirate among the Luo. This helplessness is mirrored in the *inevitability* of a *willing* or *unwilling* brother-in-law marrying a *willing* or *unwilling* widow as stipulated in the myths, traditions and customs of these people. This feeling of powerlessness is made even more explicit in the comments of a 34 year old informant.

I do not deny that I cannot remarry a widow. This is because one of my brothers could die and I could be the right person to takeover his wife. Indeed, I cannot decide right now but a situation may arise in future that makes it inevitable for me to remarry. This is because a refusal to marry my brother's wife is a curse. In our culture a man who refuses to remarry his dead brother's wife can be cursed by the woman. The outcome could be that all the man's future children shall become hopeless. Anyway, it is very inhuman for a young widow to live alone without a husband whereas men who could remarry her are available.

¹ Okoth-Okombo (1989:91-92) clarifies that *anyuola* refers to "an inner category of people...who have a common ancestor, usually, but not exclusively, male...people of common descent (literally, birth) on the father's side". Thus, this term is narrower compared to the more general one of *wat* (plur. *wede*) which may be rendered as relative. Specifically, a Luo individual will use *anyuola* when referring to a kinsperson.

In fact, the information clearly indicates that once the members of the clan have decided on a levir, there is no other alternative but for the remarriage to take place. This is because it is culturally construed that once married a woman must never stay alone in the homestead nor leave that homestead. A Luo woman is usually married to the men of her husband's lineage in perpetuity and indeed when marriage takes place such men automatically become "one of her husband's" (Evans-Pritchard 1945). Obbo (1986) insightfully adds that marital unions among the Luo continue after the original partner is in the grave and, in fact, a widow is usually perceived as being the "wife of a grave," or locally *chi liel* and not the "widow of the grave" (Juma 1996). Ocholla-Ayayo (1989:35) adds that by *symbolically marrying the deceased but in reality cohabiting with a kinsman of the deceased and the children from such a union belonging to the deceased*, the levirate lends credibility to the belief that among the Luo "the dead man lives" and his soul is always in the community".

Although widows are allowed and expected to engage (Table 2) in the levirate three-quarters (72%) of the informants reported that they actually knew of widows who had resisted the levirate. Nonetheless, the same widows were eventually coerced into the levirate. There were a number of reasons reported for compelling widows into levirate marital ties. For instance, widows who had not yet attained menopause must be confined into connubial unions so as to avoid promiscuous behaviours. Indeed, all these male informants believe that young widows cannot control their sexuality neither can they stay without a man. Informants were also asked whether or not the levirate should be promoted. Seventy-six per cent strongly felt that the levirate institution and its attendant rituals should be promoted (Table 3). Informants were then asked if they perceived that the levirate was on the wane in the Luo community. The data reveal that 78% thought that it was vanishing (Table 4), as it was not being practiced as in the past (Table 5). Western influences in the form of Christianity,

formal education, new technologies and urbanization were cited as some of the factors that have led to the decline of the levirate. For example, a levir aged 100 years felt the levirate should be promoted because:

Apart from being part of the Luo traditions, the Holy Bible,¹ also supports the practice of the levirate. Among the Luo its specific purpose is to assist a young menarche widow by giving her a chance to give birth to her own children. Therefore, it should be promoted because there is nothing wrong with it.

On the other hand, a levir aged 78 years added: I support the levirate because my grandfather and father practiced it in keeping with the Luo traditions and customs. In fact, in our culture the presence of a man is very important before any major activities can actually be carried out. For instance, sons and daughters of the deceased cannot marry or remarry unless there is a father-figure in the homestead. Therefore, the levirate should be promoted since it is a way of cleansing the home. Even if a widow does not want to remarry she should at least stay with a man for a week and then expel him from the homestead.

This study also wondered why 22% of the informants were against promoting the levirate. The most common response was that the levirate nowadays serves absolutely no purpose. Some of these informants believed vehemently, for instance, that women have abused the levirate to the extent where the original purposes are no longer viewed with esteem. For instance, the belief that the levirate was there to perpetuate the deceased husband's lineage is no longer valid as widows prefer marrying absolute strangers. In the words of one informant "in these villages nowadays it is the *jakowiny* (stranger) who primarily marries all the widows".

Other informants explained that many people in their villages have died as a consequence of practising the levirate. This is

¹ Genesis 19:1, 38:13-30; Deuteronomy 25:5-6; Ruth 3:12, 4:5-6; Mathews 22:24

Table 2: Age by expect widows to remarry

		Do you think they expect to remarry? (%)			Total
		Don't know	Yes	No	
Age of informant	30 – 40 yrs	0	5 (10.0%)	4 (8.0%)	9 (18.0%)
	41 – 50 yrs	2 (4.0%)	4 (8.0%)	3 (6.0%)	9 (18.0%)
	51 – 60 yrs	1 (2.0%)	2 (4.0%)	3 (6.0%)	6 (12.0%)
	61 – 70 yrs	2 (4.0%)	5 (10.0%)	2 (4.0%)	9 (18.0%)
	71 – 80 yrs	2 (4.0%)	4 (8.0%)	6 (12.0%)	12 (24.0%)
	81 – 90 yrs	0	3 (6.0%)	0	3 (6.0%)
	91 – 100 yrs	0	0	2 (4.0%)	2 (4.0%)
Total		7 (14.0%)	23 (46.0%)	20 (40.0%)	50 (100%)

Table 3: Age by if levirate marriage should be promoted

		Should levirate marriage be promoted? (%)		
		Yes	No	Total
Age of informant	30 – 40 yrs	7 (14.0%)	2 (4.0%)	9 (18.0%)
	41 – 50 yrs	8 (16.0%)	1 (2.0%)	9 (18.0%)
	51 – 60 yrs	4 (8.0%)	2 (4.0%)	6 (12.0%)
	61 – 70 yrs	6 (12.0%)	3 (6.0%)	9 (18.0%)
	71 – 80 yrs	9 (18.0%)	3 (6.0%)	12 (24.0%)
	81 – 90 yrs	2 (4.0%)	1 (2.0%)0	3 (6.0%)
	91 – 100 yrs	2 (4.0%)0	0	2 (4.0%)
Total		38 (76.0%)	12 (24.0%)	50 (100%)

Table 4: Age by decline in levirate marriage

		Is levirate marriage today declining? (%)		
		Yes	No	Total
Age of informant	30 – 40 yrs	6 (12.0%)	3 (6.0%)	9 (18.0%)
	41 – 50 yrs	7 (14.0%)	2 (4.0%)	9 (18.0%)
	51 – 60 yrs	5 (10.0%)	1 (2.0%)	6 (12.0%)
	61 – 70 yrs	6 (12.0%)	3 (6.0%)	9 (18.0%)
	71 – 80 yrs	12 (24.0%)	0	12 (24.0%)
	81 – 90 yrs	1 (2.0%)	2 (4.0%)0	3 (6.0%)
	91 – 100 yrs	2 (4.0%)0	0	2 (4.0%)
Total		39 (78.0%)	11 (22.0%)	50 (100%)

Table 5: Age by is the levirate today as in the past?

		Is the process of levirate today as in the past?		
		Yes	No	Total
Age of informant	30 – 40 yrs	2 (4.0%)	7 (14.0%)	9 (18.0%)
	41 – 50 yrs	0	9 (18.0%)	9 (18.0%)
	51 – 60 yrs	1 (2.0%)	5 (10.0%)	6 (12.0%)
	61 – 70 yrs	1 (2.0%)	8 (16.0%)	9 (18.0%)
	71 – 80 yrs	0	12 (24.0%)	12 (24.0%)
	81 – 90 yrs	0	3 (6.0%)	3 (6.0%)
	91 – 100 yrs	0	2 (4.0%)	2 (4.0%)
Total		4 (8.0%)	46 (92.0%)	50 (100%)

because after remarriage a widow has sexual intercourse with multiple partners besides the one she has remarried. This leads to the acquisition of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) including AIDS (locally known as *ayaki*). Such informants concluded that the levirate is on the wane because many people nowadays associate it with the high spread of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in the Luo community. Indeed, a good number of these males believed that nowadays widows who refuse to remarry have become more and more sexually promiscuous. Specifically, all the informants ardently believed that if a menarche widow refuses the levirate she would automatically indulge in what was variously described as “irresponsible sex” and “prostitution” with multiple anonymous sexual consorts who may be HIV seropositive.

Another common response was that the custom of the levirate should not be promoted because widows whom people feared would die because of not remarrying are still alive. This implies that “there is no curse or *chira* that will occur following the refusal of a widow to remarry”, surmised one informant.¹

¹ In her study carried out in Migori District, Juma (1996) found that 57% of the informants had negative attitudes towards the levirate because the levirs were described as being perpetrators of poverty as most of them end up misappropriating and mismanaging the property of the deceased. Other informants pointed out that the practice was outdated as well as being the major source of the rapid spread of the killer disease HIV/AIDS

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with the levirate institution among the Luo of Bondo District. The data show that the levirate union still remains salient in the lives of these people. This is primarily because the origins and justifications for the existence of the levirate evoke a mythological dimension of the Luo culture: *the tradition of Ramogi*. This intimates that any transgression of the beliefs and practices linked to the levirate constitutes in the local idiom *otimo kwer* or *kwero*. This may be rendered as “to commit a taboo” or “it is a sin” (Juma 1996). Specifically, amongst the Luo “to commit a taboo” can spell dire consequences for the individual concerned as well as the wider society. Kawango (1995) has intimated that the behaviour (locally, *gor pur*) of every individual in daily life should always be motivated by the cultural idiom of *kwer* (plur. *kweche*), which translates to “that which is tabooed or forbidden”. This clearly shows that all individuals in Luo society are consciously, or otherwise, aware that broken taboos and omens usually bring ill health and magical harm to an individual (cf. Barley 1983, 1986; Mulemi and Nangendo 2001). Indeed, Ocholla-Ayayo (1989) cautions that amongst the Luo there is cause to fear evil consequences if there is a departure from tradition.

Therefore, all informants interviewed declared that the rituals and practices linked to the levirate must be upheld so as to avoid infirmity and paranormal harm from the supernatural. Among the Luo of Bondo this ill-health and magical harm comes in the form

of a supernaturally-induced "illness" (Mulemi and Nangendo 2001) or a "culture-bound syndrome" (Good 1977, 1987) locally called *chira*. This is a folk physical disorder or a "spontaneous deterioration of health" (Juma 1996) that is culturally associated with ritual impurity as a consequence of moral, social, cultural as well as spiritual indiscretion.¹ And the local people believe that Biomedicine is ineffective in the treatment of *chira*. This is because the aetiology of *chira* is explicitly and implicitly associated with a breach of omens and broken taboos. This is a view that is rampant in other non-western societies with similar disorders (cf. Barley 1983, 1986; Mulemi and Nangendo 2001; Ringsted 2003; Good 1977, 1987; Gottlieb 1992; Browner *et al.* 1987).

Finally, the levirate is salient amongst these people because it is intimately tied to notions of pronatalism. Turning to the Luo in Bondo, it is socio-culturally constructed that women, and especially menarche women, must be confined within the levirate institution because of the cultural imperative of begetting many children. Or as some informants phrased it in the cultural traditions and idioms of the Luo "a woman must give birth so as to release all the eggs from her body".

Finally, Ocholla-Ayayo (1989:33) states that the levirate union is connected with rites concerning justice and right. Specifically, these rites "prescribed the standards regulating the interconnection between the living and the dead. Among the Luo it was considered that justice and right for the individual were to be observed in life and in death. In many African societies, a person was regarded in the same way: for instance, a woman had a right to bear children even in death (through [levirate] arrangements."

¹ According to Ocholla-Ayayo (1989), breaking of *chira* or *kver* consists of sins, reprobated acts of commission or omission as well as breaking an oath which forms part of the process of law and justice. "Such breaches may in some cases attract the visitation of death upon the culprit, by some impersonal spiritual being" (pp.36).

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