

Intensive Study of a Culture: The Luo of Kenya

Anthropology 21217
Tue-Thurs. 10:30-11:50

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This course is designed to present an introduction to the Luo of Kenya, a Nilotic-speaking group of some 3 million people living on the northeastern shores of Lake Victoria. It is intended to convey a sense of contemporary Luo culture and society and the complex history that has led to the present moment. It is equally concerned to use the Luo case in order to give students a sense of the ethnographic practices and theoretical concerns of Anthropology – to show in detail how anthropologists study and represent other cultures. The Luo are of particular interest in this regard because they have been studied by a variety of anthropologists since the 1930s, and they were discussed in British colonial reports since the turn of the century. Hence, they offer an excellent case for examining differences in the concerns and modes of representation within the discipline of Anthropology as these have changed over the years. We are also fortunate in that there are many Luo academics and intellectuals who have published their own analyses and literary accounts of Luo culture and history. Hence, one has the opportunity to compare alien and indigenous representations. The Luo are also of particular interest because they have been traditionally a stateless society that has had to adapt over the past century to being incorporated into colonial and post-colonial states, and this local history exposes in acute form some of the problems and contradictions that are found more generally in current African politics, law, and economics. The Luo have also been propelled into the international spotlight in recent years because of their unusually high rate of AIDS and because Barack Obama, who was elected President of the United States in 2008, is the son of a Luo intellectual and politician. The course will focus upon such things as Luo kinship and marriage patterns, Luo conceptions of space and time, Luo religion and the transformative effects of Christianity, the impact of AIDS and globalization, the differences and connections between rural and urban contexts, the role of the Luo in colonial and post-colonial Kenyan history, and transformations of the moral economy and the gendered division of labor.

Grading will be based upon: (1) active and informed participation in class discussions of the readings each week and (2) a 10 page research paper submitted at the end of the term. Instructions and a supplemental reading list for research will be found on the Chalk site. After some initial lecturing by the instructor during the first week, the course will be conducted as a seminar, with students expected to discuss the assigned articles. The class will be divided into two groups, with one responsible for providing a set of questions about the reading and the other groups responsible for responding (the roles will alternate with each session).

Required textbooks (available at the Seminary Coop Bookstore):

Shipton, P. (1989). *Bitter Money: Cultural Economy and Some African Meanings of Forbidden Commodities*. American Ethnological Society, Washington, DC.

Cohen, David W. and E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo (1992). *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa*. Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.

Ogot, B.A. and W.R. Ochieng' (editors) (1995). *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya 1940-93*. James Currey, London.

Other readings will be on the Chalk site, including some newspaper and Web articles.

Schedule of Classes and Readings:

Week 1: Preliminary Introduction to the Luo and the Practice of Ethnography

Lecture with slides

A film on AIDS and the Luo

Herbich, I.
2002 The Luo. In *Encyclopedia of World Cultures Supplement*, C. Ember, M. Ember and I. Skoggard (eds.), pp. 189-194. Macmillan Reference, New York.

Week 2: Ethnographic Approaches to Luo Culture and Socio-political Structure

Tuesday: *The centrality of kinship; lineages, identity, and the organization of society; structural-functionalist Anthropology and its legacy*

Evans-Pritchard, E. E.
1949 Luo tribes and clans. *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal* 7:24-40.

Southall, A.
1952 *Lineage formation among the Luo*. Oxford University Press, International African Institute Memorandum 26, London.

Blount, B. G.
1975 Agreeing to agree on genealogy: a Luo sociology of language. In *Sociocultural Dimensions of Language Use*, edited by M. Sanches, and B. G. Blount, pp. 117-135. Academic Press, New York.

Thursday: *Tradition and innovation in Luo music: nyatiti to Benga. Introducing the field of Ethnomusicology.*

Darkwa, A.
1985 Traditional music and dance in Luo community life. *Anthropos* 80 (4-6):646-653.

Barz, G.
2002 Meaning in Benga music. *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10:109-117.

Prince, R.
2006 Popular music and Luo youth in Western Kenya: ambiguities of modernity, morality and gender relations in the era of AIDS. In *Navigating Youth, Generating*

Adulthood: Social Becoming in an African Context, Catrine Christiansen, Mats Utas and Henrik E. Vigh (eds), pp. 117-152. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrika Institutet.

Mp3 samples of nyatiti music, Benga, and Soukous are available on the Chalk site. Please listen to these in conjunction with reading the articles.

Week 3: Luo History: The Precolonial and Colonial Eras

Tuesday: *Pre-colonial migrations, settlement, and inter-ethnic relations; the development and institutional acceptance of African history*

Ogot, B. A.
1967 *History of the Southern Luo. Vol. 1: Migration and Settlement 1500-1900*. East African Publishing House, Nairobi. Pp. 127-239.

Hakansson, N. T.
1994 Grain, cattle and power -- social processes of intensive cultivation and exchange in precolonial Western Kenya. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 50 (3):249-276.

Thursday: *The Luo encounter the British Empire*

Lonsdale, J.
1989 The conquest state, 1895-1904. In *A Modern History of Kenya 1895-1980*, edited by Ochieng', W. R., pp. 6-34. Evans Brothers, London.

Zezeza, T.
1989 The establishment of colonial rule, 1905-1920. In *A Modern History of Kenya 1895-1980*, edited by Ochieng', W. R., pp. 35-70. Evans Brothers, London.

Berman, B.
1990 *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination*. James Currey, London. Chapter 10 (pp. 424-441.)

Week 4: Luo Time and Space; Impressions of Life in Siaya

Tuesday: *Time and space in Luo life*

Dietler, M., and I. Herbich
1993 Living on Luo time: reckoning sequence, duration, history, and biography in a rural African society. *World Archaeology* 25:248-260.

Herbich, I. and M. Dietler
2009 Domestic space, social life, and settlement biography: theoretical reflections from the ethnography of a rural African landscape. In *L'espai domèstic i l'organització de la societat a la protobistòria de la Mediterrània occidental (Ier mil leni aC)*, Actes de la IV Reunió Internacional d'Arqueologia de Calafell (Calafell - Tarragona, 6 al 9 de març de 2007), edited by Carme Belarte, pp. 11-23. Barcelona: Arqueo Mediterrània, 10.

Thursday: *Glimpses of life in Siaya; postmodern, self-reflexive, impressionistic ethnography*

Cohen, D. W., and E. S. Atieno-Odhiambo

1988 *Siaya, the Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape*. J. Currey, London.

Week 5: The Post-colonial Kenyan State and Kenyan Politics

Tuesday: *Decolonization and nation building*

Maloba, W.

1995 Decolonization: a theoretical perspective. In *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya 1940-93*, edited by Ogot, B.A. and W.R. Ochieng', pp. 7-24. James Currey, London.

Ochieng', W.R.

1995 Structural and political changes. In *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya 1940-93*, edited by Ogot, B.A. and W.R. Ochieng', pp. 83-109 James Currey, London.

Maxon, R.M.

1995 Social and Cultural Changes. In *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya 1940-93*, edited by Ogot, B.A. and W.R. Ochieng', pp. 110-147. James Currey, London.

Thursday: *Politics and the construction of a national culture*

Ogot, B.A.

1995 The politics of populism. In *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya 1940-93*, edited by Ogot, B.A. and W.R. Ochieng', pp. 187-213. James Currey, London.

Ogot, B.A.

1995 The construction of a national culture. In *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya 1940-93*, edited by Ogot, B.A. and W.R. Ochieng', pp. 214-236. James Currey, London.

Week 6: Contrasting Luo Political Biographies

Tuesday: *Oginga Odinga: Luo ruoth, man of the people, militant, and African socialist*

Odinga, O.

1967 *Not Yet Uhuru: An Autobiography*. Heinemann, London.

Thursday: *Tom Mboya: urban cosmopolitan, international star, and friend of capitalism*

Atieno-Odhiambo, E.S.

1992 Tom Mboya. In *Political Leaders of Contemporary Africa*, edited by H. Glickman, pp. 150-155. Greenwood Press, New York.

Mboya, T.

1970 *The Challenge of Nationhood*. Praeger, New York. Pp. 24-33, 40-47, 73-124, 136-144, 221-232

Week 7: Transformations of the Luo Economy

Tuesday: *Commoditization, "development", and the moral economy*

Shipton, P.

1989 *Bitter Money: Cultural Economy and Some African Meanings of Forbidden*

Commodities. American Ethnological Society, Washington, DC.

Thursday: *The gendered division of labor and property, and implications for women's lives*

Pala, A. O.

1983 Women's access to land and their role in agriculture and decision-making on the farm: experiences of the Joluo of Kenya. *Journal of Eastern African Research and Development* 13:69-87.

Herbich, I. and M. Dietler

1991 Aspects of the ceramic system of the Luo of Kenya. In *Töpferei- und Keramikforschung* 2. H. Lüdtke and R. Vossen, eds. Pp. 105-135. Bonn: Habelt.

Week 8: Luo Religion and Healing; the Impact of Christianity and AIDS

Tuesday: *Traditional religious practices, beliefs, and agents; healers and healing*

Hauge, H. E.

1981 The spirit world of the Luo people in Kenya, East Africa. *Temenos* 17:27-34.

Abe, T.

1981 The concepts of "Chira" and "Dhoch" among the Luo – transition, deviation and misfortune. In *Themes in Socio-cultural Ideas and Behaviour among the Six Ethnic Groups of Kenya*, edited by Nobuhiro Nagashima, pp. 127-139.. Hitotsubashi University Press, Tokyo.

Geissler, P.W., and R. Prince

2010 *The Land is Dying: Contingency, Creativity and Conflict in Western Kenya*. New York: Berghahn. Pp. 1-14, 19-32, 201-209, 244-256.

Aids articles from new sources...

Thursday: *The Luo appropriation of Christianity; missionaries, African independent churches; and religious entanglements*

Geissler, P.W., and R. Prince

2010 *The Land is Dying: Contingency, Creativity and Conflict in Western Kenya*. New York: Berghahn. Pp. 70-106.

Schwartz, N.I.

1994 Christianity and the construction of global history: the example of Legio Maria. In *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, K. Poewe (ed.), pp. 134-174. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

For some general background:

Meyer, Birgit

2004 Christianity in Africa: from African independent to Pentacostal-charismatic churches. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33: 447-474.

Week 9: Luo Law and the State

Tuesday: *Luo customary law; the levirate in the face of AIDS*

Wilson, G.
1968 *Luo Customary Law and Marriage Law Customs*. Republic of Kenya, Nairobi. Pp. 8-11, 18-38, 121-150.

Thursday: *Luo funerals and African modernity; the conflict between Luo customary law and common law of the state*

Kisiara, R.
1998 Some sociopolitical aspects of Luo funerals. *Anthropos* 93 (1-3):127-136.

Cohen, David W. and E.S. Atieno Odhiambo
1992 *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa*. Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.

Week 10: Luo in the City and the Politics of Ethnicity

Tuesday: *Luo in Nairobi: interlinked urban and rural worlds and the forging of Luo modernity*

Parkin, D.
1978 *The Cultural Definition of Political Response: Lineal Destiny among the Luo*. Academic Press, New York. Pp. 33-63, 142-213, 286-326.

Thursday: *The evolving politics of ethnicity and the struggle for multi-party democracy*

International Commission of Jurists (Kenya Section)
2000 *The Political Economy of Ethnic Clashes in Kenya*. International Commission of Jurists (Kenya Section), Nairobi.

Wafulu Okumu, F.
2001 Ethnic politics and the decay of the state in Kenya. In *The Issue of Political Ethnicity in Kenya*, edited by E. Ike Udogu, pp. 99-123. Ashgate, Aldershot.

Atieno-Odhiambo, E.S.
1996 Reconditioning the terms of fact: ethnicity, nationalism and democracy as political vectors. In *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Democracy in Africa*, edited by B.A. Ogot, pp. 74-82. Institute of Research and Postgraduate Studies, Maseno University College, Maseno.