

# The Luo People in South Sudan



# The Luo People in South Sudan:

*Ethnological Heredities  
of East Africa*

By

Kon K. Madut

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I would like to dedicate this book to all the Luo People in  
South Sudan, Ethiopia, Congo, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Author Biography.....	ix
About this Edition.....	xi
Acknowledgements .....	xiii
Chapter One.....	1
The Context	
Background	
Theoretical Framework	
Investigating Luo Groups	
The Construction of Ethnicity and Language	
Chapter Two .....	15
The Narratives of Migration	
Historical Narratives	
Chapter Three .....	21
Luo Groups in South Sudan	
The Luo people in the Upper Nile	
The Luo people in Bahr el Ghazal	
The Luo people in Equatoria	
Chapter Four.....	35
The Luo in Central and East Africa	
The Luo in Uganda	
The Luo in Congo (DRC)	
The Luo in Ethiopia	
The Luo in Kenya	
Luo in Tanzania	

Chapter Five .....	45
Demographic Analysis	
Overall Demographic Analysis	
South Sudan	
Kenya	
Tanzania	
Uganda	
Congo (DRC)	
Ethiopia	
Chapter Six .....	49
People, Clans, and Kinships	
Prominent Luo Politicians and Technocrats in Sudan	
Chapter Seven.....	63
Socialization and Sociocultural Interactions	
Spirituality and Divine Beliefs	
Tradition, Values, and Social Norms	
Construction of Social Structure	
Social Institutions and Livelihoods	
Chapter Eight.....	75
The Luo and South Sudan's Nationalities	
South Sudan Nationalities	
The Construction of National Identity	
Nationalities and Social Interaction	
Ethnic Distributions and Representation	
Social and Communal Interactions	
Chapter Nine.....	87
Summary and Conclusion	
References .....	99
Index.....	107

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Kon K. Madut is a part-time Professor at the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Social Sciences. He taught multiculturalism and migration in Canada and Quebec; comparative politics courses at the School of Political Studies; the sociology of work and organizations, ethnics and the question of nations, the contemporary analysis of migration, and conflict and development at the School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies and Social Geography, the Faculty of Arts, the Department of Geography, and the Faculty of Global and International Studies. The author has over 15 years of professional experience with the City of Ottawa Municipal Government, the Department of Social Services, and Community Programs in Canada.

His major research contributions include a doctoral dissertation on the issues of equity in employment, where he studied migrants' experiences of unemployment in the City of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. He has also written and published articles in international peer-reviewed academic journals on migrants' employability in Ottawa, Canada, and on discourses of ethnic identity, health, and institutional development in South Sudan. While teaching at the University of Ottawa, he has examined Ph.D. theses and assessed degree proposals for cultural, equity, and ethnic studies Masters. He has published and co-authored several peer-reviewed academic articles in the fields of ethnicity, identity issues, immigration, and employment in highly ranked international journals.

Dr. Madut was conferred a Ph.D. in Social Science by Tilburg University, Netherlands, in association with Taos Institute, USA, in 2012; a Master's Degree in Liberal Studies (MLS) from Fort Hays State University, USA, in 2007; a BA in Sociology from Alexandria University, Egypt, in 1994; and is a recipient of Honors as a Social Services Worker (SSW) from Algonquin College in Canada.

Dr. Madut is a member of the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA) and the American Sociology Association (ASA), as well as an associate member of the Taos Institute, USA.



## ABOUT THIS EDITION

This edition offers an interpretation of both oral and secondary literature reviews written about the Luo ethnic groups in East Africa. This work draws from several interpretations and perceptions of Luo ethnic groups regarding their kinships and lineages; geocultural claims pertaining to the Luo identity; and sociocultural interactions among social groups and communities. Its aim is not to open up new discourses on Luo ethnicity, or to rename the Luo groups in South Sudan or East Africa; instead, it builds on the current literature and oral histories to reaffirm their kinships and establish ethnic lineages methodologically. Most of the contemporary Luo narratives come from Kenya and Uganda, which are in addition to those written by Western anthropologists and missionaries. None of these narratives have changed the content of the oral stories told by both the Luo groups and sub-groups in Africa, especially those related to their lineages, ethnic affiliations, and their path of immigration from South Sudan to Tanzania. Rather, most of these writings have confirmed the history, stories, and mythology of the greater Luo groups in Africa. Further, these narratives have prompted me to write this book, in order to contribute to the South Sudanese Luo's perspectives of their relationships with their kin in East and Central Africa. In addition, I sensed that this edition would appeal to the intellectual curiosity of both Luo and non-Luo alike, thereby prompting both groups to conduct more research to further our understanding of their ways of life and social interactions, and perhaps their contributions to the sociopolitical and economic development of the countries and regions they inhabit. There is a great need for a better understanding of the causes of ethnic divisions and migration throughout East Africa. It is also worth noting that Central Africa is considered to be a partial home to some Luo ethnic groups because the Luo Alur crossed from Uganda to Central Africa. The origins of the Central African (DRC) Luo lie in the Luo Alur of Uganda in East Africa. The same applies to the Luo that have crossed from Kenya to Tanzania, as they also belong to larger Kenyan Luo groups.

In this edition, the various Luo groups' sociocultural traditions have been omitted. The reasons for their migration have also been left out, even though all the groups have narratives about why the Luo people migrated to South Sudan from their region of origin in Africa. However, their groups, clans, kinships, regions, and countries have been carefully mapped. Subsequent

editions will build on this work to add missing and previously unrecorded clans and sub-clans that have not yet been identified due to the lack of empirical data.

In short, the goal of this edition is to present evidence that has been sourced from available literature, which reveals their oral stories and mythologies, alongside past scholarly work to help us understand the origins of the Luo groups and to discuss their ethnic lineages and migration in more depth. Most Luo narratives come from Kenya and Uganda, and they provide ample data that allows us to examine the Luo's characteristics and composition in East Africa. They also enable us to ascertain how they ended up in Kenya and Tanzania. Finally, there is still a gap in current knowledge with regard to both the Luo groups in South Sudan and the ones scattered all over Africa, especially in terms of their origins.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to my family and friends who have been supportive of the idea of writing a book that will enlighten the younger generation of Luo in Bahr el Ghazal, and South Sudan in general. Mischaracterization and misinformation about the Luo people among South Sudanese have socially and politically misconstrued the identity of Luo ethnic groups; they have also distorted their cultural heritage. I am aware that this book is not a conclusive review of the cultural and ethnographic mapping of the Luo groups in South Sudan, East Africa, and Central Africa. However, it will present a methodological and epistemological narrative that will eliminate the overdependence on the Luo's mythical history and stories about culture, language, and ethnic lineages. It is hoped that this work will serve as a reference for those who want to gain a better understanding of the ethnology of the Luo people and their environment in Africa. The long tradition of foreign names, such as (Jur) Bahr el Ghazal, instead of the ethnocultural name of Luo, is highlighted and discussed from historical, social, cultural, and political perspectives. Most importantly, we are currently witnessing the emergence of new research about the Luo in South Sudan. This will also further the discourse and cement the narratives of migration and ethnic lineages from South Sudan to Tanzania. My dearest friend and brother, Eng. Francis Donato Mabier, has been one of motivational figures who wanted me to publish this study years ago. He was moved by a presentation I delivered during one of the Luo of Bahr el Ghazal conferences in Memphis, Tennessee, in the presence of Dr. John Ukech Lueth and Ambassador Leon Isdoro on August 30, 2008, before South Sudan's independence in 2011. Further, I wish to acknowledge my friend and cousin from the Alur of Uganda, Mr. Justin Lochombi, who was fascinated to know that South Sudan has a section of his tribe. He was so supportive of me when I was writing this book, and provided many helpful links to networks and references, especially about the Luo in Uganda. Finally, I am thankful to the University of Ottawa for creating a great research environment and their financial support, without which this work would not have been possible. These abundant resources, from the library to the office space, have helped with data collection, writing, editing, designing, and publishing. At home, I had my team, which comprised of Asham, Rose Akon, Paul Ujuak, Samuel Aleu, and their mom, Maria E. Adhal. Thank you all for being so supportive of me while dealing with your own schooling, work, sports, and fun

activities! I would like to extend my gratitude to Mr. John Achor for his help with the documentation of the Luo of Bahr el Ghazal groups, clans, chiefs, and their environment. I hope that this version will achieve its intended goal, and we will do our best to include areas that have yet to be documented in the next version. In the process of compiling this version, I have noticed that there is a need to document all of the Luo's lands and villages in Bahr el Ghazal with their original Luo names. Some of these lands were taken from the Luo by displaced local ethnic groups during the war, or intentionally via the land-grabbing process that has been intensified by neighboring communities. I hope this version will help you articulate and discuss the Luo's history, as well as their sociocultural and ethnic lineages, in Africa from Bahr el Ghazal to Tanzania with great confidence and competence.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE CONTEXT

### **Background**

This book discusses the migration of the Luo ethnic groups in Africa, as well as the sociocultural and regional constructions that have shaped their identity and social interactions. This work illustrates the Luo's demographics, habitats, and geographical regions in East and Central Africa. It includes the generations-old narratives and mythical oral stories about their perceived origins in South Sudan. The Luo's peoples' path of migration from Wau to their current homes in East and Central Africa is also reviewed. The book's aim is to explore the ethnographic lineages of the Luo ethnic groups from South Sudan to their current countries of resettlement in East and Central Africa. The literature reviewed focuses on the ethnic Luo groups' population, cultural features, ethnic classification, and language as the common determinants of their identity, kinship, and ethnic affiliation, as cited through their oral history, stories, and folklore.

The objective of this work is to explore, highlight, and document the major ethnic groups who identify as Luo, even if they are assimilated within other ethnic groups. The classification methods focus on the Luo ethnic groups who have migrated to or from African countries that are currently known as their homes, namely, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Central Africa. The ethnographic map of the Luo ethnic group in Africa will be outlined and highlighted to give us a better understanding of the regions where these groups currently reside, as well as their migration patterns, which begin from Western Bahr el Ghazal (BGR) in the Republic of South Sudan to the above-mentioned six African countries where they currently reside.

So far, limited academic attempts have been made to explore the Luo migration from South Sudan. Furthermore, the current era, which has been marked by globalization, technological advancements, and modern transportation, has helped establish the Luo's path of migration.

Additional research on this subject may utilize DNA and other modern technologies to not only determine the Luo's ethnic lineages, but to also uncover Luo groups that are assimilated within other non-Luo ethnic groups in East Africa: e.g., within the Bantus or other African Nilotics. Indeed, the causes of migration and internal clans' separation within the Luo groups have thus far remained unclear, even for the Luo people themselves. The available knowledge and extant literature on the ethnic kinships, migration, and affiliation among the Luo are largely based on traditional oral history and mythical stories (Ogot, 1967).

From my personal perspective, growing up as a Luo child in South Sudan, Wau, Bhar el Ghazal, and throughout my early adolescence, I was fascinated by the oral stories my elders told me about the separation that happened between the Luo of Bahr el Ghazal, the Luo Shilluk (Shollo) in the Upper Nile, and the Luo Anuak (Anway) in the Equatoria region. Through these stories, I have managed to discover more about the Luo within South Sudan and was later able to expand my understanding of the group to the rest of Africa. Therefore, my interest in this subject started with needing to understand the causes of mythical conflicts, separation, and migrations. However, it is not within the scope of this narrative to discuss the detailed causes of immigration and displacement; rather, the main aim of this work is to map out all the African countries, regions, cities, and villages that currently host various Luo ethnic groups as the starting point for further in-depth research on their sociocultural and ethnic lineages and affiliations. As for the Luo people in Bahr el Ghazal, and South Sudan in general, such knowledge opens up new sociopolitical and economic ties to people with a shared heritage, sociocultural backgrounds, ethnic origins, and common ancestral lineages, thereby allowing them to build a better sense of belonging, while expanding their understanding of their ethnic identity.

South Sudan is home to about 64 ethnic groups, and their distribution varies across Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal, and the Upper Nile. In the Equatoria region, there are 36 (55%) different ethnic groups, while the Bahr el Ghazal and the Upper Nile regions are home to 21 (32%) and 8 (13%) ethnic groups, respectively. The 36 ethnic and tribal communities within the Equatoria region have managed to reconstruct their ethnic identities based on a cluster of regional identities, known as "Equatorian," rather than on tribal affiliation. As such, many people, including local South Sudanese people, have sometimes mistaken this regional "Equatorian" identity for a tribe, rather than a region. The same concept of clustering has been successfully adopted among groups known as the

Fertit in Bahr El Ghazal; this is a cluster of 14 ethnic groups who have managed to socially, culturally, and politically adopt a communally constructed identity, which is known as “Fertit,” rather than relating to their tribes of origin (Madut, 2015).

For these reasons, within the local geo-ethnographic discourse, this work is not only an attempt at better understanding these groups’ identities, which were rechristened by other local ethnic groups or by colonizers, but it is also an opportunity to embrace identity and group heritage in a wider universal spectrum. Many of the ethnic groups in South Sudan, and Africa in general, have adopted ethnic names with no links to their cultural heritage. This includes referring to individuals by other ethnic groups’ tribal names, which is a practice commonly found among the Luo of Bahr el Ghazal, who share some names with the Dinka groups in the region. Historically, this was the result of social assimilation, which indicates the ethnic cohesion among the Nilotics in the region.

Those who lack knowledge of sociocultural interactions and an understanding of the Luo language and heritage in Bahr el Ghazal, or South Sudan in general, continue to claim that “Luoism” is a political endeavor, and that there are no ethnic groups known as Luo in South Sudan. Ironically, many who share this perspective do not speak the Luo language and perhaps do not know that labels, such as Jur-Chol, Sulluk, and Lagoro, have no cultural relevance to these ethnic communities. These groups do not call themselves by these names within their communities. Many mythical understandings about the Luo and perceptions about their heritage and identity will be discussed in this book as we progress through the chapters.

In South Sudan, such debates have created simplistic arguments, sometimes poorly articulated by the Luo and non-Luo groups in the region. Ironically, there are strong forces of resistance from non-Luo ethnic groups; these dominant groups prefer the Luo to identify with their ethnic identities (Luo). Further, in my view, there is no need to polarize the subject, especially when the Luo’s intent is to educate masses about their identity, heritage, and ancestral lineages in Africa, rather than to assert who they have become and what name they have been given by other African ethnic groups. While Luo from all over Africa have claimed South Sudan as their home of origin, their lineages and roots are still deep-rooted in their migration, heritage, and the oral legends and stories that are still in circulation. Therefore, it is essential to continue to document the geographical origins of all these Nilo-groups and the reasons behind their migration. Further, we need to understand how the Nilotics, with all their

multiethnic groups, ended up occupying the Bantu's lands in East and Central Africa. These are legitimate questions because the Luo's migration cannot be separated from similar waves that included other Nilotics, especially the Eastern Sudanic Nilotics in 3000 B.C. (Clark, 1984).

Some scholars argue that the imposed colonial borders between groups and so-called countries were the driving force behind the Luo's division, as it forced them to inhabit different independent states. Their sociocultural and ethnic ties are further complicated by colonial inventions, which were engineered during the European "Scramble for Africa" where they used national powers to arbitrarily divide up Africa based on their own interests without regard for socioeconomic realities or ethnic and group ties (Chamberlain, 2014). This means that people who traditionally see themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic and cultural group found themselves within another group's boundaries; they, therefore become citizens of one country, but members of a different community. This is certainly the case for the Luo as they have been distributed over several countries. Consequently, the South Sudanese's oral history and mythical narratives of their lineages and ethnic affiliations have been seemingly culturally and socially disconnected from their counterparts in East and Central Africa, even though the African Luo consider the Luo of Wau, South Sudan, to be their first ancestors and Bahr el Ghazal to be the starting point for their migration to Central and East Africa (Simon, 1992).

In addition to oral and mythical stories, contemporary African demographic studies treat the regions and countries where the Luo currently reside as their final destination and home; this supports political citizenship more than ethnic affiliation. Therefore, this is an attempt to explore their ethno-cultural and clan lineages within their current homes and trace those who are assimilated within other ethnic groups to geographically map the Luo people in East and Central Africa. The ethnographic analysis presented in this book focuses on the Luo groups in the Republic of South Sudan, which is their perceived place of origin, as well as Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In order to meet these aims, both qualitative and ethnographic analysis were conducted to frame and develop the storylines that shaped this research. The information was gathered from qualitative and quantitative literature, which was analyzed using the Content Study (CS) method, as well as related data gathering and statistical analysis principles. The literature review included primary and secondary sources, such as

governmental and non-governmental records and statistics, along with oral stories and historical accounts provided by elders and historians. It is also important to point out that, when studying the Luo people, like many other indigenous peoples of the world, the researcher depends heavily on oral history and mythical stories told by elders as the main source of information (Ogot, 1967). These accounts were treated as a primary source of information about their cultural heritage and social solidarity; these stories and oral histories have also been used to maintain the groups' knowledge about their lineages.

This work utilized both an ethnographic approach and qualitative methods, including reviewing contemporary and classical sociological and anthropological literature, whose authors have attempted to observe and record the Luo's social and ethno-cultural interactions and ethnic characteristics within their various countries, regions, villages, and settlements in East Africa. A quantitative method was only adopted when analyzing statistical records by state authorities, social scientists, and non-governmental organizations related to the Luo ethnic groups in Africa. It must be noted, however, that the official statistics are not an accurate representation of the Luo people in Africa, but instead mainly serve to highlight the variations in their rough percentages in their areas of residence.

My understanding of the relevant Luo ethnic cultural context and how knowledge is preserved and passed along through generations has compelled me to rely on local oral history, stories, and observations obtained during socializing within the Luo group of Southern Sudan, Western Bahr el Ghazal region, which was also where I grew up. Oral history was the only means for many ethnic, or the so-called indigenous, groups to communicate their literature, history, trade, heritage, and life experiences to the next generations (Collins, 1971).

I met members of Luo ethnic groups from all over East and Central Africa during my undergraduate studies in Egypt and then later as a migrant in North America; this confirmed the importance of their oral stories and history. For these reasons, the elders and sub-clan leaders provide information about a given ethnic group and how they relate to the Luo. I have shared this manuscript with Luo intellectuals, scholars, and community members, and I have also conducted interviews with members of these groups to validate some of the key narratives and data collected from different sources.

The members represent the Luo sub-groups within certain East and Central African countries: Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Central Africa, and Congo. This book has been organized into nine chapters and concludes with some recommendations for further research that would add to the body of knowledge in the social sciences in general, and ethno-cultural research in particular. This work will make it easy for future researchers, as it maps out the Luo groups with their countries, regions, and states. It also maps the major Luo groups, clans, and sub-clans in Africa from South Sudan up to Tanzania.

Indeed, the only aim of the first version of this book was to map the Luo's ethnic lineages, classifications, kinships, clans, regions, and countries. I am hoping that in the second version I will continue to improve on these findings and will be able to incorporate other important data, which will have invariably been overlooked during the writing and publishing of this current edition. This version specifically relates to South Sudan, because the Luo's oral history, ethnic lineages, and the traces of other Luo groups are embedded within its cultural context.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In this work, race or ethnicity is treated as a social construct that is dependent on the mutual agreement and consent of the prevailing groups in society. This collective agreement is eventually accepted as a social norm, which creates a stratification of persons that subsequently determines their limitations in terms of, for example, their economic or political power. Berg (1989) argues that "what people do, how they act and structure their daily lives, and even how people are influenced by certain ideological stances can all be observed in the traces people either purposely or unintentionally leave behind" (85). Similarly, Berger and Thomas suggest that the sociology of knowledge created by people's day-to-day constructions of reality gives shape to the fabric of society (Berger and Thomas, 1966). Moreover, Berger and Thomas (1966) state that, if people accept a given situation as real, it becomes real for them. For these reasons, ethnicity and ethnic lineages are perceived by group members as real, and they are, therefore, motivated to defend and protect them from outsiders. We have seen how South Sudanese Luo members and other minority ethnic groups started to question their renaming by other regional ethnic groups and colonial powers, who removed the cultural relevance from their names. For example, in Wau, South Sudan, the Luo group dislikes being called Jur-Chol and considers it an offense because it has no

cultural meaning or relevance to their ethnic origins. They refer to themselves as Luo and their language as Dei-Luo.

With regard to the concept of race and how it relates to social interactions, Roy (2001) argues that it “was created mainly by Anglo-European, especially English societies in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.” Thus, race is seen as a useful means of defining human communities based on sociocultural, ethnic, regional, or religious backgrounds (Roy, 2001). Within this debate, Durkheim (1938) views race as a social fact that human societies need to understand and deal with accordingly. However, Weber (1978) argues that race is only the adoption of the social practice of marrying members of the same clan, people, or other kinship group (endogamy). Cultural anthropologist Ruby Garrett (2016) states that human societies are often socially constructed as groups that are defined by either race or skin color, and so people become known as White, Asian, Mexican, Arab, Black, Minority, and so on. These social constructions impact how a group is seen by others and, therefore, affect an individual’s life and their social, political, and economic interactions with others. In the same vein, Foucault (1991, 215) opines that “potential harm in racial-ethnic categorization outweighs any potential for remedy.” While Gracia (2005, 1) argues that “grouping persons by race, ethnicity, or nationality” is always inappropriate and is usually motivated by “social conflict and abuses.” Gracia’s argument is considered to have hindered the nation-building process.

In most African countries, people base their social interactions and political participation on ethnicity, tribal, and regional groupings. Most of the prior research examining the socioeconomic and political issues within these groups uncovered significant social issues, such as difficulties in creating a peaceful coexistence, which delayed the process of nation-building socially, politically, and economically (Atkinson, 1994).

The use of ethnicity as a factor when shaping social policy and sociopolitical and economic participation remains a common practice throughout post-colonial African society. This discourse of ethnic categorization, which is found in the classification of ethno-tribal grouping, prompted a review of the historical development of ethno-nationalism and ethnic grouping, and hindered the creation of a mutually agreed upon national identity after independence. Social constructionists’ views on race and ethnicity highlight particular social facts about the Luo’s migration and their ethnic lineages in South Sudan, as well as other Central and East African societies. These facts include the oral stories and

myths that have shaped their common identity for decades. Therefore, this discourse can also be used to conceptualize and understand their migration path and the reconstruction of their cultural identity and heritage. In this book, the concepts of race and ethnicity are discussed from both a primordial and an instrumentalist perspective.

I think that social constructionists' views on race and ethnicity highlight the key social facts that have held the Luo groups together for decades and which have shaped their common identity, even though they are scattered across many East African countries. Therefore, this discourse can be used when both conceptualizing and understanding the path to reconstructing meaningful ethnic relations, an inclusive national identity, and better livelihoods.

## **Investigating the Luo Groups**

Writing about the Luo groups in Africa has presented many challenges for contemporary African sociologists and anthropologists in particular, and social scientists and scholars in general (Atkinson, 1994). These challenges have manifested as difficulties in gathering the required resources and the inability to cover entire areas of the enormous countries that host these large ethnic groups. In addition, the political instability and occasional civil unrest in these African countries have isolated these groups from social researchers and local scholars interested in investigating their sociocultural and ethnic lineages (Ogot, 1967). Common issues include the politicization of the subject matter, and discouraging any attempt to link Luo groups socially, politically, and nationally in South Sudan or internationally with their kin in the Central and East African countries. For example, the persistence of locals in Bahr el Ghazal in calling the Luo Jur-Chol and the denunciation of the group's name (Luo) in official government transactions and documents have forced the group to consider undertaking social and political activism to reclaim their traditional name. In South Sudan's ethnic politics, dominant ethnic groups have always employed the process of social and cultural assimilation at the expense of another group's autonomy. This can be exemplified by the examples of the Atout (Reel), who are totally assimilated into Dinka; a particular branch of the Luo of Wau, currently known as Jur-Mananger; and the Dinkas, who assimilated into some of the Luo Shilluk clans in the Upper Nile (Santandrea, 1938). This type of social and cultural assimilation is not unique to the Luo groups in South Sudan, as similar practices can be observed in the Kumman and Lango ethnic

groups' integration and assimilation into the Luo in Uganda (Okech, 1953). However, non-Luo ethnic elites have often misinterpreted work on the Luo's historic, sociocultural, and ethnic lineages as political mobilization, rather than the pursuit of knowledge and the quest to find a common identity based on ethnic origins. Conversely, this common understanding with regard to the sociocultural analysis of groups may strengthen the social ties between the Luo's home countries and may help to foster collective social interactions. For the local dominant ethnic groups and the Luo's traditional political opponents, these retrospectives may redefine ethnic, sociopolitical, and economic boundaries, as well as the perception of national identity and sense of belonging. In this context, the colonial "divide and rule" approach takes precedence over cross-national and international ethnic affiliations (Tosh, 1978).

Another factor that makes the study of Luo ethnic groups academically challenging is the fact that they are scattered within their current countries of residence, and are divided between different sovereign countries, local jurisdictions, and national regions (Tosh, 1978). These issues have made it difficult to investigate the causes of immigration and displacement among the Luo groups in Africa. This has led researchers, such as Per Sjöholm (1973), Ominde (1975), and Santandrea (1981), to concentrate their investigations on studying separate Luo sub-groups, rather than exploring sociocultural, kinship, and ethnic affiliations among the larger Luo ethnic groups. Some of these authors have studied the Luo of Wau (Santandrea, 1938); other scholars have discussed Luo sub-culture and language, such as Evans (1948) who authored the *Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan*; and some local Luo writers have focused on Luo grammar, with an emphasis on the Luo's ethnic language. Atido (2011) has also written an interesting piece on the "insights from proverbs of the Alur in the Democratic Republic of Congo", which focuses solely on the Luo Alur groups of Congo and Uganda and their social and cultural folklore.

The accounts from the above social scientists have given us a valuable insight into the Luo's lineages, culture, language, and regions. However, I think that it would still be useful for African social scientists to extend their studies to investigate the actual causes behind the Luo's massive dispersion across the East African countries, and to elucidate why they considered their current countries, regions, and villages to be the best places to live.

In order to clearly identify these groups as Luo and to eliminate others from the list, I have mapped them based on their ethnic classification, nicknames, and original names. I have also traced their clans and examined how some groups' names might have changed during the course of migration, displacement, or assimilation. The rationale for this approach is to further understand why and how some Luo clans have been assimilated into other local tribes, as well as to explore other non-Luo ethnic groups that have adopted Luo culture and assimilated into the larger Luo groups in Africa. The analyzed literature sources were supported by statistical data gathered from the available primary sources, but the official figures, as noted earlier, do not necessarily reflect the accurate number of Luo in Africa, or even within their current countries of resettlement. I understand that finding accurate statistics has been one of the major challenges that researchers who conduct population studies in Africa have faced.

Statistical data and literature sources are analyzed in this book to estimate the number of Luo ethnic groups in Africa, and to identify the countries that host the largest number of Luo people. This process will also include an outline of the percentage of the Luo population in Africa by their country, region, village, ethnic links, and language. The aim is to look for an explanation that will help the South Sudanese Luo groups understand their mythical references to common ancestors, oral histories about their place of origin, and the findings reported about the Luo in neighboring East and Central Africa countries.

It is fair to state that any social scientist who wants to study so-called indigenous peoples will find that Luo ethnic groups are not an exceptional case in the pursuit of rich historical knowledge. Indeed, many ethnic groups, in both the world in general and Africa in particular, are considered to lack history, as far as social science and its post-positivist methods of investigation are concerned. The requirements placed on the documentation of social research methods, as defined by positivist Western scholars, have made it difficult to encourage social scientists to study peoples without history, except through ethnographic studies that mainly focus on observing social interactions within a cultural or ethnic group. This has led Burton (1952, 1) to state the following: "for a number of decades, anthropologists interested in the field of Nilotic studies have struggled with questions concerning ethnogenesis as well as the nature of contemporary social relations between named ethnic groups." The issues of ethnogenesis, as discussed by Burton, is also one of the core discourses among many Luo ethnic groups, who are trying to rigorously study their

social, cultural, and ethnic lineages in terms of their ethnicity, place, and ancestral origin.

However, the geopolitics, social interactions, intermarriages, boundaries, climate, destinations, and lack of resources have made it difficult for sociologists, anthropologists, and archaeologists to continue studying these large ethnic Luo groups within the African continent. Hence, most ethnologists who have attempted to study them have focused on a limited scope of geographical spaces, with the emphasis on a Luo sub-group, rather than their broader ethno-cultural interrelations. Targeted populations were invariably a clan or a section of a group within one of the countries that are currently known as home for the Luo (Crazzolaro, 1950). Many believe that this study would be more feasible if it focused on subgroups or a section within one country.

Furthermore, the history of the ethnic Luo groups' migration and their ethnographic distribution across six African countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Congo, Sudan, and Ethiopia) has left most social scientists, including the Luo themselves, with many unanswered questions related to the causes of their migration and disintegration (Murdock, 1959). The available data about the causes of the groups' migration has been shaped by oral history, myths, and elder accounts. In addition, colonial biases are inevitable when studying people with no history or references in social sciences, which makes it even harder to explore social facts about not only the Luo, but also many other similar ethnic groups within the continent.

## **The Construction of Ethnicity and Language**

The Luo have socially and ethnically reconstructed themselves as independent groups and clans, assimilated within other ethnic groups, such as with the Lango and Kumam in Uganda, and the Dinka in South Sudan, who in turn are assimilated into the larger Luo Chollo ethnic group's kingdom. The process of tracing the Luo's ethnic ancestry is still a major task and challenge for ethnologists. Furthermore, with the continuation of the social assimilation process among the various ethnic groups in Africa, it is presumed that the question of tracing the ancestries of these groups would be further complicated by the factors of time, urbanization, and intermarriages (Pace, 1990). However, ethnographers, such as Santandrea (1938), Ogot (1967), and Gilley (1992), concur that the ethnic Luo groups' country of origin is South Sudan. Moreover, the oral history, stories, and myths refer to Niykango, Dimo/Dumo, and Geilo as the first three

ancestors in the history of the Luo ethnic groups and their origins in South Sudan.

For the purpose of this research, all of the Luo groups across Africa have been treated as one major ethnic group to further encourage social scientists to investigate their ethnicity, origins, and classifications, as well as the causes of migration and group disintegration within the stated framework.

My statements and observations are therefore bounded by the fact that I am a member of the Luo ethnic group of Western Bahr el Ghazal in South Sudan. This observation is supported by a literature review to resolve any doubt of group ethnicity, ethnic classification, and the impact of social assimilation on the languages spoken within the countries that have Luo citizenship. In addition, the factors that have facilitated their resettlement, as well as the question of how they have managed to live in peace with non-Luo ethnic groups as neighbors, will be explored and discussed in order to provide a clear understanding of their current sociocultural context.



Figure 1: Luo woman in a traditional Costume—Luo Jo-Pa Dimo-Wau, South Sudan (2013)

Within these ethnic groupings, the Luo of Bahr el Ghazal came to be known as Jur Chol, regardless of the group's countless attempts to be called by their original name of Luo. The name Jur Chol is culturally and linguistically alien to the Luo of the Bahr el Ghazal region, as they do not refer to themselves as "Jur Chol" when speaking Luo (Santadrea, 1968). Almost every ethnic group in South Sudan has been stigmatized or renamed by either colonialists or dominant local cultural groups. In many cases, these stigmatized names are imposed and enforced by local and national authorities, regardless of what the groups socially and culturally perceive their identity to be or how they refer to themselves. The Jiieng, for example, became known as Dinka, the Nath as Nuer, the Luo Chaolo as Shilluk, the Luo Jo-Pari as Logoro and so on.

Further, it became the norm among many African ethnic groups for people to attribute loyalty to their own ethnic groupings, sub-groups, tribes, kinships, and clans (Seligman and Seligman, 1965). This sociocultural divide has, in many cases, overshadowed the quest for social cohesion and mutual understanding among the groups and has thus created difficulties for the construction of national identity in most parts of post-colonial Africa. Therefore, gaining a communal understanding about the groups' ethnic constructions and their origins may reduce myths and misconceptions about them, and this could also encourage a broader sense of belonging and sociocultural cohesion beyond individual regions, states, and countries. Conceptually, the narratives and the discourse of the Luo groups have been long neglected by indigenous social scientists due to geopolitical issues and the regional polarization of ethnic relations motivated by political competition and power sharing. Therefore, it is evident that most of the current discourse and literature on the Luo groups was produced by classical anthropologists, sociologists, and missionaries. Still, there have been some excellent contributions to Luo literature and ethno-cultural lineage by Luo writers, such as the work of Asiwaju (1985), who sensed that the lack of consistency in investigations and ongoing research on socioeconomics, livelihood, migration, social structure, and ethnicity has created a knowledge gap among the Luo people, which has resulted in confusion and simplification of their communal and group identities.

The discourses and narratives on the Luo's ethnic lineages, migration, and current regions are presented in the next eight chapters of this book. Chapter One provides the Luo's background with regard to their ethnicity and sociocultural ties. Chapter Two discusses their narratives and paths of immigration from South Sudan to Tanzania. Chapter Three focuses on the

Luo groups in South Sudan, while the regions, habitats, and settlements where they are found throughout East Africa are the topic of Chapter Four. Chapter Five examines their demographic representation. The statistics used do not represent an accurate sampling of the population within their respective groups, regions, or countries. Instead, they are used as a representation of the population variations in the areas that host the Luo. In Chapter Six, ethnic lineages are discussed in detail, along with the kinships and clans from Bahr el Ghazal to Tanzania. The number of clans recorded in this book may not be inclusive, as not all of the groups were able to be contacted. Chapter Seven discusses the Luo who live among other ethnic groups within South Sudan. 5 of the 64 nationalities in the Republic of South Sudan identify as Luo. Chapter Eight provides a general analysis of the main findings, which is followed by recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER TWO

## THE NARRATIVES OF MIGRATION

### **Historical Narratives**

This chapter provides an overview of the historical background of the Luo ethnic groups through the work of the scholars who have attempted to write about them. For example, Ogot (1967) dated the separation of the Luo ethnic group from the East Sudanic family of “Nilotic” groups to around 3000 years ago. The Nilotics, according to Hamly (1970), are classified according to their languages, which also show a varying degree of similarity. According to Atkinson (1994), this linguistic divergence is a result of the Luo migration southward that led them to settle in many parts of East Africa. The Nilotic ethnic groups include Dinka, Shilluk, Acholi, Bari, Latuka, Pari, Anuak, Luo of Bahr el Ghazal and its sub-groups, Suk-Turkana, Nandi, Lumbwa, and South Kevirondo.

Contrary to the Luo of Bahr el Ghazal’s (South Sudan) mythology and oral history, Ogot (1967) has attributed their demographic redistribution and migration across the 6 African countries to population explosions. The Luo ethnic groups in Africa are the only ethnic groups distributed over 6 African countries in the form of independent kinship groups and clans. Their oral history and myths refer to Sudan as their country of origin and, specifically, to the Greater Bahr el Ghazal region, Republic of South Sudan (Ogot, 1967).

Atikson (1994) dated the migration of Luo ethnic groups to Central Uganda between 1500 and 1800, suggesting that some subsequently crossed to Kenya, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Luo assimilated into other ethnic groups and vice versa during their migration. For example, the Luo Kuman (Bantus) and Lango (Nilotics) in Uganda have adopted the Luo’s culture and language, and the Dinka (Nilotic) in Southern Sudan became a major part of the Luo Chollo, who are known as Shilluk in the Upper Nile region, South Sudan (Atkinson, 1994).

The records of the peoples who assimilated within the larger Luo groups in South Sudan, as well as the rest of the African countries, were kept intact by elders through mystical oral stories. The distance and lack of communication among groups did not prevent them from understanding their roots and place of origin. Some Luo clans in South Sudan used to think that Kenya was their original home, whereas some Luo in Kenya consider it to be Sudan. The perception of the Luo in Kenya is closer to the view presented in current literature, where their migration path from Sudan to Tanzania is documented.



Figure 2: Luo man from Kenya blowing a gourd-horn instrument (oporo) (Missioni della Consolata, c. 1920)

South Sudan still remains a home to about 7 independent Luo ethnic groups: 1. Shilluk (Arabic pronunciation for shaulla), 2. Jo-Luo also known as Jur (a local term which means “strangers” in other South Sudanese groups’ languages), 3. Anuak or Anwaye, 4. Baland Bor (Bori), 5. Thuri (Chatt), 6. Pari (Lokoro), and 7. Achuli (Shuli). These Luo groups in Sudan are further divided into clans, sub-clans, and kinships. The Luo ethnic groups in Sudan are found in South Sudan, regions of Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria, and the Upper Nile states. I will explore their