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# The Lango of Uganda: identity, origin, migration, and settlements

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## The Lango of Uganda: Identity, Origin, Migration, and Settlements

*By Sylvia A. Owiny*

**Abstract:** *This paper sheds new knowledge on the identity, origin, migration, and settlements of the Lango people, highlighting their unique sociopolitical and military structures. Overlooked print and documented oral histories of the Lango people and their neighbors show that they are of diverse backgrounds and cannot trace their identity to a single grandfather or group. Through migrations, conquests, and expansion wars, Lango people developed a unique language and culture; and perfected their sociopolitical and military structures.*

**Keywords:** *Lango, identity, origin, migration, settlements, sociopolitical, military*

### Introduction

The Lango people have attracted surprisingly little attention despite the major role they played in fighting colonialism and the slave trade, and assisted their weak and struggling neighbors in Uganda. Western scholars arrived in Uganda at the onset of colonial rule, and most of them worked for the colonial government. The precolonial and colonial publications by travelers, missionaries, anthropologists, and colonial administrators are fraught with distortions, biases, assumptions, and misunderstandings regarding the Lango people. Scholars who followed (including African scholars) made similar assumptions and produced highly subjective scholarship on the Lango people. Driberg (1923) grouped Lango with the Luo, and scholars who followed him cited his work offering no new knowledge. Tarantino (1949) argued that Lango are Karamojong because Lango elders he interviewed said they came from Karamoja. Tarantino's assumptions that Lango were Karamojong obscured Lango identity for many years because scholars took his assumptions religiously. When Tarantino (1946) asked Lango elders from different clans who they were and where they came from, they replied with "Wan Lango" (we are Lango) and "Wan oya Ikaramoja" (we came from Karamoja). The Lango elders denied the claim that they were Karamojong and stated "Wan Lango" (we are Lango). The statement "Wan oya i Karamoja" (we came from Karamoja) does not mean that Lango are Karamojong, but that they came from the land that is now Karamoja.

Uzoigwe (1973) argued that these early scholars were largely responsible for most of the published information about the Lango that resulted in what is known in Ugandan history as the "Lango problem" (p. 11). Tosh (1978) in "Clan Leaders and Colonial Chiefs in Lango" captured subjective and derogative attitudes of one British colonial official. Grant, a colonial administrator in Hoima wrote a letter to the Chief Secretary stating, "The Lango ... are raw savages. The only system that these people can be dealt with is through the intelligence agents, as has been done in Bukeddi, and until these Agents are established throughout the District, I fear progress will be slow" (p. 140). Colonialism devalued African institutions and governments and made it easier to legitimize colonial administration. This paper looks critically at these discrepancies in knowledge about the Lango people and their history.

## **Identity and Language**

The Lango people live in the Lango region (north central Uganda), north of Lake Kyoga. The 2014 National Population and Housing Census put the Lango population at 2,165,948 people. A close study of overlooked oral and print sources indicates that the Lango of Uganda are not a homogeneous group. Instead, they are composed of people from diverse backgrounds (Crazollara 1960; Ogot 1967; Uzoigwe 1973; Tarantino 1949; Odwe 2012). The Lango speak “Leb-Lango,” a dialect mutually intelligible with the Luo language. According to Driberg, a Luo of Kisumu in Kenya would at once understand, and in two months would readily speak Leb-Lango. The Lango are agropastoral, relying on agriculture and livestock rearing since the pre-Otuke settlement era. They reared large herds of cattle (most commonly the short-horned Zebu), sheep, and goats. In the past, hunting supplemented their diet.

During the Lango migrations, survival and cultural domination were prioritized (Crazollara 1960). The Lango warriors, moving in small groups, fought and subjugated many groups along their migration paths. Some groups joined them for protection and brought with them their own cultures and traditions. Knighton (1990) argued that the disastrous famine during the 1580s and that from 1617–1621 stirred another ethnic mix. Adherence to “social identities or purities were broken, permitting neighbors to mix for survival” (p. 81). When the Lango people entered Uganda, they had already merged with other groups in the Agoro and Imatong areas, and the areas bordering present day South Sudan, extending to modern Acholi. The Labwor people described the Lango people as bilingual when they were neighbors in the east (Lamphear 1976). There is a difference between Lango citizenship and the citizenship practices of their neighbors. The Lango treated captives like members of the family and provided them with all the associated rights and benefits, including inheritance. The marriage of war captives to Lango individuals would signify that they officially became Lango. War captives like Odyek Owidi (Karamojong) and Akena (Madi), who demonstrated exceptional military skills, reached the pinnacle of the Lango military, claiming the rank of “Twon Lwak” (army general). The colonial census of 1911 and 1912 showed that the Lango population continued to grow in numbers and strength, especially compared to the declining Karamojong numbers. The Lango warriors did not just fight and subdue outside groups militarily; there were also inter-clan wars that resulted in total annihilation and absorption, whereas others sought protection from the powerful clans.

### *The “Langi” Term*

Lango and non-Lango scholars have (wrongly) used “Langi” as the plural form of Lango in speeches and recent publications. The name Lango is both plural and singular. When asked, the Lango always say “wan Lango” (we are Lango). The term “Langi” is a corruption of “Lango” by the Bantu neighbors, who are unable to pronounce the “ngo” present in La(ngo). Kihangire (1957) interviewed many Lango elders for his dissertation and did not use “Langi” as the plural form of Lango, but rather “the Lango” or “Lango people.” In addition, anthropologists, explorers, missionaries, and colonial administrators who traveled through the Lango country never used “Langi” but “Lango country” and “Lango people” to refer to the Lango of Uganda. Tosh (1978) acknowledged that the recent use of “Langi” was not present in earlier written records and oral histories of the Lango people. Hayley (1947) noted: “people occupying the Lango District spoke what they regarded as one language. They called themselves Lango and considered themselves one people...they would unite to protect their territory against invaders”

(p. 39). Documented oral sources from the Acholi, Iteso, Labwor, Karamojong, and Kumam acknowledged the name Lango. The Kumam also call themselves “Lango.”

### The Question of Origin

Previously overlooked oral and print evidence have illustrated that the Lango, Teso, Kumam, Karamojong, Jie, and Turkana shared common ancestry in the distant past. The name “Lango” is found in Kumam, Teso, Karamojong, Jie, and Labwor vocabularies, suggesting that these groups once belonged to the Lango race. The Kumam and Iteso languages have expressions like “yo Lango” (Lango path/road), “paco Lango” (Lango home), and “wan Lango” (we are Lango). “Atekerin” means clan in Teso, Karamojong, Jie, Toposa, Kumam, and Abwor; and in Lango, “Atekere” stands for clan. In Turkana, “Ateger” represents a distinct group who share a common ancestry. The Acholi refer to the Jie and Karamojong as “Lango Dyang” (reference to pastoral lifestyle) and the Lango people call the Karamojong “Lango Olok” (Olok is the type of hat they wear). Other indicators of a common origin among these groups are the terms they use for the names of months (the lunar calendar) and clans. The Atek, Okarowok, Arak, and Otengor are clans in Lango, Kumam, Teso, Karamojong, Jie, and Abwor (Tarantino, 1949), showing close relations between these groups. What is common among these groups is their love for cattle—most are pastoral or agropastoral and have pet names for their cattle.

Several scholars have touched on the origin of the Lango race. According to Crazollara, the Lango race was made up of many groups that lived in the area ranging from the Agoro and Imatong Hills to present day Acholi country and the shores of Lake Kyoga. These people were the first to migrate to the Lango region before 1000 AD. However, the Madi invasion of 1000 AD split the Lango race into different independent groups. Some moved to the east/northeast, whereas others migrated closer to the Agoro and Imatong Hills. The Lango of Uganda retained the Lango name and developed their unique culture and language (Leb-Lango). The smaller Lango group that remained in what is now South Sudan was absorbed by the Lutuko and now speaks a Lutuko dialect. Crazollara stated that there were two major Lango migrations, one in 1000 AD and the second between 1750 and 1800, when the Lango returned via Otuke Hill to reclaim their country from the Luo/Madi mix.

Tarantino (1949) listed the names of groups he argued once belonged to the Lango family. These included: The Dime (Dimi) and Bako (Abyssinia—present-day Ethiopia); the Toposa, Dongotono, Lotuko, and Lango (Sudan); the Suk, Turkana, Nandi, and Maasai (Kenya); and the Lango, Teso, Kumam, Abwor, Dodoth, Jie, and Karamojong (Uganda). Tarantino added:

The name Lango is properly applicable to a group of peoples originating in Abyssinia who in the course of time, have split up into [a] large number of tribes. The dispersal of the Lango took place over a long period of migration and increase, between the departure of the original group from its homeland north of Lake Rudolf to the time when the Lango of Lango District in Uganda broke away from the Jie of Karamoja (p. 145).

Uzoigwe (1973) mentioned the Lango race. He noted, “Northern Tradition claims that between A.D. 1000 and 1650, this history was dominated by Lango” (p. 397). Reclus (1892) documented the presence of the Lango in Bunyoro.

Unyoro is also occupied by peoples of other stocks, the most powerful of which are the Lango or Longo, who hold both sides of the Nile between Foweira and Magungo. These

are probably of the same origin as the *Wa-Huma*, and even still speak a *Galla dialect*. They enjoy full freedom, forming independent communities among the Wa-Nyoro, and recognizing the authority of the chiefs only during their warlike expeditions ... spending long hours in arranging their elegant or imposing headdress. The prevailing fashion is a kind of helmet, in which every lock of hair is interlaced with many coloured wools.... The Lango women are the finest and most symmetrical in the whole region of the equatorial lakes. (p. 92)

In 1902, Hutchinson found a small Lango community in Bunyoro (perhaps the same group), occupying both banks of the Victoria Nile between Foweira and Magungo. He described the Lango as being of Galla/Oromo stock, placing their origin in Ethiopia. He noted that they had preserved their mother language amidst the Bantu and Negroid populations and were “distinguished by their independent spirit, living in small groups, and recognising no tribal chief, except those chosen to defend the common interest in the time of war” (p. 360).

Knighton corroborated Ethiopia as the origin of the Lango people and their relation to the Bako people of the North Omo River. The Lango of Uganda have Bako, Ober, and Kariwok clans.

The Ober clan of Lira claims descent from the Semitic (Abac) and the Bako people of the North Omo River, whose namesakes lived west of Mount Terror in Najie until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, do indeed have an Ober clan. Moreover, the Kareu, or the Karewok clan, though taking their name from the Lotuko Oghoruik (Bari: Kuriak) clan, was also associated with the Oromo. (p. 77)

Knighton adds:

the Bako, would be the foundational clans for the Itesyo, Teso, Nyakwai, Pore, and 2 tribes, whose language has become dominated by the Lwo with whom they mixed: the Abwor, Kumam, and Lango (p. 81).

### **Migration and Settlements**

The Lango people migrated in different directions as they sought water and good pasture for their animals. Precolonial and colonial scholarship overlooked the north to south migrations, focusing more on the recent westerly Lango migration (reversed migration) via Otuke Hills. Crazollara (1960) stated that the Lango migrated to their current land before 1000 AD. The Madi attack of 1000 AD split the Lango clans and many moved farther east/northeast of their current home. Not all Lango clans migrated to the east/northeast; many remained with the Madi invaders. The Madi absorbed the Lango clans who remained and imposed their political authority upon the remaining population. When the Luo later moved into Lango country, they discovered the Madi/Lango mix and imposed their own political authority on them. The reverse Lango migration from Otuke (1750–1800) led by Atek, Okarowok, and Arak clans ended the Madi/Luo rule in Lango country (Crazollara, 1960). The Lango frowned upon hereditary rule and toppled the Luo/Madi rule in Lango country, refusing to submit to any authority beyond the clan heads. The Lango also diluted the Luo language of the inhabitants, which resulted in the creation of the distinct Leb-Lango dialect.

There are documented oral sources from neighbors of the Lango pertaining to their presence in Lango country by 1000 AD, before the Madi and Luo migrations. The Alur and Madi referred to the Acholi as “Lango” and to their area as Lango country. The Luo history by (Onyango-ku-Odongo 1976) situated the Lango in the Agoro Hills with other groups, giving credence to the southeastern migration of the Lango people. Onyango ku Odongo corroborated the Jie and Karamojong oral histories and posited the Lango with the Luo and other groups in the east/northeast as neighboring the Jie and the Karamojong. According to Okeny (1982), after Rukidi left, “the Luo people experienced two major invasions by alien people. The first invasion took place around 1490 by the people Luo called Lango. The second invasion of Tekidi settlement by the Galla between 1517 and 1544 forced the Luo people to take refuge into the mountains” (p. 113).

Karamojong oral history supports the presence of the Lango in the east/northeast and distinguishes them from the Karamojong. When the Karamojong moved to the land that they presently inhabit, they found it occupied by the Lango, Maasai, and Kitosh. The Karamojong seized their cattle without bloodshed, giving the owners the opportunity to cohabit with them. Many accepted the terms and stayed because they did not want to part with their cattle, while others preferred their autonomy and left. The Karamojong then adopted the names of the people they conquered as their clans. The Lango clans (Atek, Otengor, and Okarowok) who remained were absorbed by the Karamojong, and were renamed Ng’katekok, Ng’Itengor, and Ng’Ikarwok, respectively (Clark 1950).

Jie oral history also corroborates the presence of the Lango in the east and acknowledges Lango as a distinct group that inhabited the Agoro Hills and Korten in South Sudan and present-day Acholi country. The oral history contends that the Lango and Jie are of one clan and that Lango once lived in central Jie land before moving westwards together with a people who identified as Teso, before separating near Otuke Hills (Butt 2017). The legend of the three brothers demonstrated the proximity and close relations between Lango, Jie, and Turkana; the different occupations the three brothers took when they parted ways; and the recognition that they were one people in the distant past. Tarantino (1946) documented the legend of the three brothers, Lango, Jie, and Turkana:

Lango, the ancestor of the Lango people, had two brothers, Turkana and Jiwe. Their father was not rich enough to provide a wife for all three of his sons but wished at least to provide a wife for the eldest. The others would have to do the best they could for themselves, on their own account. Jiwe and Lango naturally protested at this idea, so the father and the three sons sat down to discuss the matter. They agreed that the father should keep all his goods and that each of the three boys should provide for their own future. Before they parted, however, the old father arranged a feast. He killed an ox, cut it into pieces, and heaped all the flesh on the skin; he next poured a quantity of beer over the flesh. He then invited Turkana, his eldest son, to take for himself what he thought fit. Turkana took a great quantity of meat, shook it well to cleanse it of beer, and departed. Jie, the second son, took nearly all the meat that remained. For Lango, there remained only some entrails and most of the beer. (p. 16)

## **Social and Political Organizations**

The social units of the Lango people are the family, lineage (Jo Doggola), and the clan (Atekere), offering the benefits of social cohesion, expansion, and protection against perceived enemies. Members of the lineage trace their ancestry to a grandfather. The lineage lives close to each other, within reach for consultation, assistance, and participation in marriage and birth ceremonies. When a lineage member travels out of his neighborhood, clan affiliations become important (Driberg 1923; Hayley 1947; Tosh 1978). Clan members claim common ancestry through blood, adoption, and absorption. In the past, a clan included two or more lineages, and the number could increase as the clan expanded. Each clan had its own cry, which would be uttered during ceremonies, in battle, and when hunting. Lango clans are patrilineal and exogamous, meaning that children follow their father's clan and marriage is not allowed into either the paternal or maternal clans. The clan continues to be the basic cultural administrative unit of the Lango people. Clans perform social functions such as protecting members from attacks, transmitting Lango values and traditions inter-generationally, planning and conducting ceremonies (married, birth, naming, religion, etc.), settling land disputes (including those related to hunting grounds in the past), and assisting members in times of need.

The majority of the Lango clans stem from the three core clans: Atek, Arak, and Okarowok (Tarantino 1946). Clan names such as Okarowok of Oki (Okarowok me Oki) indicate that a new clan has been formed through the fusion of a migrant group (Jo Okarowok) and a host group (Jo Oki) (Tosh 1973). Certain clans have unique skills and knowledge. For instance, the Okarowok are warriors with excellent military skills. The Atek are born leaders and administrators, and mediate between people, families, and clans over issues concerning land, waters, pastures, etc. The Inomo have a comprehensive knowledge of medicine/herbs and practice traditional medicine, especially orthopedic treatment related to sprains, fractures, and muscular pain. The Omolo clan is of mixed heritage and known for their ability to bestow curses (Lameki Akena, personal communication, 2012; Iteso Clans Directory 2017).

## **Political Organization**

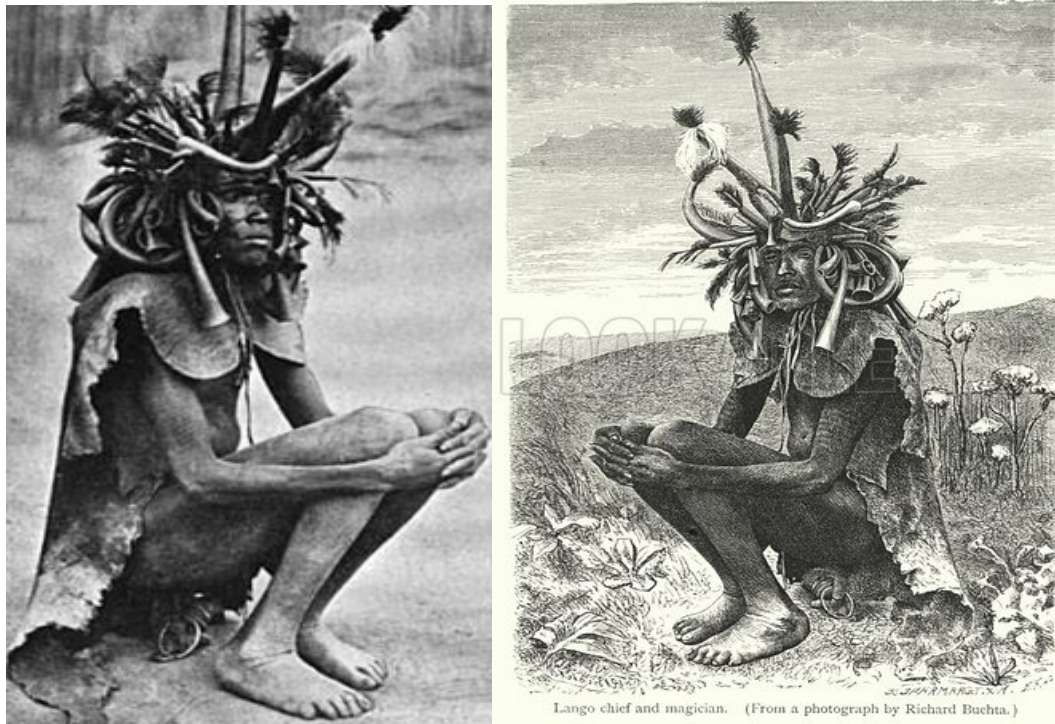
Lango oral tradition traces their system of governance to the first three mythical chiefs who entered the country they now occupy. They were Ekangoro—the paramount chief—Mugaicha, and Obiyamarokakare. Lango mythology purports that the three chiefs arrived from the sky. This legend supports the oral history of the Lango of Uganda, which documented the existence of chiefs before the advent of colonialism. In precolonial Lango, there was no centralized government or hereditary form of government. All decisions for the welfare of the Lango were clan-based and decentralized (Driberg 1923). Driberg described the Lango as egalitarian people, who preferred to uniformly share power. The colonial administrators confused the egalitarian Lango leadership system with the British and Buganda systems of authoritative chiefs. Any form of government that differed from the British system was not considered a government. The Lango system of governance was far more democratic than a monarchy. Tosh (1978) described Lango political organization as “amorphous,” lacking those “incipient structures through which organized large communities could be brought into existence [when] the need arose” (p. 241). Tosh ignored the advanced clan system that existed in Lango society before and during colonial rule. For Tosh and other Western scholars, the concept of government was exclusively a western

concept—any system outside of a monarchy was not a government. In a review of Tosh's book, Uzoigwe (1980) argued:

it is equally incredible that he could devote a lot of space arguing with religious conviction that pre-European Lango was a stateless society because it lacked 'a specialized political leadership in the form of kings or chiefs,' and that it therefore 'functioned without government' (p. vii). Apart from the fact that this is a clear case of imposing a European idea of the state and government upon a society that functioned on totally different principles, kingship or chiefship is not the only characteristic of statehood and government. It is, indeed, irritating that the notion of statelessness, long abandoned by historians of Africa, is stressed ad nauseam without any further illumination. (p. 115)

At the time, Western scholars and the British colonial government preferred a system of monarchy or chiefdom because it was familiar to them, and thus undermined the clan system of governance practiced by the Lango people. This kind of reasoning is still prevalent in contemporary African studies scholarship. One possible reason why the colonial government in Uganda did not like a decentralized governance system like that practiced by the Lango was because they would have to work with a group of powerful clan chiefs, as opposed to dealing with just one person—the monarch. In traditionally centralized systems kings had absolute power and would dismiss chiefs who they felt were blocking modernization. According to the thinking at the time, the actions of Lango chiefs (described by Tosh) distorted colonial policies, obstructed the administration of justice, and hindered the expansion of Western education and agricultural productivity.

The Lango governance system was administered through elected clan leaders at various levels who had authority over the people of their clan. Even with the imposition of a Western governance system, the Lango people continued to follow their clan system of governance, albeit with a few modifications. The Lango clan system of governance operated like the federal government system, with independent clans like Jo Atek (Atek people), Jo Oyima (Oyima people), Jo Arak (Arak people), Jo Okarowok (Okarowok people), Jo Oki (Oki people), Jo Otengor (Otengor people), Jo Bako (Bako people), and so on. In the clan governance system, the Jago (village head) was responsible for overseeing the village. The Jago was elected from among the village's main clan and depended on the council of village elders from various clans during wartime and for the dispensation of justice. The office of Jago was not necessarily a hereditary position, as another family could replace the leader if the Jago's successor did not perform well in terms of his leadership during battles and his management of the village during peace time. Another clan governmental figure was the Rwot Atekere (clan chief). The Rwot sphere was composed of several Jagi (village heads) and several villages. The office of Rwot was hereditary in some clans, so when a clan chief died, elders from the clan would choose one of his sons to succeed him. In addition to military responsibilities, the Rwot had the authority to settle disputes between clan members (Driberg 1923).



**Figure 1.** Precolonial Lango chiefs wearing an elaborate headdress [Helmet], Hutchinson (1902)

### *Lango Military*

The Lango people were warriors, feared and hated by many groups, including the colonial government in Uganda. They were known for their military skills, courage, and aggression in the wars fought during migration and settlements. Driberg described the Lango people as

brave and venturesome warriors who have won [the] fear and respect of their neighbors.... Ever ready to lend their arms to others engaged in war, they have frequently joined in the private quarrels of other tribes, enhancing their prestige.... In their relations with each other, they are generally honest..." (p. 68).

The Lango were at the height of their military power when the British arrived in Uganda. The Lango army triumphed militarily during this era, but the might of their military was constantly undermined or negatively reported by the colonial administrators and their agents. They fought wars to expand and protect their territory against invading neighbors, find new pastures and water for their cattle, repel slave traders, and later to thwart the advancing British colonial administration. The army was united under one military leader, the Twon Lwak (army general), chosen from the available men and all had to agree to be led by him. Twon Lwak was not an elected position. Their leadership/tenure was based solely on their military prowess and continued success in battle. A successful Twon Lwak would draw other chiefs to him; however, they were likely to desert him and look for a more successful military leader if he lost a war or became weak. After the war, they returned to their clans and resumed their daily occupations and were not entitled to any special benefits. There were times when a Twon Lwak's son or relative succeeded him. Famous military leaders were Ongora Okubal, who brought the Lango back from the east/northeast to their present land, Opyene Nyakonyolo, and Arim Oroba (Opyene

Nyankonyolo's successor). Other famous leaders included Agoro Abwango, Angulo Orenge, Akena, Apenyo, and Okello Ikit (Tarantino 1949; Kihangire 1922).

The Lango warriors waged wars against the advancing colonial administration, slave traders, and against neighbors near and far. Foreign wars were conducted during the dry season, which ranged from November to February. At their borders, the Lango were constantly at war with the Acholi and Madi to the north and the Iteso and Kumam (Akum) to the east and south, respectively. These border conflicts allowed them to consolidate their land and acquire captives and large herds of cattle. In Teso, the Lango were known as "emirit" (enemies). The Karamojong and Jie referred to the Lango as "nimiro" (enemies). In the Labwor's vocabulary, "Lango" means enemy (Wayland 1931). The Acholi referred to the Lango as "omiro" (enemy or foreigners), a term they used to refer to their hostile southern neighbors (Okot Bitek 1963). In addition to foreign wars, the Lango also engaged in inter-clan wars, where stronger clans subdued and absorbed weaker clans. Some clans voluntarily joined the stronger clans for protection.

#### *Wars Against the Advancing Colonial Administration*

The colonial government in Uganda viewed the Lango people as troublemakers and wanted them subdued. Many Lango warriors were murdered by agents of the colonial government, and their history was suppressed. According to Gray (1955), the Lango military made a surprise attack and killed many soldiers at Mruli post, including their leader Kukakka. The colonial government retaliated by attacking the Lango region, killing many innocent people. The number of Lango civilians killed is unknown, but an estimated 800 heads of cattle were taken from them. These attacks were not mentioned by Tarantino in "Lango Wars." As late as 1902, Lango warriors attacked the colonial government's post at Foweira; assisted and offered temporary refuge to the Chope people who were attempting to escape the colonial tax (Tosh 1978).

#### *War against the Acholi and Slave Traders*

The Lango fought against Acholi for many years and raided most parts of Acholi territory (Tarantino 1949). In addition to territory expansion, the Lango associated the Acholi people with the slave traders. The slave traders, with the support of the Acholi (forced or voluntary) raided Lango villages near the borders and seized captives and cattle in the process. In retaliation, the Lango warriors attacked the Koch, Patiko, Atiak, Paranga, and Pajule people. In 1872, Ali Husain, who worked for the notorious slave trader Abu Sa'ud, abused Lango hospitality and ventured into Lango territory to capture slaves and cattle twice. Owing to the Lango's superior defensive organization, Ali Husain was routed, and his forces were annihilated, which resulted in no further raids in Lango territory by slave traders. Baker (1874) recorded how Lango warriors crushed a dawn attack on a Lango village that was mounted by Lazim, a slave trader based in Patiko. Out of the invading force of 250 men, which included 100 snipers, only one man escaped.

#### *Assistance to Bunyoro Kingdom*

Lango warriors made periodic incursions into Bunyoro, assisting warring parties in the Bunyoro Kingdom. They helped the king of Bunyoro, Kamurasi, against his brother Nakubari in the fight for succession to the throne after the death of their father Mugeni. The Lango also assisted Kamurasi in his conflict against Pauka in Bagungu (Tarantino 1949; Driberg 1923; Kihangire

1922). Oral and print sources reveal that the Lango helped Kabalega fight Baganda and Batoro and were rewarded with women and sweet potatoes. The Lango warriors had no permanent enemies. They were always ready to lend a helping hand to struggling groups or individuals. For example, the Lango fought the Baganda for aiding the colonial government, but in 1897, Kabaka Mwanga of Buganda and Omukama Kabalega of Bunyoro fled to the Lango country. The Lango warriors subsequently protected the two kings for two years, enabling them to evade capture by the colonial government until 1899, when Kakungulu captured them in the Abalang swamp.

#### *War against the Madi*

The conflict between the Lango and Madi was about settling old scores. The Lango did not forget how the Madi routed them out of their country in 1000 AD. Lango warriors conducted raids against the Madi when they came back from the east/northeast to their present country. Initially, Lango warriors combined forces with the Acholi to fight the Madi. This alliance ended when the Acholi sided with the Madi. Ngora Okubal commanded the Lango's first war against the Madi (Tarantino, 1949). They fought fiercely and took many captives, but the Madi also inflicted heavy casualties. Ojungamwenge, another war leader, defeated the Madi near Nimule but lost his army in the flood when they were resting in the dry bed of Nyangaragot River. Akena successfully commanded a raid against the Madi. The Madi retaliated against the Lango with the support of the Arab slave traders (armed with firearms) but were defeated.

#### **Traditional Justice Systems**

The traditional Lango justice system existed primarily for resolving conflicts within the community. A crime committed by any member of a clan was attributed to the entire clan, and therefore all the members of that clan were jointly punished for the crime. Any deceased member was also considered to be a loss for the whole clan, and they all grieved together (Driberg 1923). The Lango justice system had criminal, civil, and other minor laws in place before the advent of colonial rule. The criminal offenses had communal consequences and were thus considered offenses against the entire society and could be punishable by death. These crimes included incest, witchcraft, and sexual aberrations, among others. In contrast, civil offenses including homicide, hurt, mischief, adultery, seduction, theft, and defamation incurred individual consequences (Driberg 1923). There were no western-based prison systems in Lango. Instead, the traditional practices of *Culo Kwor* (compensation for the dead) and *Kayo Cuk* (atonement/reconciliation) were used to reconcile families or clans (Odwe unpublished manuscript).

#### *Culo Kwor (Compensation for the Dead)*

After a murder had been committed, elders of the affected families would organize a *Culo Kwor* followed by a *Kayo Cuk* (Atim 2013; Odwe unpublished manuscript). The guilty one was required to offer restitution in the form of livestock. Upon the judgment of community elders, the accused would provide cows from his herd or, if lacking a herd, from his family or clan, to satisfy the demands of the victim's family (Atim 2013). Under the practice of *Culo Kwor*, the *Rwot Kwor* (clan official responsible for compensation) was mandated to oversee the process until its completion. All the affected clans had to agree on *Culo Kwor* as a payment for the dead and the performance of *Kayo Cuk*.

*Kayo Cuk (Atonement/Reconciliation)*

*Kayo Cuk* was a rite of reconciliation that was performed after *Culo Kwor*. The practice was mainly limited to cases involving two clans, where a perpetrator took responsibility for the crime or harm caused. The purpose of the *Kayo Cuk* was to restore individual and community ties and relationships after cases of a grievous nature. The remedy was limited to compensation and was usually determined by the clan, regardless of the magnitude of the harm caused to the affected family/household. In addition to the six heads of cattle that were typically required (numbers could vary), the murderer or his family had to provide an additional bull for the *Kayo Cuk*. The bull was ritually slaughtered and eaten (Atim 2013; Odwe unpublished manuscript).

The two traditional practices, *Culo Kwor* and *Kayo Cuk*, have changed over the years due to widespread poverty (Atim 2013). As a result, *Kayo Cuk* is no longer performed after the fulfillment of the *Culo Kwor*. Today, it is normally the responsibility of the offender's household to make the required payment (money or cattle). In contrast to the punitive measures practiced in the West, the Lango traditional justice system is geared toward accountability, reconciliation, and cleansing. Traditional Lango justice systems serve as an important method of dispute resolution in the Lango subregion, especially in areas where the police and courts are ineffective, under-resourced, or entirely absent (Atim 2013). As a result, customary law is the preferred (and sometimes the only) avenue for plaintiffs in rural Lango.

**Conclusion**

Previously overlooked print and documented oral sources showed that the Lango, Teso, Kumam, Karamojong, Jie, and Turkana once shared a common ancestry, and later split into different independent groups. The Lango trace their origin to Ethiopia. Lango warriors moved in small groups, conquering, and subduing many groups along their migration paths and expansion wars, resulting in people of diverse backgrounds being assimilated into Lango society. Through several migrations, conquests, and expansion wars, the Lango people have developed a unique language and culture. The Lango no longer speak their original language and have lost some of her original culture. However, migration and conquests did not affect their independent spirit, military skills, and love for cattle. They also contributed significantly to the precolonial and colonial politics in Uganda.

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