

THE HOME AS TEXT: A Critical Examination of Spatio-Temporal Symbolism in Luo Context.

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ABSTRACT

The Luo narratives, like others worldwide, are set in the home. For the Luo, the home is more than a house or set of houses. It is a space built after given rituals organized spatiotemporally. This is meant to promote law and order, without which, no meaningful production and reproduction can materialize. The paper examines the Luo world view, in so far as it manifests meaning from the spaces in the home and its environs. This is analyzed in the context of time and order that dictate the human activities chronologically. It is known that time is a product of seasons and solar system impacts heavily on the characters performing on the platform known as the home. The time superimposes itself on the people both in its cyclical and linear perspectives. There are meanings attached to the symbols and rituals of the sexual intercourses performed among the people and perceived as sacred. For that reason, they are associated with planting, harvesting, wedding and burial ceremonies. Though time and space are invisible, they interact with the Luo home in a metaphorical manner that needs interpretation. Upon the interpretation lie etiquette, social order and transition. The paper exposes how the Luo use their time and space in a manner that reveals their identity. As containers of events, time and space impose social order and together, they affect production and reproduction thereby determining poverty levels of the community. To be healthy, successful or ill is to strike a balance or imbalance between the individual and the environment. The Luo ethno-medicine is dependent on manipulation of time, space and sex of the individual, family and clan. For centuries, the Luo have used these indigenous principles to manage, harness and exploit the resources in the environment. The paper concludes by

showing how all these things underline Luo narratives in a subtle manner that must be understood if the significance of the stories is to be grasped.

INTRODUCTION

The Luo are an ethnic group that lives on the shores of Lake Victoria in East Africa. Their ancestors migrated from the Southern Sudan and arrived in what is now called Kenya in the 15th Century or thereabouts. They are basically fishermen by inclination, but for the declining catches, they have lately taken to farming and keeping of cattle. The history of the people indicates that they followed River Nile because of their interest in fishing. Since they have interacted with water as the source of their mainstay, their cultural practices revolve greatly around the water in its many forms. It forms the basis for their rituals and ethno-medicine. Water is a traditional medicine, however, if not handled well in line with traditional taboos that guard its usage, it can cause illnesses that Western medicine cannot manage to deal with. Like other ethnic groups, the Luo culture has learnt a lot from their neighbours, like the Luhya, the Abagusi and Kalenjin around them. For this matter, some shared customs have evolved in the area. That notwithstanding, the Luo remain a distinct community because of the way they cherish some of their 'outdated' traditions that foreigners abhor. This has earned them severe condemnation from the international community and even non Luo Kenyans. It is important for the World to understand the mindset of these people by looking at the physical setting of their narratives and how they perceive it. The paper is offering a tiny window through which some of these complex issues could be interpreted or monitored.

BACKGROUND

It is common knowledge that the World is undergoing serious challenges because of environmental mismanagement. According to Agnatava (2010), pollution problem has been afflicting mankind from the time people started using fire. However, when industrial revolution occurred in the 19th Century, pollution became worse. Though technological improvement has made it possible to strike oil offshore and onshore and extract it with maximum efficiency, they have been unable to devise methods of cleaning its undesirable side effects like discharges emitted into the atmosphere, frequent spillage of oil into the seas and residues on land. Mining in general has its adversities, but this is just to mention one as an illustration. Agnatava goes on to argue that the progress created capitalist culture entailing division of labour and efficient consumption of the resources. The population has grown in leaps and bounds, thereby outstripping food supply. The attempt to cope with it through industrialization has created faster urbanization, which in turn, has stressed the earth by demanding excessive resources from it. She concludes that the carrying capacity of the earth has been surpassed and further demands put upon it can only yield automatic disaster.

In the light of the cited challenges, some people have recommended reactivation of indigenous knowledge, skills and practices that have stabilized the society over the years. This can be done in one way by examining the belief systems of a people. It is imperative to examine their myths, legends, rituals and world view because these are the people's instruments of survival that have protected them over the years, Gorgestani (2000). There are those like Shah, (2002), who holds contrary opinion, arguing that studying indigenous knowledge would lead to globalizing them which in his opinion amounts to theft. He says this would be stealing creativity and innovation from the people by denying them their rights.

Having considered the multiple and controversial voices on the subject, it has been recognized that there is merit in seeking to understand folk knowledge, for what it is worth, because a tiny contribution is still something worth pursuing. In this belief, the paper delves into the world view of the Luo regarding their use of space, time and sex in the management of the resources.

THE STRUCTURE OF A LUO HOMESTEAD

The home is a flippant imagery that generates multiple meanings all the time. There are mobile homes or homes away from home as opposed to fixed homes. It symbolizes a cultural concept. People think of this world not being our home as we are just passing through to another destination. Therefore, Molz (2008), finds concept of home intriguing in its multiple definitions. Tackling it from its synonym called abode, she finds it entailing two broad meanings. It could mean a sojourn for temporary stay or home where one resides for a long time even a life time. There is, for that matter, dualism in the terminology that makes it possible for one to think of home as fixed and stationery and perceive it simultaneously as a flux and temporary. This way the home can be seen as fluid, mobile, plural, and static, with all sorts of cultural attachments and grounding.

The structure of a Luo homestead is a fixed pattern whose blueprint has been passed down from generation to generation for centuries. It is like the constitution upon which all other legal issues are resolved. Indeed it is the platform or space where the spirits intermingle with the living, Iteyo (2009). The unborn, the young and the old must interact in this space with the departed ancestors who are known as the living dead Mbiti (1975). However, for the interactions to work well there must be rules of engagement. Some people call them taboos, others call them etiquette, yet to others they are just cultural heritage. Whatever the case may be, the dead occupy the most exalted position among the Luo according to Iteyo. That is why the dead must be buried at a

particular space in a particular position. In this scenario, the right side reflects symbolic maleness, authority and power, he observes. It is imperative that all the males must be buried on the right side of the door of the homestead, if you look towards the gate. Here the male body must lie on its left side while the female one lies on its right, thereby re-enacting the traditional sexual positions that they played in life. For adults, a fire known as *magenga* must be lit for 7 days for dead male and 3 days for female. This is the background against which the burial of S.M. Otieno, Cohen & Atieno –Odhiambo (1989), (1992) became a national debate. There were legal, cultural, social and historical questions that revolved around what constituted a Luo homestead and how that affected the inheritance of the estate.

THE TIME FACTOR

We have seen above how time and space interact with age and sex of the dead. To grasp the importance of all this, one needs to know the argument of Dejung, (2003), who states that time and space are key to life because they are the containers of happenings or events. For this reason, he believes that time imposes social order and space carries symbolic meanings. According to this opinion, all social facts or events are located in particular physical places, thereby being in particular social processes. The Luo home space and performance on it should be seen against this philosophy. This is how their past, present, and future conception of space and its structure should be understood. It takes a keen observer to interpret the spatial positions of houses by the manner in which they have been built. In the Luo homestead prototype, the parents must pitch their house at the top of the space, and then the boys put up their huts, left and right, according to their order of birth cascading down towards the gate.

THE *OULA* WATER FACTOR

This is where water system comes in handy. In almost flat terrains, in which it would be hard for anyone to tell which side of the landscape is higher, the Luo would only need to watch the storm water. Its flow will dictate who builds a house where and this rule becomes enforced by taboo *kwer* practice. The bigger picture is determined by the location of water body like a lake, river or pan that collects water. It is a rule of the thumb that a Luo homestead must be set facing the direction of such water bodies. The oldest couples settle at the highest altitude of the landscape, and then younger generations spread themselves in phases downhill in order of their ages so that the youngest couples occupy the lowest part of the landscape. This is why it is arguable that the planning of how to use land resources is taken care of to some extent for the Luo by the water, which in turn is controlled by the hills or mountains and skies. It is not left to chance to decide who will settle where as the usage of the land surface is culturally predetermined. Supposing the left side of the farm is rocky or marshy, the son born in the order to inherit it cannot make a claim for a change of settlement. It would be a taboo for him to move above his senior brothers.

Atieno Odhiambo, (1973) participates in questions of what constitutes good development plans for Africans. Some recommend capitalism, others talk about Marxism and later on African Socialism. To Atieno Odhiambo it is the responsibility of the state to plan for development because it controls the resources and levies taxes and rents by imposing rules and regulations with the objective of making the society happy. In a Luo state, planning the development in the environment would have been left to *oula* water principle to sort out. Together with the left-right pattern principle, there would have not been controversy on what should be done where by who and in which order.

LEFT-RIGHT PATTERN

The point of reference is the home of the oldest couple. Back to individual home space, it ought to be noted that the sons are supposed to put up their huts in an alternating right-left pattern starting with the oldest son at the top and the youngest at the bottom of the home space. A person familiar with culture will figure out by himself which house belongs to who. The home structural design is legible to those who are culturally literate. The same rules apply to polygamist families. Different wives take positions in an alternating right-left pattern in order of seniority where junior ones comes lowest and nearer the gates. This can be 'read' too. All these things may seem unimportant, but they help the Luo find their bearings and navigate their movements in life and on earth.

Having studied the Luo settlements in detail, Abonyo (2005) reaches a similar conclusion. She notes that there is often an underlying cultural value attached to creation of cultural spaces. It is these spaces that define communities and give them idiosyncratic identities. From the cradle to the grave, the Luo use the spaces in the home in a manner that identifies them as Luos. We have seen the skeleton outlay of the homestead. Beneath the conspicuous basic spatial layouts of the home, according to Abonyo, there are signs that define their ethnicity.

DOORS AND GATES

For illustration, she gives the example of the gates and doors. They have both hidden symbolic meanings which the community cherishes. The sons in laws cannot use the back gate known as *rot*. This is a small entrance at the back of the home used by those who may be insiders or intimate to the family. Probably, this restriction was meant to keep privacy from those who do not belong, like the in laws, were not to use this gate. For the main gate, however, it is used by all in life, but in death, the practice changes. When a man or his wives die outside the home, their bodies would be brought in through the main gate. In Abonyo's opinion, this is because they are considered permanent residents of the home.

Anyone else like the children, sons or daughters in law are to be brought in through a temporary opening called *rot* made in the fence. It is again arguable that this is symbolically indicating that the diseased did not thrive to move out to his or her own homestead.

Both the gate and the door are symbols of transition and privacy. The door is a sign of entry as it is everywhere. However, like the gate, it is also a sign beyond which certain individuals within or without the family cannot go at given moments. For example, it is a taboo for adolescent sons and daughters to go past the door to their mothers' hut. It is the sacredness of the sleeping space that keeps them off. Abonyo observes that in the event that the sons and daughters came to their mothers hut for a meal, they would be served at the door. If the mother would be away, she would ensure the food is left for the youth at some special space above the door, where it can be accessed without stepping into the hut.

The gates and doors have been noted to be points and symbols of transition. They are markers of insiders versus outsiders. For the Luo, Ogembo (2005), they are delicate spaces that can be manipulated ethno-medically to cause illness or heal a sick patient. Indeed they are guarded strictly because they are the points of exposure at which ones enemy can deposit harmful charms to ones detriment.

OSURI

On the roof of every hut in a Luo homestead is a one metre stick pitched at the apex of the circular conical roof. It is a very important symbol in the home. It pierces through broken pots and sits directly above the centre of the hut. That space below it is sacred. It is where beer pot is mounted with chairs around it for old men to have their drink. It is also the point at which the medicine-man would administer his herbs to those who are ill, if there is a sick person in the family. In

case the man of this house dies, the osuri stick, which some people think is a phallic symbol, is removed to reflect his demise. Anyone passing by, if literate in the culture of the people, would know for sure that the man is dead. As soon as the woman or widow is remarried or inherited, as it is known here, a new Osuri stick is fixed on top of the roof. This symbolizes the presence of the new man. That osuri is like a flag. It signifies authority, which is bestowed on the man because this is a patriarchal community.

The Luo tie a lot of significance also to the concept of left or right spaces. These are deictic terms that must be determined by the position of the speaker. For the Luo point of departure at which people perceive 'leftness' or 'rightness' is the door of the first wife's hut. It matches well with the gate too. The two points complement one another and they decide how the spaces in the home or farm or village will be distributed, used or occupied. Abonyo says the system of placing activities and artifacts left and right stems from the cultural beliefs in the differences in function and strength between two opposing wings. This concept is applied in the life of a Luo from the cradle to grave.

THE BINARY LEFT-RIGHT OPPOSITION

The right is inherently associated with strength and good luck while the left is regarded weak and a sign of bad omen. The Luo figuratively refer to the left side as '*bat kor ka jachien*' meaning the side of the devil. It is this weak side associated with evil that typifies the women folk. In case children, against all discouragement, persist on being left-handed, the Luo would organize certain rituals to cleanse them. On becoming adults, when due to establish their own homes, certain rituals must be done in advance for the left handed men according to Abonyo. When all sons have moved to their homes and the parents have aged and died, a Luo home is considered dead and the settlement cycle begins all over again.

Birth, Death and Space are all intertwined amongst the Luo to maleness or femaleness of the subject. At birth, the placenta (*biero*) of a baby girl is buried on the left hand side of the door of the mother's hut. Later, when she dies, she is buried to the left of the door too, although not on the same spot. For the boy child, they do the exact opposite. It is possible for an observer to know the gender of the dead by simply looking at the grave site. When a young marriageable girl dies before finding a husband, she would be buried outside the fence of the home. The same applies to people who have committed suicide. The space outside would be making a statement to the rest that what the dead person has done is unacceptable. This is supposed to have some deterrent effect on society especially on the peers facing similar pressures.

GATES AND DOORS AS MARKERS OF TRANSITION

The gate and door are markers of territoriality keeping those inside from the outsiders. They are points of strategic defences. In terms of taboos and procreation, these are key points to be guarded jealously for the Luo. Lots of rites of passage are conducted in these places because they symbolize transition and becoming. On the doors and gates, one might find symbols of competition, rivalry and interfamily feuds. At harvest time, leaves of the new crops are hanged on the gate to ward off witchcraft and to announce the good news about the harvest. Traditional medicine men also put markers on their gates for the public to discern.

SPACE AS INSTRUMENT OF SELF-DEFINITION

In de Silva's opinion (2007), the concept of space and place are well recognized and accepted in recent architectural theories and practices though definitions vary according to different interpretations. He thinks that the concept of space basically relates to man and his environment in terms of man's experiences. This position however is confronted by modern concepts of the infinite and boundless space in the Cartesian sense. Technology has made exploration of our environment beyond any limits. The Luo, of course, did not go that far although

they had the concept of *polo* heaven. Their oral narratives go only that far and that is the limit of their traditional spatial imagination. We understand that even in the Western world view, space remains an ambivalent medium constructed between human beings and environment in the sense of physical and psychological manner. In a way, the spaces around one, helps to define him. As he explores this space he also reflects an undertaking of self-discovery. For that reason, we understand ourselves in terms of our stories. The stories are set in and on an environment. In the mind of Morris (2007), stories help people reconstruct or reconstitute physical settings and make them permanent when actually they are fluid and evolve from minute to minute. If we do not use narrative space concept to create stability, the environment would simply melt away. The presence of the audience to the narrator makes it possible to hold still the environment which has passed. To the Luo, the home symbolism is the chief device of holding the environment still and therefore managing interactions between man and the space around him.

Beyond the fiction world, real issues like the ones raised by human rights activist find it hard to undo the Luo traditions on land allocation by surface principle of left-right. Nash (2009) argues that human rights disrupt the norms usually taken for granted. They revolve around universal justice. Globalization that the world is going through raises hard questions about how resources can be allocated across the board in a just manner. However, the shared understanding of justice would vary from community to community. To the Luo, the spatial distribution of land will follow the water flow and order of left-right pattern. If there were any land dispute between brothers, the elders would strictly look at the *oula* concept together with left right-left patterns to resolve it. Justice is determined by the order and gender in which you were born. The women are not considered here because they are *ogwange* wild cats that marry away from the homestead. This is what Nash calls cultural politics. The space symbols are deeply rooted in the Luo heritage, but these could be contested in a struggle to change things.

SEX AS A METHOD OF ENFORCING SOCIAL ORDER

The Luo have been derided as people whose life rotates around sex. This has made some people born in the community become too shy to identify with this cultural practice. Before the bride is taken to bed, the bridegrooms' parents must have sex themselves and send a signal to the young couple in a symbolic language, but which must be culturally very clear. For planting new crops, the order of sex starts with the oldest couple in the hierarchy to the youngest ones. No couple could plant new seeds, without undertaking a sexual ceremonial ritual the night before. When putting up a new homestead or moving into a new house, the Luo must have sex to complete the process. All these are made mandatory obligations that must be observed. Defying such taboos would invite the chronic and stubborn *chira* disease into the family. This is a dreaded illness, whose symptoms are like those of HIV/AIDS infections. For a long time, the Luo used to confuse the former for the latter sickness. What is common between the two is that they are diseases revolving around social ethics. The ethics decide what is regarded as normal and therefore considered acceptable sexual practices. Leighpigg and Rivkifish (2005) argue that sex is very important in development. Population control and management, disease prevention, maternal health promotion and child health care practices, which internationally depend on sex culture. This influences planning and reproduction, which in turn affects physical development of the land.

Gosine (2009) agrees and observes further that when sex and sexuality are left out of international development agenda, it cannot reach optimum levels. He says that sexual proclivities of those on development sites have caused anxieties of the people and driven and shaped projects of international development. The Luo seem to have taken care of this need by integrating their sex and sexuality to development. This is also injected into their health management. To them staying healthy is a function of good sex practices in an orderly manner as we have discussed above. When life is infected by illnesses, it might just mean that

someone has not played his part correctly in the sex chain and order. The remedy is to re-enact the whole play, having adjusted the part that went wrong.

This world view is getting support from the most unlikely quarters. Dossey (1982) argues that the world cannot be understood entirely on the basis of modern physics in which the body is perceived as a clock-work of mechanism, in which illness is caused by breakdown of parts. Having been an internal medical physician for a long time, Dr Dossey recommends that medicine needs regular updating probably by infusing indigenous knowledge. On this basis we can question the theories that have governed our application of medicine. He wonders whether the brain is nothing more than a hologram in which every part contains a whole. That could explain why ordinary people have been able to raise or lower their blood pressure at will, or control heart-rate and body temperature. The major question arising out of this phenomenon is what part consciousness plays in the management of health and illness. He disputes our obsession with the idea that time is a flowing entity. Like the Luo, he introduces the new time pattern which is not linear but circular or cyclical. Upon this understanding, he brings in the idea of time sickness which he talks about as a new medical concept. It is seen as a possible cause and the greatest killer of all heart diseases. He presents remarkable medical data showing that by changing their view of time, people have been able to positively affect the cause of diseases.

THE FENCE OF THE HOME

The Luo home is normally fenced using a euphorbia. This is a boundary marker indicating transitory point that separates the insiders from outsiders. The fence indicates territoriality beyond which intrusion would not be tolerated. If need be, force will be used to evict the uninvited. Normally, the fence would take a circular shape and pattern. The fence also symbolically binds the family together. Those inside must adhere to certain cultural norms, if they want to stay healthy. The

outsiders do not have to go by these rules. If anyone falls ill within the home compound, a medicine man would be engaged to examine the space to see if someone contravened the space and time taboos. The healing remedy is normally a re-manipulation of the space in the understanding that the reconfiguration would bring life. The fence is a point at which witchcraft and is carried out. It is also the point in which anti-witchcraft charms are planted. The space outside the fence is regarded 'unclean'. That is why those who die in an acceptable manner are buried outside the fence. Indeed it is a marker of where the home begins and ends. When a story is told of a character going into or out of a home, it is the fence that determines at what point the character is in or out.

To Atieno Odhiambo, (1989), the boundary of the home is further indicated by the 'biero' or placenta principle. This is a theory where people whose placentas were buried outside the home are considered weak and of less value. Such people are considered 'jooko' meaning outsiders. He argues that those whose placentas are buried within their respective homesteads are seen to belong and understood to be upright and dependable. He concludes that 'biero' in the home then becomes part of the constitution of boundaries between those born and raised on familiar grounds and those unrecognized or coming from outside the lands of familiar people. Like the fence, one can see that biero, placenta, and its burial site, is a marker of the Luo identity. The birth place and death place are indicators of Luo identity in terms of the burial sites of the bodies concerned.

THE CYCLES OF SEX AND TIME

The Luo say '*piny agonda*' meaning the world is round. This underscores the idea that time moves in a cyclical pattern. The Luo symbols and rituals and sex patterns reflects time as a cycle. Even in this complex cycle, there is linearity and order. This is the basis upon which the planting of new crops, harvesting and ploughing are all preceded by chronologically organized sex starting from the oldest couples to the youngest. If the population complies with the pattern, there is health, but if deviation is brought into play, the community would be afflicted

by illness. The spatiotemporal sex pattern of the Luo emanates from the fact that man can abstract. This is why van Huyssteen (2006) states that only man can brood about what did not happen and ponder about what it would be like if we did not exist. If the Luo fall sick, they try to figure out what might have not happened in the right way. That way, they invent stories about what might not have happened well and then use the stories to organize their lives.

The Luo stories like *Lwanda Magere*, *Simbi Nyaima*, *Gor Mahia*, Ogutu & Roscoe (1974) and so on are set in homesteads. All of these stories are crafted around something that went wrong in the homestead and how the characters went about fixing it or how they made errors in the quest to correct them. It is understood that the houses in these stories where the characters live were built to fit the blueprint given above. The stories are told to listeners who are assumed to have the home design, pattern or orientation in mind. The home of *mikayi*, *nyachira*, *simba* and *abila* are all fixed. The narratives revolve around these houses and their positions are already fixed in the mind of both the teller and the listener. Spaces of the homestead 'speak' to the narratives in symbolism, infusing or injecting meaning into the stories in a silent manner. In the Luo thinking, spaces are planned by *oula* meaning storm water and *chira* disease. As water flows and finds its own level, it distributes Luo population across the surface of the earth. Chira is the illness that afflicts people who defy settling their homes according to the *oula* dictates. The temporal order is observed in sex, which takes a fixed pattern in the community. In turn the pattern is controlled by major seasonal phenomena like the planting seasons that are determined by the rainy periods. In effect, it is the solar systems that affect weather, which in turn would influence sex patterns. The celestial rhythms affect Luo life in this way by invoking order or meta-order into society.

THE STORY OF OTHIN-OTHIN AND SPACE METAPHOR

The Luo tell the story of Othin-Othin rabbit or hare that wanted to go to seek a wife in heaven. He dared the space around him and natural limitations to dream of a bride from above. Not knowing how to reach the heavens, he approached different animals for help to no avail. After a lot of search, he came to a spider, who agreed to help. On the appointed day, the spider wove a line web from the earth to heaven. They used it to climb up to the place. They were three together with a frog. On approaching the home, Othin-Othin warned them that when they would be served, they should listen very carefully. If the hosts said, "Send these things, food, chairs or anything else to *oche* meaning sons in law, whatever would be brought would all be left for Othin-Othin alone. However, if they said send the same to *welo* visitors, then they would all share whatever it was." It turned out that the chairs were brought for *oche* and Othin-Othin claimed all the chairs and tried to sit on all of them: two for his legs, two for his hands and two for his buttocks. The spider and the frog sat on the floor. When the hosts brought food, Othin-Othin was quick to enquire, "Is the food for *oche* or *welo*?" They replied for *oche*. Othin-Othin ate all the food and left his friends hungry. At night, the two conspired and returned to earth using the web, then cut it. On waking up the following day, Othin-Othin discovered that he had no means of coming back to earth. He jumped from heaven only to have a hard and dry landing that turned him into *obambala* dry fish.

The story goes on but the bit given above will do for our discussion. The Luo etiquette demands that those going on a marriage errand must be three, and not more or less. The pattern was supposed to identify the actual suitor by the space position he occupied. He was to be in the middle. The "mothers" in law would know him without asking his name directly. Othin Othin defied this cultural requirement and occupied all the seats, thereby throwing heredity and traditions out of balance. It ended in a fiasco. He also became very greedy and individualistic by seeking to occupy all the chairs when he only needed one. It is the greed that drove him to seek a wife outside the known territories of the earth. He is punished for over-reaching the environment by going overboard and disturbing

the balance of nature with very adverse consequences. He abused the environment by going too far to reward his ego. The home where they went in heaven was understood to have taken a Luo format, with mother in laws' house elevated above. Its door must have faced the gate next to which there were several huts called *simba* for the boys. This would be the venue where the suitors would be welcomed as they await the formal negotiation later in the mother in laws' house. All the chairs and food would be brought down from the mother in laws' house to the *simba* huts. The Luo listener will understand the cultural beliefs regarding the spaces, fences, gates and doors. Though this message is loaded with what Leland & Viotti (2009) call inter-subjectivity, meaning levels at which the narrator interacts with the narratee and that in which the subjects within the story interact among themselves, the essence of the Luo ethics remain clear. In this story, the narrator has used a figurative structure to map the World and show ones' place in it. The mans' place in it is the home. Realizing the role of narratives in giving meaning to the environment, Tally, (2008) draws a parallel to mapping. The stories organize data into recognizable patterns which, even if we know them to be fiction merely representing space and place, help the listener make sense of the world. The World of Othin Othin is mapped or cartographed local territory, the earth, which he can exploit freely and outer space, heaven, which is a space forbidden by traditions. The result of defying tradition is that he became homeless fitting neither in heaven nor on earth.

Lowe (2004) sums up such a scenario arguing that the internal structure of a story is captured in what he calls narrative space that may code information about structure of relationships between players. When the Othin Othins are united, they can conquer the environment because the relationship is good. Later on we see a spatial structure whose matrix reflect differentials and spheres of power. The sitting arrangements are configured to reflect that. The animals in the story ventured beyond their spatial limits, the earth, to the place where they would be vulnerable. They have to contend with the consequences.

PLANNING THE ENVIRONMENT

The Luo environment and landscape is planned by cultural traditions that cannot be changed. Even the exploitation of the resources is not done in a haphazard way or random manner. It is done in an orderly way organized by water flow and sex patterns that are remotely controlled by the weather and seasons. This way, the Luo would not overexploit his environmental resources because cultural demands would invoke regular punctuations in between to make him pause as he waits for his turn. Today, the people have become so individualized because of westernization and urbanization. This has unleashed the people from traditions and it has pushed the people to become perfect consumers who think of nobody else but themselves. This is why the resources are abused instead of being used.

The stories, folktales, proverbs and songs were all used to uphold the ethics of using landscape and other resources according to traditions. There would be characters crippled because they built their houses above their parents or because they ate green maize ahead of their senior brothers. When one brought a new wife known as *miaha* home, he would have to wait for his mother to come back, if she had travelled far away, so that the parents would have their sex before the young man sleeps with his wife. To ensure this, the elders would keep the young lady out of his reach by ensuring that she sleeps in a grandmothers' house away from the bridegroom.

The world space is continuously changing. For people to organize their lives well on it, they need a theoretical framework to grasp and fix it. This is a principle that Smith, Harre and Langenbov (1995) call 'partitioning'. It is a process by which the environment is held still by the observer in order to make the objects of interest perceivable. It is a construct that holds the environment stable for human action.

They say that the purpose of partitioning is to create figural relations which are constant under constant transformation of the figure. This makes space a predictable phenomenon on which narratives can be based because it spells out how space is organized to contain experience. For the Luo, that figure, is the home together with its structure and History.

CONCLUSION

We have seen how the Luo mindset responds to time, space and sex in manipulating his environment and exploiting it. There is merit in these traditional provisions because they limited individualistic and competitive exploitation of the resources that would be more ruthless and abusive than otherwise. The whole objective of extracting materials from the environment was to make use of it and not to hoard it or accumulate it as is the capitalistic practice that ensues today. Whereas the taboos that were passed on from generation to generation through folk narratives may not have been sensible, they were efficient in enforcing and sustaining public order, which is a prerequisite for development. The World view of the Luo was governed by predestined positions in life to some extent. Indeed, it is debatable whether this was good or bad. It seems the Luo did not benefit from the privilege of having free choice in a random manner. He was born to fit in a strait jacket of labyrinthine pattern of a homestead. He gained the resultant order, but lost his freedom of choice in matters of sex, space and time. This has culminated in perpetual debates about determinism versus randomness and freedom of choice in matters of development of a Luo. To date, that argument has not been resolved.

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