

CHAPTER I

LANGO RELIGION AND MAGIC

The distinction between magic and religion is of theoretical rather than of practical importance. Some would reserve the term 'Religion' to designate that corpus of beliefs concerning the superphysical world and powers which forms the philosophic background to the pattern of culture of a given society. The term 'Magic' is then applied to the processes arising out of these beliefs, by which man strives to control those superphysical powers for his own or for his society's ends. As Driberg has put it, 'Magic is the practice of religion'. He has also pointed out that it would be better to avoid the term magic, for it suggests that magic is a phenomenon peculiar to primitive peoples, since it is not usual to refer to our own religious practices as magic. I consider that the anthropological distinction between religion and magic is useful when analysing a culture. Those who cannot see that the practices of their own religion are magic to the same extent as the magic of the primitive would surely not be persuaded of the similarity even were we to jettison the word magic when dealing with the religious performances of primitives. When describing the religious activities of the Lango, I will therefore attempt to distinguish between religion and magic.

It is difficult to understand fully the religious philosophy of a people after living with them for so short a time as I was able. It was particularly difficult where all those who had been to school wished to have as little to do as possible with the practices of their fathers. I did not find much desire for concealment among the old people once I had persuaded them of my good intentions. The lack of success of my endless quest for explanatory information was due not to reticence but to ignorance. The beliefs of the majority were not clear-cut, and when pressed they would say that only the *ajwaka* (medicine-men) understood these questions. But the *ajwaka* were no more sure, and on points of detail their replies rarely agreed. Certain beliefs are so obvious to the individual that it never occurs to

him that there is anything requiring explanation. A good example of this was the amusement of the women at a hunt when I asked why one should not kill a roan antelope (*ochwil*). 'He asks why a roan should not be killed!' they said in amused amazement. 'Yet he must know that the roan will give a man the affliction of *jok orongo*.'

Successive generations have learnt the ceremonial forms and the emotional attitudes underlying them by imitation of their elders without intellectual explanations being desired, save for the broadest principles. The invariable answer to the question, 'Why do you do that?' asked during a ceremony, was, 'Because it is a custom of the ritual observance (*kite me kwer*)', or, 'Because the child will then become well'. I deemed myself lucky to receive an answer as detailed as 'Because then no one will steal the blood', which was given me during a birth ceremony (p. 131). Perhaps there are individual Lango who can interpret their religion, but I never found one. Interpretation, therefore, must be based on deduction from behaviour on all occasions, particularly at ceremonies. For this reason I have adopted the policy of recording ceremonies exactly as they occurred. My interpretation follows closely the interpretation of African religion given by Driberg. I went into the field fully critical of Driberg's theories, but I could find no hypothesis that fits the facts so nearly as his does.

The following three sections:

- I. The Premises of Lango Religion,
- II. The Practice of Lango Religion: White Magic,
- III. The Practice of Lango Religion: Black Magic,

are elaborations of eight cardinal assumptions round which the religious beliefs and practices of the Lango are organised.

I. THE PREMISES OF LANGO RELIGION

Among the Lango *Jok* is the mainspring of all religion and magic. It may be considered as the Mana principle of the Lango. In pp. 216–25 of *The Lango* Driberg gives an account of *Jok*. For the sake of brevity I will merely give an analytical account of the principles underlying the term *Jok*. Most of the

evidence from which my deductions are drawn is to be found in the records of the ceremonies that I witnessed; the rest is drawn from daily conversations and observations that cannot be recorded in the text.

A. *Jok* is a neutral power permeating the universe, neither well nor badly disposed towards mankind, unless made use of by man.

Under this premise fall all the religious and magical manifestations of the Lango. The conceptions of this *jok* power we may term Religion. The practices by which man tries to harness *jok* power we may term Magic—White Magic where the ends are for the good of society, and Black Magic or witchcraft where the ends are harmful to society.

B. Anything of an unusual and apparently causeless nature must be associated with some aspect of *jok* power.

Under this premise come:

1. *Abnormal births.* While *jok* power is considered to be responsible for all births, it is particularly in evidence at abnormal births and therefore must be controlled by special magical ceremonial. Where the abnormality is of a purposeless kind, such as a child born with teeth and abnormal deliveries, the event is unwelcomed and looked upon as ill-omened. Not surprisingly this is particularly so in the case of abnormal deliveries, where the death of the mother or baby is a common result. A child born in this way may even be called an *ajok* (sorcerer), so I was informed by a man at Anwongi near Nabieso. This man's wife had given birth to a child feet first. The child had died, much to his father's relief, for the abnormality of his birth showed them that the child must be an *ajok*. So they built an *ot rudi* (twin house) for the child and performed the ceremony of mixing the seed (*rubo koti*) at the next sowing (p. 123) in order to avert the danger that this manifestation of evil *jok* power might herald. The birth of twins, on the other hand, is a happy event in so far as two individuals arrive to strengthen the Clan. But again the presence of *jok* power thus manifested necessitates careful magical control by those affected. The elaborate twin ceremonies (*myel arut*, p. 97) serve to exercise this control.

2. *Abnormal natural objects.* These do not affect the life of the Lango much. There is no cult of fetish objects. But any peculiarly shaped stone, root or such like object, which as far as the people's knowledge goes is not the product of man's handiwork, is thought to be the outcome of *jok* power and may therefore be used for magical purposes. The best examples of this were the Bushman digging-stick weights termed *kide jok* (stones of *jok*) by the men of Amaich and used by them for rain-making purposes (p. 79). The fear of hills as associated with *jok* power may come under this category, since they are relatively abnormal protuberances in a flat country. The caves found in hills and used for rain-making as being *ot jok* (house of *jok*) must also come within this category (p. 79), as must bare patches of ground found in the bush and termed *laro jok* (*jok's* threshing floor).

3. *Mystifying occurrences.* These denote the presence of *jok* power and are the means by which *ajwaka* (medicine-men) prove their worthiness as practitioners. Every *ajwaka* has a conjuring trick of some sort which is performed as the primary essential of his treatment of a case. Examples of this are very numerous: Odur's shillings that stuck to the wall (p. 154), the frog-spawn that came out of the cuts in a baby's stomach (p. 160), Oming, who spoke from under the ground (p. 164), stones that were sucked from the patient's body (p. 161), the bundle of sticks that balanced on end (p. 166), charcoal pulled from the patient's ear (p. 158). Two further examples concerned me. I was waiting in a village for an old man to arrive, and to amuse the other old men round me I performed that party trick by which a string is cut and then apparently joined together in the mouth without any knot being visible. Immediately one old man drew me aside and showed me an ulcer on his leg. He begged me to give him medicine, for if I could tie string together in my mouth like that I could certainly cure him. I told him to go to the dispensary for treatment. He laughed, saying that they merely gave one water to drink there, whereas by my string trick I had clearly shown that I had the power to cure him. The other occasion concerned a trick I had made out of two pieces of bamboo. The illusion is given that a piece of string pulled out of one stick is joined to the string hanging out of the other stick.

But the sticks can be held apart and still the drawing of one string causes the other to disappear. When I showed my boys how the trick worked, they told me to destroy it, for, 'Should anyone gain possession of it he would become a great *ajwaka* (medicine-man) and deceive the people'.

4. *Good and bad luck.* It is realised that in many quests there is an element of chance. This is particularly so in hunting, fighting and travelling. Some individuals seem to have better luck than others. The causeless nature of this luck marks it out as being associated with *jok* power. Reference may be made of a person that 'His *jok* is good' or 'bad' (*jokere ber, jokere rach*), though it is more usual to-day to say that his '*Obanga*' is good or bad, '*Obanga*' being the Christian God. A synonym for this expression is '*Winyo*', which means literally 'Bird'. It may be said of a person 'He has *winyo*' (*etye ki winyo*), meaning he has good luck. It seems as though this has become a specialised aspect of *jok* power. The bird envisaged when referring to *winyo* is the pennant-winged nightjar (*achulany*), which is usually seen at dusk. It is considered very fortunate should this bird fly round a person on the night before an undertaking, such as a hunt. [It is also considered good luck for a bat (*ollik*) to knock against one. But I did not find anyone who thought of the bat when discussing *winyo* (see, however, *The Lango*, pp. 225–8).]

I do not think that Driberg is quite accurate in translating *winyo* as Guardian Spirit. I think that 'luck' is a more appropriate rendering. I was told that animals did not possess *winyo*. If on killing an animal in the hunt a man did not perform the magical rites (*gwelo*), his own *winyo* might desert him, so that he killed no more animals. But on killing a man (see *The Lango*, pp. 110 and 227) the head-dress (*tok*) was cut off and hung in the slayer's village on the tree by the fireplace (*otem*). In this way the slayer added the dead man's *winyo* to his own, which made him strong to kill other men. Moreover, people would see the number of head-dresses hanging in a man's village and would not dare to kill him or steal his cattle, for they would know what a strong man he was.

Winyo can be controlled to a certain extent, as with all manifestations of *jok* power. This is done by the old men. A father will give his son *winyo* before the son goes on a journey.

On the night before the hunt the *won arum* (guardian of the hunting ground) with the help of his *Etogo* group will invoke good luck (*gato winyo*). Beer is prepared and drunk and the *gato* chant and chorus are sung. The presence of the *Etogo* group on this occasion suggests that there is a close connection between *winyo* and *tipo* (spirit). I think that this can be explained in the light of the father being able to give his son *winyo*, which is always conferred by the older on the younger generation. The *tipo* of the dead will be able to give *winyo* to their descendants, and therefore the *Etogo*, which can exercise control over the *tipo* (p. 111), will be the most effective group for obtaining *winyo*.

It is my tentative view that the causelessness of good and bad luck is of such a special nature as to merit a specialised manifestation of *jok* power. The vague personification of this quality in the shape of a bird probably has an historical origin impossible to discover now. It has been suggested to me that the eagle of the Baganda kings may be linked up with it in some way. Seligman is of the opinion that this eagle is connected with the falcon of the Egyptian kings. So that the *winyo* of the Lango might be traced back to Egypt by those who find interest in such connections.

C. Phenomena affecting society, the vicissitudes of which, while familiar, cannot be predicted or controlled empirically, are associated with *jok* power.

Under this premise come:

1. *Natural phenomena, such as rain, hail, locusts and lightning.* The failure of the rains or the destructions caused by hail, locusts and lightning can only be explained as manifestations of *jok* power. This uncontrolled or evilly controlled *jok* power must be brought under control by the appropriate magical ritual, which is the way in which the Lango express that universal desire of man to control his own destiny.

2. *Sickness and disease.* In his chapter on religion and magic (*The Lango*, pp. 216–40) Driberg gives a series of ‘Manifestations of *jok*’, such as *Jok Atida*, *Jok Adongo*, *Jok Lango*, *Jok Orongo*, *Jok Nam*, *Jok Omarari*. My short stay in Lango does not justify me in questioning any of his assertions, and my evidence on the

jok manifestations is particularly poor. However, since my interpretation of the little evidence I obtained differs from that of Driberg to some extent, I will record my views here for what they are worth.

An *ajwaka* (medicine-man) at Awelo, named Okelo, gave me the following account. It is a solitary piece of evidence and is doubtless false in details, but it illustrates vividly the principle that I had deduced from my other observations. He gave me a list of *jok* manifestations, each of which, he said, was a disease and each of which must be treated with a special magical technique. The symptoms of the patient would give the clue to the manifestation of *jok* from which he was suffering. He would then go to an *ajwaka* who knew the technicalities of that manifestation of *jok*. Some of these diseases, together with their treatment, had been known in Lango from the beginning of time and therefore came under the generic term of '*Jok Lango*', but a number of the diseases with their treatments had come from the 'Peoples of the Lakes' (*Jo Nam*: the Banyoro, Bakenyi, Baruli, etc.). These diseases were termed '*Jok Nam*'. I had previously deduced this principle myself. My informant then gave me the following list of diseases, with their symptoms as far as he knew them.

A. *Jok Lango*:

1. *Jok Orongo*. Shiverings all over the body, due to killing a roan antelope (*ochwil*).
2. *Jok Omarari*. Plague.
3. *Jok Mama*. A type of madness.
4. *Jok Orogo*. A type of madness.

B. *Jok Nam*:

1. *Jok Abani*. Aches in head and chest.
2. *Jok Obanga*. Permanently bent back or other bones crippled.
3. *Jok Olila*. A disease like dysentery.
4. *Jok Kabejo*. Stomach-ache.
5. *Jok Odudi*. Aches in head and chest.
6. *Jok Nyarakoe*. Aches all over the body.

As I have said, this list of names and symptoms may not be

accurate—I had no time to verify it sufficiently—but I believe the principle to be true.

Sickness and disease are of the greatest concern to the Lango and much thought must have been expended on their causes and cures. This accumulation of experience has resulted in a threefold classification of sickness:

(a) *Sicknesses usually undergone by children.* These are termed *two*. They are considered as inevitable and their treatment is stereotyped, consisting of the inter-Clan ceremonies described below (pp. 83–97). In this category must be included common forms of sickness occurring to adults, which are not serious and are treated with well-known herbs, etc.

(b) *Incurable sicknesses.* These are also known as *two*. There is no explanation of them, but they are recognised as sicknesses (*two*) and not as due to *jok* power.

(c) *Jok sicknesses.* These are thought to be caused by the particular manifestation of *jok* power entering the sufferer's body. Of such a person it may be said, '*Jok Orongo* seizes him' (*Jok Orongo omake*).

A medical training is essential for the study of native diseases and their methods of treatment, if pronouncements as to the accuracy of diagnosis or the efficacy of native drugs and methods are to be of any value. I was given many roots and herbs by prominent *ajwaka* (medicine-men) and was shown how to prepare the drugs from them. The symptoms for which they were used were also explained to me. But this would have been of value only if an analysis could have been made on the spot. The combination of Anthropologist and Doctor might lead to the discovery of drugs at present unknown to science.

With this reminder of the worthlessness of a layman's views on medical matters, I may say that I was very struck by the definiteness of the distinction between the different types of sickness. Most of the *jok* afflictions comprised psychic disturbances or virulent diseases, such as plague. Rigid distinctions were made between the different types of psychic disease. Epilepsy, contrary to expectation, was not considered to be a *jok* disease. It ranked as incurable sickness (*two*) and was called *ekwinkwin*. It is realised that it is an affliction which cannot be treated. Okelo of Awelo also told me of an interesting

affliction that is becoming more frequent. It takes the form of a fear of crowds. The sufferer falls to the ground shrieking if he sees a crowd of people near him, 'Because he fears the people'. He mentioned the case of an Aloro policeman. Okelo said that the name of this disease was *ongech*. Cold water would be poured on the sufferer to bring him to his senses. In the case of *ekwinkwin* and *ongech* Okelo insisted that *jok* power had nothing to do with them. Yet, when referring to them, he said, 'This is a bad *jok*' (*man jok marach*), meaning 'This is a bad disease', for he again expressly denied the presence of *jok* power in either of the diseases.

The following are a few disjointed yet significant pieces of evidence regarding these *jok* diseases. During a meal at Ngai with the local chief, the Aboki Dispensary dresser and my informant Philipo Lawottim, I was told that epilepsy (*ekwinkwin*) had nothing to do with *jok*, being a disease that made a man fall to the ground and froth at the mouth for which there was no cure. They said that other diseases, which caused the patient to behave as if mad, were due to *jok* power seizing the man's body; of such were: *Jok Orongo*, *Jok Abong*, *Jok Adongo*, *Jok Orogo*, *Jok Lango*. As soon as a person becomes ill he is taken to the *ajwaka* (medicine-man), who specifies what *jok* has seized him and what ceremony should be carried out in order to effect a cure. For instance, if it is *Jok Adongo* a sheep is killed and dragged into the bush. The chief (*jago*), a school boy of Awelo and a devout Christian, also said that *jok* is bad in that it causes diseases, but through the *ajwaka* it does good by telling you what to do to be cured. He added that the *jok* which seizes a man is Satan, while the *jok* which helps one, like Oming (p. 163), is *Obanga* (the Christian God). Oming, he said, is like a doctor. The Lango know, he continued, that if they go to the English doctor sometimes they are healed and sometimes not. The same is true of their own *ajwaka*, he said, but they are more frequently healed by the *ajwaka* than by the English doctor.

All types of madness are not immediately assigned to some aspect of *jok* seizure. A young man of twenty near Aduku lived in the open near his mother's house, sleeping in the ashes of his fire, naked and unable to talk coherently or do any work. His

mother denied that he was suffering from any type of *jok* seizure and told me that she had come to the conclusion that it must have been caused by a cow, which had knocked him over and injured his head when he was a small boy. There was a mad woman at Chiawanti, who abused me foully when I greeted her. I asked what *jok* had seized her, but they assured me that she suffered from no *jok*. They said that she merely talked nonsense when the moon was full. The full moon marked the highest points of her attacks of madness. This was not a *jok* disease, they insisted.

On the other hand my informant Philipo Lawottim of Ngai took me to see his sister, who was suffering from a form of madness. She was living with her parents in a small hovel of a hut. They had moved here from a large house as they thought that the largeness of their old house might have something to do with her condition. She was naked, could not talk but grinned all the time, and she had to be moved about by her parents. They said that it had started two years previously. Her husband had gone like this first but had now recovered. They said that *Jok Orogo* had seized her body (*jok orogo omako kome*). They had been to the *ajwaka* Oming, who told them to kill a goat and carry out a certain ceremony at her husband's village. The mother told me that she considered this sickness to be the work of an *ading* (sorcerer: p. 29). She explained that if someone steals from a man, the injured person will go to an *ajwaka*, who will divine (*tyeto*) and lay a spell on the offender, who will become ill in some way. She considered that the husband had been afflicted as a result of some theft and that he had communicated the disease to his wife. [They had heard of a man at Aboki who had a cure for this disease and they had sent for his medicine. It arrived on the following day, cost ten shillings and consisted of a powdery fibrous substance wrapped up in banana leaves. The girl was given this to eat. I do not know if she recovered.]

The rigid distinction between curable and incurable psychic diseases suggested to me the possibility that the *jok* diseases were neuroses produced by social causes, that they fell into certain categories designated by different *jok* terms, and that a specialist in a particular *jok* disease was capable of curing the psychic