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**Pokot Masculinity
The Role of Rituals in Forming Men**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a contribution to masculinity studies, and is a case study about the world of Pokot men in Kenya. In it I try to answer the questions: How do the rituals Pokot men go through from birth to death, the age-set system, and the male institutions, war and the cattle exchange system, *tilya*, shape their identity? Which values do they transmit? What are the specific values of Pokot men? How do they internalize them? At the beginning the Pokot people are put into a wider African context, as a part of the big Nilotic group of peoples and the Kalenjin sub-group. It is argued that this people group is young in the present form, probably from the second half of the 19th century, and further that it is a mixture of the primordial Okiek group, called Cherangany, and their neighbors. To better understand the rituals men go through, they are put into the context of the Pokot religion, which main elements are described, and of African traditional religion. As babies men go through the “plant the spirit” ritual in which an ancestral spirit in the family becomes a part of the baby as a guardian spirit. In order to become mature men and full members of the society boys are circumcised and initiated into the secrets of the elders. They stay for three and a half months in an initiation camp where they go through several stages and rituals and have to endure great hardship to become good soldiers. Unity and brotherhood is nurtured in the camp with the aim of it lasting the rest of their lives. All circumcised men belong to a circumcision age-set. The pastoralists who live on the plains go through an alternative initiation ritual, *sapana*, and many agriculturalists do it also in order to be blessed and to be allowed to knit a wedding ring, *ptirim*, on the forearm of their wives. These rituals and all other major rituals they go through reflect the importance of cattle in the life of Pokot men. Their lives revolve around acquiring as many of them as they can and to protect them from sicknesses and enemies. They are the chief form of wealth and ritual sacrifices. In some rituals young men are urged to go raiding to acquire wealth, and successful raiders and those who kill enemies are regarded as heroes. A man, who has many heads of cattle can afford to have many wives and children, who are an important labor force tending to his wealth. Such a man can establish many joined cattle ownerships, *tilya*, across clan lines, through which he distributes his wealth and decreases the danger of losing all his animals in a raid or famine. He can become powerful and enjoys respect in his community, which is the most important male value. Apart from acquiring wealth it is important for a man to beget sons to prolong his life as a member of the family as a guardian spirit.

ÁGRIP

Þessi ritgerð, sem er rannsókn á heimi karlmanna Pókot-þjóðflokksins í Kenýa, er framlag til karlmennskurannsókna. Reynt er að svara spurningunum: Hvernig móta þau ritúöl sem menn fara í gegnum á lífsleiðinni frá vöggu til grafar, aldurshópakerfið og stofnanir karlmanna, stríð og kúaskipti, *tilya*, sjálfsmýnd þeirra? Hvaða gildum miðla þau? Hvaða gildi eru sértæk fyrir Pókot-menn? Hvernig tileinka þeir sér þau? Í upphafi er Pókot-samfélagið sett í víðara afrískt samhengi sem hluti af Nílótum, hinum stóra hópi þjóðflokka og undirflokknum Kalenjin. Því er haldið fram að þessi þjóð sé ung í núverandi mynd, ef til vill frá seinni hluta 19. aldar, og að hún hafi orðið til við blöndun Okiek-frumbyggjaþjóðflokksins Cherangany og nágretta þeirra. Til að skilja betur ritúöl karlmanna eru þau sett inn í ramma trúarbragða Pókot-fólksins sem þau eru hluti af og helstu þáttum þeirra lýst. Trúarbrögð Pókot-manna eru borin saman við afrísk trúarbrögð almennt. Sem ungbörn fara drengir í gegnum ritúalið „að gróðursetja andann“ þar sem forfeðraandi úr fjölskyldunni verður hluti af lífi þeirra. Drengir eru umskornir og innvígðir í leyndardóma karlmanna og verða þannig fullveðja karlmenn í samfélaginu. Þeir dvelja í þrjá og hálfan mánuð í umskurnarbúðum þar sem þeir þurfa að fara í gegnum ýmis stig og ritúöl og þola mikið harðræði til verða góðir hermenn. Lögð er áhersla á að skapa einingu og bræðralag í búðunum sem á að vara alla ævi. Allir umskornir karlmenn tilheyra umskurnar-aldurshópi. Hirðingjarnir sem búa á sléttunum hafa annað innvígsluritúal, *sapana*, en akuryrkjumenn fara einnig í gegnum það til að fá blessun og leyfi til að hnýta giftingarhring, *ptirim*, á framhandlegg eiginkvenna sinna. Þessi og önnur mikilvæg ritúöl á lífsleiðinni endurspeglar mikilvægi nautgripa í lífi Pókotmanna en líf þeirra snýst um að eignast eins marga og þeir geta og varðveita þá fyrir óvinum og sjúkdómum. Nautgripir eru æðsta form auðs og fórna. Ungir menn eru hvattir til að fara í kúaránsferðir í sumum ritúölum til að afla sér auðs og þeim sem verður vel ágengt í slíkum ferðum eru virtir sem hetjur. Maður sem á margar kýr hefur ráð á að eignast margar eiginkonur og börn sem eru mikilvægt vinnuafli til að hugsa um eignir hans. Hann getur komið á mörgum kúaskiptasamböndum, *tilya*, við aðra menn þvert á ættflokkatengsl. Á þann hátt dreifir hann eignum sínum og minnkar hættuna á því að missa öll dýrin í kúaráni eða óáran. Slíkur maður getur orðið valdamikill og nýtur virðingar í samfélaginu en það er mikilvægasta gildi karlmanna. Auk nautgripa er mikilvægt fyrir mann að geta sonu til að framlengja líf sitt í fjölskyldunni og verða verndarandi afkomenda sinna.

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SPELLING

The Pokot language is tonal and there are several sounds in it that are not found in English. I am not going to explain it here except the letter, ĩ, that occurs often in this thesis. It denotes a sound that is between the English u, as in “but,” and i as in “is.”

1. INTRODUCTION

A delegation of elders from afar visited me one day to ask if the church could establish a congregation in their home area. This was a fantastic request for an inexperienced missionary wishing to make a difference in a new country he was willing to serve with all his heart. At the same time he felt constantly the burden of the accusations prominent in the West that missionaries were forcing their religion upon peoples of other nations and even destroying their cultures, neither of which I wished to do. But in this case, people unknown to me took the initiative and visited me to ask if we could come and help in their area. After some consultation with my co-missionary pastor and our Pokot co-workers we decided to visit the area and speak with the people living there and see if we could assist them, even if it would mean being postponed indefinitely. Several months later, church work was started in the area and a lot of people attended the meetings, many of them expressed their intention to take the message of Christianity to their heart.

As a pastor in charge of a big parish, I experienced several times, that delegations of elders from far away places visited me asking if church work could be started in their home areas. Usually a request for schools, dispensaries and other types of community development work would follow later. If the church could meet some of them, a pattern evolved that was repeated almost everywhere. It started with the commencement of church services, which were initially attended by many people of both sexes and all generations, but as time passed the attendance of the mature men ebbed out and eventually only a few of them continued to visit the church faithfully. The majority of attendants were women and children, a situation which made it difficult for new men to join the church because for them women and children constitute one and the same group, the group of children. It was often seen as a blow to their dignity to be with them, and their peers often ridiculed them for staying with this group and some were even accused of chasing the other men's wives.

This experience opened my eyes to the importance of studying the world of Pokot men specifically to find out how they could be approached in a way they felt culturally meaningful and enabled them to join the Christian Church without losing their dignity. The Pokot society is male oriented and men own the most important properties, land and domestic animals and are the decision makers at home and in the

society at large. I realized that the Church could never be established among the Pokot people and gain the necessary strength to become independent of missionaries and foreign aid without the men being a part of its leadership. The church would thus have to become more culturally relevant. As a result, I decided to conduct a research to find out which were the specific male values in this society and took a masters degree in intercultural studies (Th.M.) from the Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Intercultural Studies, Pasadena, California, USA (1990-1991), where it is emphasized that all development and church work should be receptor oriented, culture sensitive, and to be contextualized into local cultures. I felt, however, that my understanding of the world of the Pokot men was not deep enough and decided to proceed further with my studies of their world in order to make a serious contribution to making the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) in West-Pokot a place where men could feel better at home. This is the reason why I undertook this research project.

1.1 Rationale and research questions

Anthropologists have long maintained that peoples' identities and values are reflected, among other things, in their rituals and the symbols constituting them, and that rituals are the most important means of transmitting them between generations (Durkheim 1995 [1912]; Lévi-Strauss 1987 [1950]; Monica Wilson 1954; Gluckman 1963; Turner 1967; Mbiti 1969; Douglas 1966; Leach 1954; 1976; Geertz 1973; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; Bell 1992; 1997; Rappaport 1999; Staal 1979). For that reason, I decided to research all the rituals Pokot men go through from birth to death, especially the initiation rituals, but also the age-set systems, and the male institutions of war, and the cattle sharing system, *tilya*, in order to find out how they shape the male identity and values. Many male values are grounded in the Pokot religion, which is a part of the Pokot tradition, and it is thus of great importance to understand its main thinking. The rituals men go through from birth to death are a part of this religion and cannot be separated from it lest they lose their meaning. They are the stages on the way from birth to death, which have the aim to help them cope with new challenges and the responsibilities every stage brings. Almost all ritual specialists are men.

The main research questions of this thesis are: How do the rituals Pokot men go through from birth to death, the age-set system, and the male institutions, war and

the cattle exchange system, *tilya*, shape their identity? Which values do they transmit? What are the specific values of the Pokot men? How do they internalize them?

I conducted fieldwork among the Pokot people in the West-Pokot district of Kenya from January 1992 to June 1995. During that time I was the ELCK's district pastor of the area, but used my spare time to work on this project, helped by my research assistants. This thesis will make available fundamental parts of the Pokot traditions, many of which have never been committed to writing. It will benefit the Pokot people, foreigners working among them, and students of other Kalenjin ethnic groups because their cultural heritage has much in common with the Pokot traditions and their origin is intertwined. In the Introduction I will describe my background and clarify the methodology I used, review the existing literature about the Pokot people relating to this research, and clarify how I use important concepts such as ethnicity, gender and masculinity.

This will be explained further in 1.6 (Sex, Gender and Masculinity). Specific studies of men as a group has mostly been conducted after 1990. Few studies have been conducted on African masculinities but the literature is expanding (cf. Lindsay and Miescher 2003; Kimmel et. al. 2005; Connell 2005b). This thesis is a case study of the life of Pokot men in Kenya and will be a contribution to gender studies in anthropology in general and masculinities in particular.

1.2 My background

After graduating from the University of Iceland in 1980, as a theologian (cand. theol.), I was ordained as a pastor in January the next year by the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland with the aim of becoming a missionary in Africa. Only a week later my wife and I found ourselves on a Swahili course in Nairobi, that lasted three and a half months, before commencing our service among the Pokot people. We served in Kenya for twelve years between 1981 and 1995, eleven among the Pokot people and one among the Digo people on the coast of Kenya. My role as a pastor was to strengthen young congregations and to establish new ones in areas where no church existed yet, but my wife served among the women and constructed a women's department. I was also involved in preparing, administering and carrying out community development work in the fields of

education, healthcare, improved farming and projects aimed specifically at improving the living conditions of women.

I chose the Cheptulel sub-location in Sigor division in the southeastern part of West Pokot as my main research area following advice from my Pokot friends because the Pokot people in general are of the opinion that the inhabitants of this area have the most “original” and trustworthy form of Pokot rituals and traditions. Men from other parts of Pokot-land consult the elders of Cheptulel and the highland of Lomut location about when to open and close age-sets and when to perform circumcision.¹ The *simar* and *kironгон* rituals, which foretell how the coming planting season will be, are only performed in Cheptulel but their outcome is believed to affect the whole West-Pokot district.

Although the Pokot people have no written history from before the colonial period, they are, as with other ethnic groups and nations whether they have a written history or not, the outcome of a long historical process (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:97). This is a big issue, which will be dealt with in chapter 2 (The Pokot people), where I will discuss the origin of the Pokot people, Kalenjin² and other related ethnic groups. On the other hand the Pokot people have an oral tradition, which, as with other traditions, is constantly changing and adapting to new situations. There is therefore no absolutely “original” Pokot tradition nor of other societies, a matter discussed in 3.4 (Tradition). It is important, however, to note at this point that in the Pokot people’s mind the traditions found in Cheptulel are the most authentic version available among the Pokot people. History as a concept is also interwoven with ethnicity as will be discussed in 1.5 (Ethnicity and Boundaries).

During the time of fieldwork I also conducted a general study of most of the Pokot clans and found that most probably the people who first called themselves Pokot belonged to clans, which seem to have emerged in Cheptulel, and that others moved to West-Pokot from different directions after that. From this collection of different groups the Pokot people emerged as a distinct ethnic group, probably in the 19th century. This was an unexpected discovery for me because most writers follow Ehret who maintains that the Pokot and other Kalenjin ethnic groups originated

¹ I use the word circumcision only about the initiation of men into adulthood. Women go through the most severe form of female genital mutilation there is when they are initiated into adulthood. The custom is very old and it is unclear where it comes from, but certainly not from the Jews or Muslims, because it is older than both Judaism and Islam.

² The Name Kalenjin means I tell you. It will be explained in further detail in 2.3.1.2 (Kalenjin).

together and moved as one big group from a triangle between south eastern Sudan, south western Ethiopia, and northern Kenya, to the big Mt. Elgon³ on the border between Kenya and Uganda, from where they dispersed as distinct ethnic groups. I will discuss Ehret's theory, which is chiefly based on linguistics in chapter 2 (The Pokot People). My discovery sheds entirely new light on how the Pokot people and other Kalenjin ethnic groups came about, and probably other Nilotic groups as well. The Kalenjin is a group of several ethnic groups speaking related languages and have cultures with many similarities, e.g. circumcision of boys, female sexual mutilation and similar age-group systems. Cattle play a prominent role in their lives and are used to pay dowry and they are the supreme form of religious offerings and traditional wealth. The Pokot live in close geographical proximity with most of the Kalenjin groups, the Nandi, Tugen, Sebei, Elkeyo, Marakwet and Cherangany, and are in constant interaction with them. They are classified as one of them. I will discuss this further in chapter 2 (The Pokot people).



Picture 1. The author doing fieldwork.

³ Mt. Elgon is the third highest mountain in Africa, 4321 m.

I kept close contact with Cheptulel all through the research period and visited it regularly; it was my parish during the last year, 1994-1995. I had many friends in the area and had been in contact with it from the time I arrived in Pokot, because the work of the ELCK in West Pokot district started there in 1977. During the years I lived in Pokot I was in close contact with the Pokot culture and participated actively in the lives of my neighbors. For that reason some of my knowledge comes inevitably also from areas outside Cheptulel.



Picture 2. I lived with my family in West Pokot during the time of fieldwork. My daughters, Heiðrún and Ólöf Inger, with friends at a festival.



Picture 3. My son, Jón Magnús, attended a nursery school under a tree.



Picture 4. My wife, Valdís Magnúsdóttir, organized widespread work among women.

1.3 Methodology

Much has been written about fieldwork and how to write good ethnographies. Bronislaw Malinowski (1984 [1922]) made participant observation and fieldwork the standard research method of anthropology. The working methods were fairly fixed; the anthropologist learned the language of the people he studied and had theoretical tools to find what was believed to be the core of the culture. Because it was too much work to research the whole culture, he looked for selected information that was thought to reveal the central aspects of the culture as a whole (Clifford 1988). Talal Asad (1973) pointed at Western bias and ethnocentrism that are found in many ethnographies as anthropologists tended to look at the peoples they described as the “other.” Said spoke in the same vein and asserted that the research methods of Western anthropologists reflected “orientalism,” i.e. a Western style of dominating, and their prejudices, ignorance and misconceptions. Cultures were interpreted in ethnographies with Western eyes. In his view, orientalism reflects the culture that created it rather than the objects of its ethnography (Said 1978:2-3; Clifford and Marcus 1986). In the seventies and eighties anthropology went through a time of strong self-criticism for its involvement with colonialism and its integrity as science, independent of political and economic interests of the colonial powers, was severely

questioned. During this time, the so-called reflexive anthropology emerged focusing on the anthropologist as a mediator. It criticised some of the traditional fieldwork methods and expressed doubts about its accuracy pointing out how many possibilities there were to distort the information anthropologists collected and to manipulate it when they finally wrote their ethnographies. Their research methods and questions, and their assistants' answers, were all marked by their respective cultures and historical situations (Rabinow 1977). Comaroff and Comaroff (1992), agreeing with this view, pointed out that all ethnographies are moulded by their historical contexts and are thus their products. Geertz (1988) criticized also the participant observation method in a similar way as the reflexive anthropologists and pointed out how difficult it is for an ethnographer to write objectively because he has been a part of what he is describing and is thus partly transmitting his own experience. He asked if he could always rightly be called the author of what he describes because usually other people have participated in creating the material (cf. Clifford 1988). From the anthropology Geertz had participated in creating, the so-called symbolic or semiotic anthropology, there emerged experiments with the ethnographic form. The so-called polyphonic ethnographies, in which the voices of many people from the field speak in the ethnography is a good example, although Gupta and Ferguson (2001) have pointed out that it does not solve the problem of otherness. Several anthropologists have questioned the traditional methodologies and theories of anthropology and all metanarratives and grand theories without providing much constructive theory themselves. Wolcott (1999), however, still believes in ethnography, as a methodology, not necessarily that the anthropologist should go to another country to do it, but as "a way of looking." Gupta and Ferguson (1997) hold a similar view, but according to them the ethnographer is an observer who must be involved with the community he is describing but does not have to go away to do his job. I agree with this view, that ethnography is first and foremost a method and the venue is irrelevant. This reflects exactly the situation when I did my fieldwork, i.e. I did not leave my home country to do fieldwork but did it where I was living and working. The same holds true for my research assistants. Sigríður Dúna Kristmundsdóttir brings this method to its extreme by making the life of her country woman her field when she describes her lifespan (2001) as an anthropologist. Marcus (1998) advocates for "multi locale" ethnography where it is possible to do research in more than one place in the same research project.

For me Marilyn Strathern's observation is very important, that an anthropologist can neither absorb all the reality of the field nor describe it in all its fullness as it can be approached from indefinitely many angles, each of which represents only a part of it (Strathern 1991:xiv; cf. Jackson 1989:182). My description of the Pokot society, from a missionary's point of view, is thus one of many equally valid angles. My long stay in the field has given me an in-depth understanding of the life of the Pokot people which is a big advantage for this research, as Stoller (1989:6-7) has emphasized, that the amount of time an anthropologist spends in the field is of great importance for the depth of understanding he will gain of the world of the people he studies.

The methodologies I used in the fieldwork were traditional participant observation and interviews with key informants (cf. Spradley 1979, 1980; Babbie 1989; Isaac and Michael 1989; Gupta 1997; Wolcott 1999). Due to a grant from The Icelandic Science Fund (Vísindasjóður), I could employ three young Pokot men as research assistants, Jackson Kamoru who worked for me through the whole research period, Benson Mosin who helped for me for two years and Joel Kirew who assisted me during the secondary school vacations, about one year in total, scattered over a three year period. Kamoru and Mosin had finished form four in secondary school, equivalent to about half gymnasium in Scandinavia, before I employed them, but Kirew finished secondary school, i.e. form four, during the course of the research project. I trained all of them to do qualitative research and how to select good informants, who should, as a rule of thumb, be old men known to have knowledge of the tradition of their people and especially the topic they were researching each time. My assistants helped me to collect the material for this study by interviewing a score of selected elders in the society, both individually and in groups, and by participant observation at rituals. Other assistants helped me on specific topics. All of them took a list of questions that I made for them to use in most of their interviews (see appendix no. 1), which they recorded and transcribed both in the Pokot language and English. They were however, free to ask other questions than I had made as they felt natural according to the flow of the conversation, making the interviews "semi-structured" (Wolcott 1999:53-54). They also recorded the rituals they observed and all the accompanying songs and transcribed the material later. When I had read through their manuscripts I often sent them back to dig deeper for more information and in several cases they had to go many times to try to expand the material they had

acquired. By giving them feedback in this way every time I met them, their training continued all through the time of fieldwork.

I also collected some material myself through interviews and participant observation, e.g. the coming out rituals of the circumcision, *kipuno*, the *sapana* alternative initiation ritual for men, and the secretive *poro* ritual, which is conducted when young men have completed the circumcision process, and other rituals as well, some of which are not a part of this thesis. I visited two circumcision camps in the Kongelai area during the research period when I lived there at the outset of the research and became a kind of father figure in one of them, which was near to my home, because I provided some sacks of maize and kidney beans, cooking oil, and bottles of antiseptic to clean the wounds of the initiates. All this was highly appreciated and was expressed by a visit to my home when the elders brought all the members of the camp to sing and dance for my wife and I. They stayed at our home for two or three hours, giving us insights into the songs they sing in the circumcision camp with accompanying dances. When I visited their camp, the elders in charge gave me a guided tour through the whole camp, explaining what I saw and answering my questions. I will describe an initiation camp in detail in 5.2.2 (Preparation). The material in chapter 5 (Becoming a man) is, however, mostly collected in Cheptulel.

As a part of the Pokot community for eleven years, I often discussed various aspects of the culture with people and observed several rituals, e.g. cleansing rituals. I often heard people perform various rituals in my neighborhood and sometimes observed them, e.g. the *sapana*, an alternative initiation ritual for men, which will be described in 6.4, but before it is performed in the morning, people sing and dance all through the night. I also heard people sing and dance many consecutive evenings late into the night as a preparation for female genital mutilation, e.g. when I lived in Chepareria. I often heard people dance and sing praises to the men's favorite oxen in the evenings and far into the night when I lived in Kongelai, etc. I tried to participate in the life of my Pokot neighbors as much as I could and often drove patients in cases of emergency to hospitals, helped them sometimes to transport their goods to the market or homes, contributed money when friends and neighbors were raising money for school fees in order to send their children to secondary schools. As a pastor I also participated with the people of various communities to build schools and carry out other community development projects and visited them at home at times of happiness and sorrow. Almost every day people visited me to ask my wife and I for

help to solve problems of all kinds, sickness, lack of finances, marriage difficulties, disputes with neighbors etc. Often they spent long hours on our veranda where we drank tea together and talked, or in my office where many matters were discussed. Sometimes I spent weekends away from home with my evangelists staying with them all the time, which gave me a golden opportunity to get to know them very well. During long night hours we had extensive discussions about various topics. On church boards and committees, at meetings with evangelists, or when teaching them at courses, elders, women, youth and others, many aspects of the Pokot culture were discussed, e.g. various rituals and customs. In this and many other ways I learned a lot about the Pokot people and their culture, and became acquainted with many people, which was invaluable for my research. During the time I lived among the Pokot people I learned to appreciate and love them and their way of thinking enriched mine very much. It may take time to get to know and understand them well but when you have got a friend you have got friendship that lasts a lifetime.

In order to verify the validity of the data of the circumcision process, which was mostly collected by my research assistants, I presented all of it in detail at a week long course for men's group leaders from the congregations of ELCK from all over the West-Pokot district, some who were former ritual specialists. This gave me an invaluable verification of the validity of my findings and some additional details. I had one research assistant collect material in the Sok location for the sake of comparison in an attempt to avoid one-sidedness and to make up for possible limitation and errors of the research assistants in Cheptulel. Some material of general interest was collected in Sok, e.g. about some clans, which were highly concentrated there and some rituals. It is my aim in this research to try to reproduce the emic view of the Pokot people as much as possible (cf. McKaskie 1989). It is not my goal to describe rituals as they occurred at one specific occasion, even if that may sometimes be the case, but to reproduce them in general because my aim is to find what male values are transmitted and how the male identities are shaped through this. Without my research assistants and the help of many Pokot friends this research would have been much shallower.

As flaws can be found in all ethnographies, many scholars have pointed out that reliability can be improved if a group of people conducts the fieldwork together and consult and correct each other in the process, thus being fellow learners during the time of the research (cf. Davies 1999). During my fieldwork I met with my

research assistants at least once a month and several times all of us met together to discuss our findings where everyone was free to speak his mind. In December every year we spent almost a week together. Although I was the chief learner, they learned also a lot about their own culture (cf. Herzfeld 2001:49). When the research project started they did not understand the Pokot clan system as a whole. They knew the clans of their parents and a few others, but did not have an overview of the system (cf. Appendix 5, Pokot clans). They found it very interesting to learn about it and many other things in their own culture and for that reason enjoyed very much being a part of the research team. We worked therefore, together as a group and were all on an ongoing training.

When I was still living in Pokot, I typed as much as I could of the material my assistants and I collected during the time of fieldwork and continued when I had moved to Iceland. It has been the latter part of my doctoral project to bring all the material together.

1.3.1 Western epistemology

As a European, I am aware of the problem of communication that anthropologists face who do fieldwork in foreign cultures as they are caught between the intention to understand the informants' point of view and to share it with anthropologists and other people in their own culture when they incorporate it into "an analytical or theoretical discourse defined by Euro-American social science" (Herzfeld 2001:26).

Salzmann (2002) has rightly criticized the so called reflexive anthropologists for focusing too much on the person of the ethnographer in the field, his feelings, and how he affects and moulds the material he works with according to his goals (cf. Rabinow 1977; Clifford 1988:41-54; Clifford and Marcus 1986). They have not succeeded better than others to bridge the gap between the particular culture in the field and the reader in the world outside, and are, as Herzfeld has observed, "trapped in the logic of a Western self-absorption." (2001:43-44; cf. Tyler 1986).

The majority of anthropologists are from the Western world and those coming from other parts of the world are usually a part of the Western anthropological tradition and epistemology.⁴ Their discourse is mostly "*Western*" (Comaroff and

⁴ Old examples are e.g. Kenyatta (1978 [1938]) who studied under Malinowski and later became the first president of Kenya, the Nigerian Busia (1954) who studied under Radcliffe-Brown and later became a prominent figure in the Nigerian society.

Comaroff 1992:10). The research methods are dominated by visualism and textualism (Jackson 1989; Fabian 1983; Classen 1993; Herzfeld 2001:34-37). Their terminology and concepts carry philosophical and historical baggage and definitions. This is reflected in the way concepts such as time, space, power, cultural and political domination are used, which do not always correspond properly to the reality they are meant to describe because they are often defined in a different way in non-Western cultures (cf. Strathern 1981b:169), and thus the material is forced into foreign forms (Wagner 1974:95-122). As a result, there is an imminent danger, as Englund and Leach (2000) have pointed out, that when “an underlying meta-narrative” of the social science is applied to the “particular” of the ethnographic material in order to “situate” it in a wider context of sciences, its meaning is distorted (see also Wolcott 1999:30-31, 82-88). Every ethnography is thus a child of its time and the context in which it is created, it is “a historically situated mode of understanding historically situated contexts, each with its own ... kinds of subjects and subjectivities, objects and objectivities” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:9-10; cf. Moore 1994:126). In my opinion anthropologists should adhere to “reflexive comparativism,” where cultures and cultural objects be treated as interesting in their own right and not evaluated by comparing them with “us” as “the immovable touchstone” (Herzfeld 2001:65).

As Herzfeld has noted, “even attributing the concept “philosophy” to African societies risks representing their thought in Euro centric terms” (2001:63; cf. Hountondji 1983; Mundimbe 1988). In my view this hegemony of Western culture, its philosophy and epistemology in anthropology (and other sciences), is its great weakness, because cultures of peoples of non-Western societies are mostly reproduced from that perspective only (cf. Said 1978; Asad 2000). This is unfortunate because anthropologists are describing, explaining and interpreting cultures of other peoples. This situation is gradually changing as people from non-Western countries are increasingly conducting ethnographic research in Europe and other countries, which will eventually put an end to the Western “superior status” in anthropology (cf. Godina 2003), and will, in the years to come, contribute to making it increasingly more “cosmopolitan” (cf. Kuper 1994, 1996) or “transnational” (Appadurai 1991:191). This might lead to new types of epistemologies and philosophical hegemonies, which in my view, would enrich the science of anthropology and continuously challenge the Western point of view (see Herzfeld 2001:31). This is in accordance with the view of many contemporary anthropologists that culture is not a

fixed entity but is understood more as a “system of contested meanings” (Mascia-Lees and Black 2000:92). Some African anthropologists, such as Mafeje (2001; 1997) and Mundimbe (1988), have taken this challenge and try to analyse it and make contributions to rectifying it (cf. p’Bitek 1970). It is, however, a huge task to change and adapt the whole epistemology of social sciences to the African reality and thus there is still a long way to go before it will materialize. Until then anthropology will continue to be mostly a Western university discipline representing the cultures of the world predominantly from that perspective.

It is important to understand that the historical and cultural context of a society is itself hermeneutical and may analyse and interpret its reality differently than Western sciences do (McKaskie 1989:72). This emic way of interpretation is of great importance in all ethnographic researches, although I am aware that I, as an intermediary between the Pokot reality and this text, am, to a certain extent a distortion factor. It is thus my hope that the Pokot people themselves will soon begin to conduct researches in their own culture and participate in creating an African discourse in anthropology.

In spite of the problematic nature of a foreigner writing ethnography of a society with a greatly different culture, I have tried to reproduce the general, emic view of the Pokot people themselves by using a great number of informants and a group of indigenous research assistants. The Pokot people are composed of over 30 clans, most of which originate among other ethnic groups, especially the Kalenjin, which is a part of the big Nilotic group of peoples as previously mentioned, but also others. The Pokot also live in close proximity with other non-Kalenjin neighbors, such as the Turkana and Karamojong, and have been influenced by them in many ways as will be explained in later chapters. The Pokot culture is thus not an island but a mixture of various traditions, Kalenjin and others. A version of some Pokot rituals and customs are also found among these but many of them have not yet been recorded. The ethnographic material of this research is, however, only about the Pokot people and I have not conducted any field research among other ethnic groups.

1.3.2 An ethical issue

The Pokot people who knew of my research were generally glad that someone was willing to write down their cultural heritage and felt it as a recognition of their culture and dignity. Some information in this research is secretive for some parts of the

population, especially some aspects of circumcision and the *poro*-ritual, which follows the circumcision (cf. Babbie 1989:470-490), which secrets the initiates are forbidden to tell to women, children and uncircumcised men. In my view it is of fundamental importance to know these rituals in order to understand the world of men, which values they transmit and how they contribute to constructing the masculine gender of Pokot men. It is an ethical question whether I should commit these rituals to writing. After consulting many Pokot friends, I decided to do it because it was important for them that the truth about them was revealed because they are surrounded with secrecy and lies and one of their aims is to suppress the women of the society, as will be clear in chapters 4 and 5, when I discuss circumcision and *poro*. Educated people and Pokot Christians encouraged me to write also about the secretive parts of their culture, as for them and many others, they are not secret any more and they regard it of great importance to preserve these traditions in a written form as well as other parts of their cultural heritage because they are being eroded by modernity and changes in the society. Writers, such as Barton (1921) and Meyerhoff (1981; cf. 1.4 Literature about Pokot), have also mentioned some aspects of circumcision shortly before.

Many leaders in the ELCK, some of which had previously been ritual leaders themselves, as mentioned above, helped me and my assistants to find some of the best available informants on the topics we were studying at any given time and some of them were excellent informants themselves and sometimes revealed information others were reluctant to do. Only a few in the whole group of informants were, however, Christian believers.

1.4 Literature about Pokot

Many travel documents and articles, a few masters and several doctoral theses have been written about the Pokot people and their society, especially the visible and material part of it, their economy and way of living. Little has been written about their non-material culture, their oral literature, religion, and worldview. I will review the most important part of this literature relating to this research. I have divided it into two parts, the literature of travelers and government officials, and scholarly studies. Much of the literature in the first category is superficial and reveals ignorance and often prejudices and ethnocentrism about Pokot and Africa in general and some of the

current European ideas about this part of the world at the time of writing and how they compared the Pokotland and its inhabitants with Europe and Europeans.

1.4.1 Travelers and government officials

The Pokot people are mentioned in documents from the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, but they had very little contact with Europeans before 1900. Travelers and government officials were the first to write about them, usually short accounts, only mentioning them in passing. The German missionary Ludwig Krapf (1968 [1854]) makes the first known written reference to the Pokot, calling them Sukku, a distortion of the name Suk, which the Europeans used about them until the 1960s. Some writers gave short descriptions of the district and the people (Wakefield 1870; Thompson 1885; Macdonald 1899; Austin 1899 and Coupland 1939:370). Some of these writers and others aired their ideas about how the Pokot people might have come about (Johnston 1902; Hobley 1906). Dundas (1910) believed they came from north moving southwards to the Kerio River and Beech (1911), that they had originally been two ethnic groups, the Chok or Chuk and the Sekerr, but refugees from Samburu, Lake Turkana, Moiben,⁵ Karamojong (in Uganda) and Nandi had married into these groups resulting in the emergence of the Pokot people. According to him, this view was supported by the fact that there were astonishingly many types of people among the Pokot people from “handsome Hamite to dwarf-like pigmy” (Beech 1911:2; cf. Elliot 1909; 1911). Barton (1921) thought the agricultural part of the Pokot people, especially those living in Cheptulel, were the most original part of the population. Already at this stage first versions of the two most important theories about their origin had emerged, i.e. first that they came from north and secondly that they were a mixture of people of various origin.

Huntingford (1933) thought that the irrigation channels in the Marakwet district and the Mwino valley of West Pokot had traces of the so-called Azanian civilization, which he believed explained the existence of certain innovations in Eastern Africa. He did not believe that they could be the invention of the people living there themselves.⁶

⁵ Is in Uasin Gishu district.

⁶ Huntingford (1933) believed the Azanian civilization flourished at the Horn of Africa and existed during the first seven centuries of the Christian era on the coast of East Africa and to the 14th or 15th century up-country as he thought the peoples living there were too “barbarous” to be able to invent this civilization by themselves. This civilization was, according to him, destroyed with the coming of Islam

As Bianco has noted, many of these writers were government officials who did not develop spiritual intimacy with the Pokot people and stayed usually only for a short time among them.⁷ They did not learn the vernacular and their writings reflect Western prejudices and ignorance of that time about Africans and their cultures (Bianco 1992:56).

1.4.2 Scholarly studies

Scholarly studies of the Pokot can be seen as starting with Schneider (1953), the first person to write a doctoral thesis about the Pokot society in which he describes its main institutions and economic structure before it had been affected greatly by Western influence. He showed the importance of cattle in the Pokot subsistence economy and how the most fundamental male values are grounded in them (see also Schneiter 1956; 1957; 1964; 1967). Schneiter also gave a short account of the Pokot religion and the most important ethical values of the society (1955) and why the Pokot people were resistant to external changes (1959). Because *Tororot* gave them cattle, goats and sheep they were afraid that the fundamental principle of the Pokot society, *pöghishyö*, peace and harmony, might be put out of balance with unforeseen consequences, misfortune for both animals and humans, if they introduced new domestic animals, e.g. hens, or changed the setup of life in another way. Peace and harmony had to be maintained by all means but it is obtained and preserved by conforming to the laws of the tradition, which is guarded by the gods and the ancestors (1955). Steenbergen (1990) explained this concept further and also how sin can undermine it, when he analyzed various concepts of sin in this society (1991). Conant (1965) described how Pokot is divided into more or less independent neighborhoods, *korok*, and (1982) how, by their traditional pastoralism, thick acacia bushes are kept at bay. Nangulu (2001) pointed out, as Schneiter, that the Pokot have

which did not penetrate up-country and thus this civilization might have survived there as long as to the 14th or 15th century. He was of the view that the Azanian civilization might have contributed to establishing some of the early ports on the East African coast. He and many other Western scholars believed inventions in Africa came from the north and had difficulties believing that it could have been the other way round.

⁷ Bianco gives further details of the involvement of some of the writers referred to above with the Pokot people. Macdonald (1899) led the Juba expedition in which Austin (1899) participated, Johnston (1902) was a Special Commissioner to the Uganda Protectorate 1902-1906, Eliot (1909) a Commissioner of the East Africa Protectorate 1901-1904, Hobley (1906) a Assistant Deputy Commissioner of the East Africa Protectorate 1902-1906, Dundas (1910) a District Commissioner of Baringo 1907-1908 and Beech (1911) a District Commissioner of Baringo District 1909-1910 (Bianco 1992:56).

always resisted changes that they have regarded as threatening to their subsistence economy and evaluated inventions on the basis of whether they believed they strengthened or threatened it.

Patterson (1969) was the first to write scholarly about the history of the Pokot people. He wrote about the colonial period from the time Kenya became a British territory and later a British colony (cf. Nangulu 2001). He describes the struggles of this foreign power to invent schools and modern agriculture. He also described the coming of the first missionaries. This account is very valuable and gives insight into the history of Pokot in the 20th century. No serious research has, however, been done to write the history of the Pokot people before the year 1900 as hardly any documents exist before that time and hardly any attempts have been made to write down its oral traditions. Ehret (1971) has, however, made an attempt to reproduce the history of the Kalenjin cluster of peoples and the Nilotes as a whole by using linguistics,⁸ archaeology and ethnographic material, and put forward the hypothesis that their origin could be traced to a group he called Proto-Kalenjin, that he estimated to have existed about 1.000 AD, and traced its origin further to the so-called Proto-Nilotes, which he believed existed in the third millennium B.C.⁹ As mentioned above, most scholars who have written about the history of the Pokot people or the origin of one or more of the Kalenjin groups, follow Ehret's theory.

Distefano (1985) relying heavily on Ehret and using his methodology, tried to develop it further in an attempt to reconstruct the history of the Western Highlands of Kenya and the Central Rift Valley during the last 1500-2000 years and to find out how the Kalenjin ethnic groups and others related to them had emerged and developed in this area. He included a very inaccurate account of the history of the Pokot people, which is based on old and untrustworthy written sources. Ehret's methodology will be dealt with in chapter 2, but at this stage it is sufficient to say that I agree with scholars who find it highly controversial and speculative.

Several authors have written about the Dini ya Msambwa, an interesting millennium sect that started as a kind of an anti colonial protest movement in Trans Nzoia District in the fifth decade of the 20th century under the leadership of Elijah Mashinde, and got several hundred followers in West Pokot led by Lucas Kipkech. This sect was the only movement among the Pokot people, that was openly hostile to

⁸ I.e. glottochronology and lexicostatistics.

⁹ See also Ehret 1968, 1974, 1976, 1988, 2001 and 2002.

the British colonial authority during its rule, and writings of several authors and government officials reveal how uneasy the colonial authority was about its existence and activities in West-Pokot, seeing it as a potential threat to its power. The history of Dini ya Msambwa shows that it was possible to sell new ideas to the Pokot people by adapting them to their way of thinking. Those who became adherents to the movement did it, among other things, due to promises of cattle and the ideal Pokot life (cf. Usher-Wilson 1952; Kipkorir 1973b; Were 1972; 1977; Wipper 1971; de Wolf 1977; 1983; 1984, Buijtenhuijs 1984; Bianco 1992; 1996; Lundebly 1982; 1998). I will say more about Dini ya Msambwa in chapter 2.

Reynolds (1982), Tully (1985) and Muir (1985) studied changes following the incorporation of the East and West-Pokot districts into the Kenyan society and the world economy, and Reynolds has an interesting account about the Cherangany people, or Sengwer, as the Pokot people call them, one of many aboriginal people groups in Kenya scattered over a wide area and which are collectively called Okiek. They live in the West-Pokot district in great proximity to the Pokot population, mostly in the Siyoi location. Their culture is very similar to that of the Pokot people and their language is closely related. Many believe that the Okiek are the aboriginal people in the areas where they live, i.e. that they lived there already when other people moved there and that they may hold the key to important aspects of the past history of Kenya (Blackburn 1971; Kratz 1988). The proximity of the Cherangany people is thus of great significance.

Tully (1985) gives an account of the history of the Pokot people, mainly in the 20th century in her doctoral thesis, especially the economic policy of the colonial power in the district. Dietz (1987) collected much data about the life, economy and survival techniques of the pastoral Pokot in Kara-Pokot and Upe County in Uganda. Nangulu (2001) explored the matter further and demonstrated how the British and later the Kenyan government, destabilized the subsistence and survival mechanisms of the Pokot people, especially the pastoralists, by not giving them freedom to live according to the needs of their subsistence economy. Yadeta (1985) and Bolling (1996) describe the survival methods of the pastoral Pokot, especially the cattle sharing system of domestic animals, *tilya*, which is a very important part of the Pokot men's culture and masculinity. Bolling (2000) describes the ideas of manhood and warriorhood of the East Pokot in Baringo district, and some aspects of the clan system as well. He has also an interesting account of the history of the raids between the

Pokot and the Turkana (1990a). During all the years I lived in Pokot these neighbors raided each other every year, especially during the dry season, sometimes with great casualties as a result. He explored the matter further (1993) and what it meant to the Pokot society and the value of various groups within the society and their importance in intra ethnic conflicts and conflicts within the society. I benefited most from Tully and Nangulu about the policies of the colonial authorities in Pokot and how it affected the inhabitants. Bolling's writings are very useful for the main subject of this thesis, the identities of men.

Meyerhoff (1981), who studied the life of women in the big Mwino Valley in Sigor division and their relationship with men, described the most important rituals they go through, especially female genital mutilation, and the power and powerlessness of the sexes towards each other, pointing out that sexuality is the greatest power women have in their relationship with men. Her account is an important contribution towards the opening up of the world of women and how their gender is developed. Edgerton (1964a) wrote also about women and described what he believed to be the root of antagonism between the sexes and the possibility women have to punish bad husbands by shaming them through *kilapat*, a practice where a group of women use force to punish and humiliate them. Men are also said to be able to punish badly behaving wives in the same way. All through the years I lived in Pokot I never heard about an incident where *kilapat* was used, neither against men nor women. On the other hand men sometimes had friends help them discipline their wives by beating them. Bianco (1991) writes about political ramifications of motherhood and, further (1992) how the Roman Catholic Church combined Christian worship and medical treatment among the inhabitants of Riwoy location, an area with many Dini ya Msambwa adherents, and how it appealed to the population there. Cox (1972) describes the health situation, especially of the pastoral Pokot, noting that their physical appearance varies greatly, indicating a mixed origin. Nyamwaya (1982 and 1987) writes about the Pokot people's ideas of diseases and how they manage to make traditional and Western medicine coexist peacefully, which is very interesting.

Lewis (1991) and Davis (1998) point to the importance of understanding and using existing leadership models in the Pokot culture when indigenous church leaders are trained, instead of Western. Pöghisiö (1987) underlines the importance of understanding the social organization of the pastoral Pokot, especially the opinion leaders, and that communication is receptor oriented. These writers stress the

importance of foreigners who work among the Pokot people are culture sensitive and receptor oriented (cf. Kjartan Jónsson 1991 and Sanders 2001).

Handing over reports of the district commissioners from 1911 to 1989 provide much valuable information about the development in the West Pokot district during that period, and the general policy of the Kenyan government from the perspective of its officials. Studies by e.g. Tully, Nangulu and others about the work and policies of the authorities are partly based on this material. I use it also in the section about the history of West-Pokot in the 20th century in chapter 2.

Missionaries have contributed greatly to the field of linguistics by writing grammar and dictionaries, combined (Crazzolara 1978; Baroja 1989), and separate, an English-Pokot dictionary (Baroja 1983) and a Pokot-English dictionary (Baroja 1998) with a list of Pokot clans in an appendix. Crazzolara and Baroja's grammars and dictionaries are very valuable tools when working with the Pokot language. All these books are necessary when people work with the Pokot language and I consulted them often.

Few authors have made serious attempts to describe the religion and the non-material culture of the Pokot people. Hasthorpe (1983) analyzed their musical tradition. Peristany (1951) described the *sapana* initiation ceremony and the *sapana* age-set system, which the pastoral Pokot use as a substitute for circumcision and partly the circumcision age-set system, due to security reasons. Bolling (2000) also describes the *sapana* age-set system. Peristany (1975) described also the circumcision age-sets and the role of prophets. His and Bolling's researches are quality work and very useful for my study. Conant (1974) has an account of the *sintagh* ritual, which is performed at solstice in June. There he claims that it is accepted by the Pokot society, at least in the Mwino Valley, for a period of one month a year, within which time this ritual is performed, that men can elope or capture young women and take them as their wives (cf. 1966). It is Visser, however, who has written the most extensive account of the Pokot religion so far. First, he tried to assess (1982) the work of missionaries in the Orwa community in the West-Pokot District near the Turkana border, and then (1989) wrote his doctoral thesis on the religion of the Pokot people where he tried to give a comprehensive description of the religion and its rituals.

Much of the literature referred to above are the first documents written about their subjects and thus do not describe them in depth. Although Visser (1989) sheds light on many aspects of the Pokot religion and his account is very valuable, it is

incomplete in many ways because some important topics are not dealt with comprehensively enough or not at all, especially the most important rituals men undergo such as the whole circumcision process. The little information he has about it is wrong and is based on the lies men tell women and children about what allegedly takes place in the initiation camp during the circumcision process in order to deceive them. Rituals following it, such as *poro*, are not mentioned at all. De Wolf (1983) and Barton's (1921) accounts of circumcision are also wrong in the same way as Visser's, but Barton has, however, some correct information about it in his short account as well.

From this review of literature about the Pokot people it is clear that little has been done to study the world of men specifically and thus there is, in my view, a great need to expand the literature with studies about their lives, especially descriptions and analysis of the fundamental rituals and institutions that shape their masculinities.

I will now discuss some concepts important for this study and start with ethnicity and boundaries.

1.5 Ethnicity and boundaries

More than half a century ago, Leach called the existence of clear-cut "tribes" an "ethnographic fiction" (1954:290-291), and Southall (1970) called it an "illusion," as such entities were often the result of the colonial authorities' lumping several small ethnic groups together to simplify their administration and thus imposing foreign identity upon them (Eriksen 2002:33 [1993]; Porter and Sheppard 1998:340-341; Mafeje 1971). Wright and Suny-Cortland (1999:421) point out that Africans "discovered" their "ethnic identities" when they began to read European studies about themselves in the first half of the 20th century, which reflected originally the European notions of "how things ought to be rather than the African notion of how things were." This way of misrepresenting African nations has caused indignation among many educated Africans. Mafeje feels strongly that since the term "tribe" does not have an equivalent term in the African languages and is utterly derogatory, it should be discarded and "ethnic group" used instead (1997:12, 14; cf. 1970; Southall 1976).

Barth (1969:10-11) defines an ethnic group as an entity that

1. is largely biologically self-perpetuating,
2. shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms,
3. makes up a field of communication and interaction,
4. has a membership which identifies itself,

and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.

Schermerhorn, whose definition has influenced many, adds that ethnic groups have a common proper name, a myth of common ancestry and common origin, shared historical memories of a common past, one or more elements of common culture, which normally includes religion, customs and language, a link with a homeland, and a sense of solidarity (Hutchinson and Smith 1996:6-7; Schermerhorn 1970; 1978:12; cf. Weber 1996:56 [1922]; Cohen 1996a:370-371). Geertz holds a similar view, maintaining that ethnic attachment comes from “cultural givens,” i.e. kinship, language, religion, customs etc., which he calls “primordial bonds” (1973:259).

Cohen (1996a) criticizes definitions which presuppose that ethnicity is “an essentially innate predisposition ... separate from any social “content”” (:373), “fixed” and “static” (:375), that the human personality is inflexible and unable to adjust to social changes. Ethnicity should rather be regarded as “a variable” the result of interaction between groups (1996b:83).

I agree with this criticism, because, as Vansina (1990) points out rightly, ethnic identity is constantly changing as time passes and cultures and ethnic groups are rarely homogenous because ethnic identities are an “ongoing process” (Clifford 1988:9). According to Kristín Loftsdóttir (2005:18), ethnicity is not monolithic, but flexible, contextual and exists in conjunction with other aspects of individual identity, such as age, gender, status and religion and can be renegotiated and redefined at different times and circumstances. Ethnic identity is thus not fixed but always to a certain extent fluid.

Every ethnic group has thus come about as a result of certain historical circumstances and development (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; 1.2 My background). People flow across boundaries, but the groups maintain their distinction through “social processes of exclusion and incorporation” (Barth 1969:10), i.e. “border guards” such as language, dress, food etc., that preserve the groups (Hutchinson and Smith 1996:9). Eriksen adds that, “boundaries between them are fuzzy, ambiguous and situational” (2002:89 [1993]; cf. Gellner 1983:54).

According to Jerman (1997), the concept “ethnicity” was not used in anthropological literature until after 1960 when the colonies were gaining independence and the new governments were struggling with nation building. She points out that Glazer and Moynihan suggested in 1975 that “ethnicity” reflected this

new reality and was an expansion of the concept “ethnic group,” without explaining further what that meant. Still the notion was that of belonging and distinctiveness of a group. Jerman maintains that there is “almost a universal agreement” that “ethnicity” is “a form of consciousness and that it is dynamic“ (1997:50). For Eriksen it “entails a focus on dynamics rather than statistics” (2002:11 [1993]).

Ethnicity has been used in the post-colonial times to mark the identity and to emphasize the distinctive features of ethnic groups, often against other groups and the state, in the multi-ethnic nations of Africa, often as a weapon in the struggle for ownership of natural resources, as in the Nigerian delta, and a fair share of the national economy (cf. Obi 2001; Moore 1994:129-130). This is the situation in Kenya and the Pokot is one among many ethnic groups in the Kenyan nation. There is a rivalry for influence among the representatives of individual ethnic groups in the parliament. The Pokot ethnicity is in this way used politically.

From what has now been said, the concepts “history” and “ethnic identity” are closely interwoven because identity is based, among other things, on knowledge of a common past. A society, which does not know its past, does not know where it comes from and where it is going. History is knowledge of the past as it is reconstructed in the present (Kjeldalsli 1992:21, 34). According to Smith, ethnicity has “primordial ties”, i.e. traces of old times can often be found in modern societies (2000:69), in things like “blood-ties, language and religion” (Jerman 1997:50-51). For that reason, there is no such thing as an entirely “new” ethnic group because it does have traces in the past one way or another. Ang (2000:1) makes the important point, that although “cultural identity“ has a history and is a product of a historical development, it is not only a matter of the past and the present but has also to do with the future, what people can become and is thus “a resource of hope,” a site of agency that energizes people to create their own history.

The historical knowledge of the Pokot people goes only back a few generations, maybe five, but it is partly substituted by its rituals, which are rooted in the past and are bridges between the past and the present and are a continuation of older traditions, even if the past history is in great darkness. The circumcision ritual is a good example, with its accompanying myths about past events. Every grown-up of the same sex knows the same stories and thus they create a feeling of coherence in this society.

The Pokot people live in close proximity with several ethnic groups, both Kalenjin, such as the Cherangany, Keyo, Marakwet, and Sebei, and others, e.g. the Karamojong and Turkana, and interact a great deal with them. They have, as will be explained in later chapters, among other things brought or copied rituals from them, e.g. *sapana* from the Karamojong, and many cattle names from the Turkana, which verifies scholarly observations that changes are absorbed into the life of a people as a result of constant renegotiation of their identity (cf. Kristín Loftsdóttir 2005:19).

That is the case with the Pokot people and their Kalenjin neighbors, as mentioned above, because ethnic groups interact across their boundaries and are constantly renegotiating their identities and are thus in constant making. It is often difficult, if not impossible, to define clearly the limits of an ethnic group, especially when its neighbors have similar cultures. For that reason it is not clear-cut, but “fuzzy.”

Although the Pokot people, as an ethnic group, does not have a myth of common ancestry or origin, nor historical memories of a common past, they have a known history of the last one hundred years or so, share many elements of a common culture and have a sense of solidarity based on the same religion, values and language. Their will to stick together is based on “voluntary adherence and identification, loyalty, [and] solidarity” (Gellner 1983:53). The clans, on the other hand, have myths about their origin in Pokot and migration stories about the journeys from their places of origin to the present home in Pokot and the reasons why they moved.

Before the beginning of the colonial period, several ethnic groups in northern and western Kenya did not exist in the present form as unified entities but rather as loosely connected clans, each with some form of leadership. The colonial authorities lumped at least some of them together to form ethnic groups, e.g. the Marakwet (Moore 1988), the Sebei (Goldschmidt 1969; 1976; 1986), the Kipsigis (Mwanzi 1977), and the neighboring Luyah (Southall 1970; Fedders 1980) as will be explained further in 2.4 (The Emergence of the Pokot People).

As the Pokot clans have their origin among several of the present day Kalenjin ethnic groups, some of them are found in two or even more of them, but a few have a non-Kalenjin origin. I argue in this thesis that the present day Pokot people are the outcome of fusion between these clans, and that the Pokot people in the present form, as an ethnic group, is of a relatively recent origin, probably from the 19th Century (cf. Bolling 1990b), when circumcision was adopted. The way they have come about is a

good illustration of fuzzy boundaries and how ethnic groups are in constant making, and their identities change through migrations and interaction with other groups, as well as the fact that the authorities impose new on them. I will discuss this matter further in 2.4.1 (Fluid Boundaries).

The goals of women and men in life are not identical among the Pokot people, as will be discussed further in 1.6.3 (Pokot masculinities), and for that reason it is possible to talk about gendered ethnicity (cf. Kristín Loftsdóttir 2002:311-312). I will now continue to explore the meaning of identity, especially through the concepts of sex, gender and masculinity.

1.6 Sex, gender and masculinity

Anthropologists have studied identity from various angles and in relation with other concepts, such as gender, age, status and religion and found out that it is, as ethnicity, fluid and difficult to know where to put the limits. I follow the general view of the post-structuralists, that identity of an individual is socially created, and is thus a product of the culture of the society he belongs to (Foucault 1970; 1972; Ingólfur Á. Jóhannesson 2004). As Hall (1996) points out, it is also created in relationship with those we call “us” and “them,” the people we mirror ourselves in (cf. Helga Björnsdóttir 2004:11). This has also to do with the concepts sex, gender, femininity and masculinity. Holland (et. al. 1998:5) defines identity as “a concept that ... combines the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations.” It is important to have in mind what I have already mentioned, that cultural identities have historical roots.

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, many anthropologists and feminists have drawn attention to male bias in anthropology and Western sciences, and the fact that men have not always been aware that reality looks different from women’s point of view.¹⁰ The greatest heat was in this discussion from about 1975 to 1990 during which the importance of rectifying the male bias by studying women specifically was emphasized. The result of such studies has revealed many aspects of the world of women, that would have otherwise not been exposed (Moore 1988; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994:28). Since then, gender studies have soared and gender, a concept that is a product of feminism, has become a key concept in anthropology. Influenced

¹⁰ This discussion can be said to have started by the publication of Betty Friedan’s book, *The Feminine Mystique* (Mascia-Lees and Black 2000:6; Ardener 19xx; Rosaldo 1974, and Ortner 1973).

by feminist scholarship, contemporary research has made a distinction between sex and gender. As with identity, I believe that gender, as identity in general, is socially created (cf. Holter 2005; Gardiner 2005:45; Ashe 2004:190, 195; Bauman 2001), and that it is the way a society defines what it means to be a man or a woman, male or female, in a particular society, or as Kimmel puts it, “the sets of cultural meanings and prescriptions that each culture attaches to one’s biological sex” (1996:2). Sex has thus to do with the human body of being male or female, but gender what it means to be a male or a female in a certain society. Every society constructs gender in a specific way. Many writers have shown that the content or definition of gender is constantly changing all over the world as cultural and economic situations change and that it is possible to change it intentionally, e.g. as has been done in the Scandinavian countries, where younger men participate more in the duties of the home than previous generations of men did (Connell 2005b). This means that where there are changes in the construction of gender, there are also tensions between the sexes and the generations of each sex because the ideas about gender roles differ from one generation to the next.

Anthropologists have used several theories to explain the social difference between the sexes. Evolutionary theories (e.g. Spencer 1885) see it as rooted in the biological make up of the human body. According to psychoanalysis (e.g. Freud) and structuralism (e.g. Lévi-Strauss) women are born inferior to men. Marxism and materialist oriented theories are of the view that the economical situation of a society can affect the “gender stratification,” i.e. the power relationship between men and women. Post-structuralists believe that power is an important element in the formation of the personal identity because “power relations permeate all levels of society” (Gupta 2001:5). Those in power can use the institutions of the state to mold the subjects. De Lauretis (1987) talks in this vein about “technology of gender,” i.e. that the power relationship between the sexes and the gender of each sex can be manipulated and formed by external means and thus given a prescribed content. Post-structuralists and sociolinguists are also convinced that language is of primary importance in the formation of gender (Mascia-Lees and Nancy Johnson Black 2000:80-91; Foucault 1994 [1977]), that “[T]he discourses and categories dominant in a society ... are “inscribed” upon people, both interpersonally and institutionally, and

... within them. Selves are socially constructed through the mediation of powerful discourses” (Holland et. al. 1998:26; cf. Mascia-Lees and Black 2000:80-83).

1.6.1 Studies in masculinities

Until recently, men as a group were usually not focused on specifically in anthropological literature and are thus often invisible as a gendered category. They are in the background and usually taken for granted (Connell 2005b:1806; Kimmel 2004; Gutman 1997) because they were not studied as gendered subjects. As an example, Messerschmidt (2000) has observed that studies of adolescent male sexual violence are “gender blind,” i.e. it is ignored how gender may have affected the offenders’ identity and thus played a part in their criminal activity. Since the 1990s interest in masculine studies has, however, increased greatly and, according to Judith Newton (2002:178), literature about the topic has increased five to seven times in the last decade of the 20th century.¹¹

Feminism and its reaction against essentialism, particularly various forms of patriarchies, based on the assumption that gender is socially created, has led to interest in specific studies about men and masculinities. Theories of masculinities have emerged as an attempt to understand their situation and gender and how it is formed (Morell and Swart 2005:95; Holter 2005:21). The Australian R.W. Connell’s contribution with the book *Masculinities* (1995) has influenced the discussion of masculinities greatly. In his view several types of masculinities can coexist in a society at the same time but normally only one of them is hegemonic, the one most widely accepted and adhered to by the ruling class (1995:76-77), which is not necessarily the form of masculinity most men adhere to (Connell 2000:11). Other types of masculinities are what he calls, subordinate, complicity and marginalized masculinities. The subordinate masculinity is the way some minority groups, especially homosexuals, may express their manhood differently from the hegemonic masculinity. They are often objects of violence from heterosexual men following the main stream (Connell 1995:78). Few men, who belong to the power structure, are engaged in maintaining the hegemony, but the majority of men benefit from what Connell calls the “patriarchy dividend,” e.g. financial advantages, the subordination of women etc., and thus live in a tacit consent or complicity with it. Finally the

¹¹ Quoted in Nye 2005:1938.

masculinities of minority groups may be marginalized due to the smallness of the groups in proportion to the dominant group, e.g. blacks vs. whites in the USA (:79).

Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994:20) criticize Connell for not giving room for the possibility that various hegemonic masculinities could coexist at the same time in the same society. Lindsay and Miescher (2003:6) support this criticism with respect to Africa during the colonial period, which I will discuss further below in connection with masculinities in Africa.

Several currents of theories about masculinities have emerged in recent years. Some writers have divided them into four streams, conservative, liberationist, mythopoetic, and profeminist interpretations (Ashe 2004; Ingólfur A Jóhannesson 2004). I follow this division. Ashe, referring to Gilder (1973), sees the conservative interpretation following the essentialist explanation of the roots of male “gender identities.” It is believed to be biologically determined and aggressive by nature. For that reason society must be organized in such a way that the male aggression and promiscuity is directed into a breadwinner role. Men’s power over women is looked upon as a “natural right” due to their inclination toward “aggressive and competitive behavior” (Ashe 2004:198). Others find it natural for men to protect women, provide for them financially and to hold the political power of the society. For them increased power of women and the influence of feminism is a bad evolution, and thus it is urgent to preserve traditional forms of sex roles in the core family and to adhere to Biblical values of the family and marriage (Ingólfur A. Jóhannesson 2004:38-39).

According to the liberationist interpretation, men feel threatened by feminism and that they are oppressed by women. In their view, their masculine roles have been forced upon them by the modern culture and they want to be liberated from the breadwinner role and its dangers, which are inevitably a part of several so called men’s jobs, such as being a soldier, a fire fighter, policeman etc. Hence men should have some privileges at the disadvantage of women. They accuse women of oppressing them by high financial demands, and emotionally by constant hate propaganda against them. Some of them fight for causes such as the rights of single fathers (Ashe 2004:198-199, Ingólfur A. Jóhannesson 2004:37).

The mythopoetic interpretation is best known through the books of Robert Bly, especially *Iron John* (1990), who understands masculinity as chiefly being spiritual, not physical. For him masculinity is rooted in a “prediscursive spiritual force

that is within each male subject” (Bly 1990:234; Ashe 2004:199). Men can only get connected with this force, represented in the archetype of the “wild man,” by having certain “authentic male experiences.” If they do, Bly claims, they will develop “a noble and functional masculinity.” It is important that boys and young men have older men as role models and follow their advice. This thinking is not very well developed but as Ashe has pointed out, Bly seems to be suggesting “archetype of traditional male identity” (Ashe 2004:199; Ingólfur A. Jóhannesson 2004:38). Messner (1997) sees the mythopoetic interpretation as opposed to feminism and improved situation of women.

Lastly there are the profeminist interpretations of masculinity. Those who follow this stream have the same presuppositions in social sciences as feminists and believe that gender, and thus masculinity, is socially constructed. They fight for a righteous society, both for men and women, and emphasize the importance of changing some traditional ideas about masculinity in order to gain their objectives. In their view, traditional patriarchy and its sex roles isolate men from their children and force them to suppress their feelings which in turn leads to aggression and competitiveness. For that reason, they urge men to tend to their feelings and cultivate relationships with their families and other people and thus fight against alienation in the society, which affects them as much as the women and their children. Profeminists support the causes of minority groups, such as homosexuals (Ashe 2004:200-201; Ingólfur A. Jóhannesson 2004:37-38).

Researches in masculinities are still young and have mostly taken place in Australia, Europe and North America, and thus it is of great importance to expand them to other countries of the world as well. This is increasingly being done (e.g. Kimmel et. al. 2005; Connell 2005b; Lindsay and Miescher 2003). Lindsay and Miescher (2003:21) warn that this field of study must not be based on European and American assumptions only but give room for the possibility of unique and “multiple, competing and interacting ideas about gender” in Africa. It is important for researchers to be open-minded and theoretically flexible as stories of masculinities from all over the world are collected as a result of new researches showing various and possibly new ways of gender constructions, which will enrich and deepen masculine and gender studies and verify further how difficult it is to get hold of identities, masculine and others.

1.6.2 Studies in African masculinities

Lindsay and Miescher manage in their book *Men and Masculinities in Africa* (2003) to connect Western discussion of masculinities with realities on the African continent and provide some case studies that show how masculinities and gender roles have changed from the 19th century till this date and are still changing, not the least due to external influences. They differentiate between “manhood” and “masculinity” and use manhood about “indigenous notions explicitly related to men’s psychology, often recognized in terms of male adulthood.” Masculinity is, however, seen as a broader and more abstract concept, which can be used both about men and women, e.g. the female Igbo king (cf. Achebe 2003), or female husband among the Nandi of Kenya (cf. Oboler 1980). This is what they call “masculinity without men” (cf. Halberstam 1998), which seems to have the same meaning as “female masculinity,” i.e. in instances where women can take positions in the society normally occupied by men, e.g. as chiefs in the colonial Lesotho, and the cases just mentioned above, in which they acted as “honorary men” (cf. Epprecht 1995) (Lindsay and Miescher 2003:5). It is thus important that in the researches of masculinities in Africa, Western assumption and concepts are not used as the only frame of reference (cf. Strathern 1981:168b).

As other identities, masculinities changed considerably in many African societies during the colonial period and have continued to change after the countries gained independence as a result of influence from modernization, urbanization, industrialization, and globalization. The colonialism of European countries in Africa were led by men who were themselves a part of the power elite of Europe, which was chiefly composed of men. They exported their gender structures and ideas of masculinity and repeatedly created problems in the colonies when they interfered with traditional gender constructions, often due to prejudices, ignorance and ethnocentrism (Connell 2005a:73-74). During the colonial period many men left home to take up employment in cities or on settler farms and some left Africa to fight during the World Wars. When they returned, they often brought home new ideas about gender. Many young men earned enough money outside the economy of the rural areas to be able to marry unassisted by the contributions of their fathers and families. They could thus marry younger than had been the rule and overcome the power of the elders, who often tried to delay their marriages in order to use their labor force as long as possible, and to take additional wives among their age group. In this way the authority of the

elders decreased but that of the young men increased, as the power and identity of men in most societies of Africa has traditionally been attached to being married, having a home, children and domestic animals. In societies where polygamy is common, the power and respect increases the more wives, children and animals a man has.

All changes in the economy and the situation of the families inevitably affect traditional social construction of gender. Coming of guns, long distance trading, (Western) education, religious conversions, and central governments in the 19th and 20th centuries, led in many cases to redefinition of masculinities, which became attached to violence, new types of employment, new values and religions, and capitalist economy. The colonial power itself confronted local patriarchies and overtook part of their powers. All this created tensions in the traditional societies and put pressure on the gender roles. “European actors in colonial Africa worked to remake men; and African men negotiated with women, elders, missionaries and employers about domesticity and the rights and obligations of men within households” (Lindsay and Miescher 2003:13). Colonialism has thus often been seen as an assault on African masculinity.

White (2003) points out, that traditional masculinity and gender roles were reconstructed among freedom fighters, such as the Mau Mau in Kenya, in which both men and women participated and lived together during the time of armed struggle. The educated among them wanted “companionate marriages.” In the detention camps men were made to do domestic work as a part of “rehabilitation” which was a part of an “officially sanctioned type of masculinity” (Lindsay and Miescher 2003:17). The fact that the majority of the freedom fighters were young people, usually led by educated men, who eventually took over the supreme power of the nations when the countries gained independence from the colonial powers, and not uneducated traditional elders, did also affect the definition of gender and masculinities in Africa. All these changes have created new kinds of masculinities (cf. Obeng 2003). According to Lindsay and Miescher (2003:18-19) the African “big men” have the “attributes and prerequisites of dominant masculinity” in the popular culture in many countries of the continent. Such a man is “wealthy and powerful patriarch, with business and government networks in the city and perhaps some rural links to “his people” as well, perhaps only one wife but certainly eyes for many, dispensing gifts

and largesse in exchange for particular services or general deference.” This view may be true for some parts of the population in several countries of Africa, but there are also other leading models of masculinities of more traditional nature in the same nations. I thus agree with Lindsay and Miescher (2003) that there may be more than one “hegemonic,” or model masculinity, side by side in the same nations due to the fact that within the same country, such as Kenya, groups of people can lead very different ways of life, based on race, ethnicity, class, religion, education, economy, and geography, and thus have different values and ideas about gender.

The great urbanization of the 20th century has changed people’s lives and identities greatly in Africa. Some have two identities, one in the city and another at home in the rural area (Morell and Swart 2005:102). Government employees and educated people working in the cities usually have a home in the rural area, the traditional land of their ethnic groups and clans, as well as a home in the city. One of my neighbors in Chepareria was Kenya’s ambassador to Italy but still had a humble home on his father’s land, although his main home was in the big city.

Industrialization and globalization, the building of factories, which has given employment to thousands of people, the flow of services and industrial goods, domestically made and imported, all over Africa, even to the most remote corners of the continent, have affected the lives of practically all Africans. They are affected by the fact that their economies, however weak or small they may be, are a part of the global economy and thus the fluctuation of commodity prices. Globalization creates new spaces beyond country boundaries in transnational corporations, communication systems and markets, global mass media and international state structures, such as the United Nations and European Union. According to Connell, they have their own “gender regimes.” They are usually male oriented and may create an environment for “new configurations of masculinity.” The local masculinities are not only interacting with other masculinities and various gender orders within the same country but also on the global arena (2005a:73; 2005b:1804).

1.6.3 Pokot masculinities

The social changes caused by modernization and globalization in Africa have brought changes to the Pokot people as well as others. More and more young people are getting education, jobs outside the traditional land of their parents and obtaining

monetary wealth. This has also affected traditional gender roles and masculinities among the Pokot people.

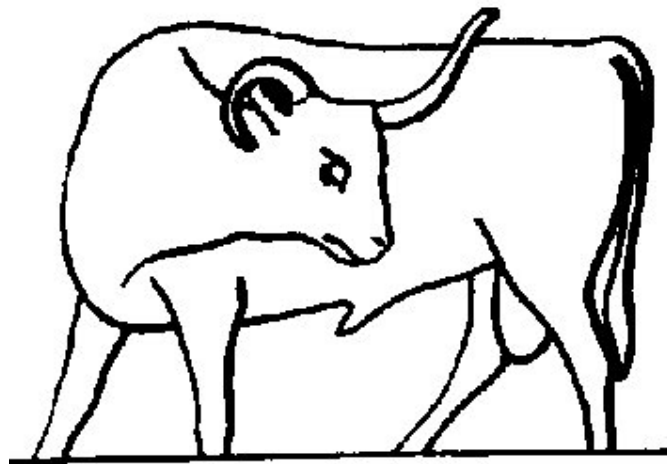
In older ethnographic literature about non-Western societies, it is often emphasized that men are created. Boys are changed into mature men, most often through initiation (cf. Turner 1967; Evans-Prichard 1940; Richards 1956; Droogers 1980; La Fontaine 1985; Heald 1999; cf. Rosaldo 1974). This is also the perception of the Pokot people. Elders initiate boys into the men's world through the circumcision process, following prescriptions of the tradition, and create soldiers and mature men to shoulder responsibilities and participate in running the society. The difference between the male and female gender among the Pokot people is rooted in the tradition. Its values and gender structure is transmitted to the initiates through the initiation, both of boys and girls, but also through the religion and its rituals.

Gender and social differences between the sexes are explained among the Pokot people by essentialism, i.e. that *Tororot*, the Pokot high god, created people as they are, male and female, and decided that their gender should be according to the prescription of the tradition, i.e. that the man should rule the woman.

The ideal Pokot man follows the rules of the tradition, and enjoys *Tororot's* favor in return in form of numerous cattle and domestic animals, good health, several wives and many children, who will remember him after his death, as well as their descendents. He is thus wealthy and is engaged in many *tilya*-relationships, i.e. shared cattle ownership (explained in chapter 5). He is a good orator and speaks wisely in public meetings. All this grants him respect among other men and members of the society. He is also fearless and fierce when fighting the enemy and ready to die if necessary, protecting his cattle and the community. At times of peace, a man should be calm and not cause disputes. Should he use the same methods in his own community as in war, i.e. being fierce, he will be despised. Good men are calm and settle disputes peacefully (cf. Bolling 1993; Kimmel & Connell 2005). I will discuss this matter further in 6.5.2 (Preparation for war). Cattle constitute a big part of male identities, which is reflected in the fact that men take names derived from their favorite bulls during the circumcision period and are taught to be ready to die for them if need be, as already mentioned. They are taught to admire their strength and polygamous nature.

Men often sing songs about their favorite bulls and admire their beauty, strength and physical fitness. The bulls with modified horns, *kamar*, are in highest esteem among the men. Usually one horn is bent forward.

The aims of the ideal Pokot man in life are to lead a harmonious life and become wealthy and influential. An ideal Pokot woman does also follow the prescriptions of the tradition and enjoys *Tororot*'s blessings in return in form of many children, especially sons, and does not suffer the loss of her children. She is a humble and faithful wife who follows the directives of her husband without arguments and pleases him by all means she can. A good wife takes care of her family and makes her husband proud. Her aims in life are to become a good wife and a mother of many children. The interests of husbands and wives are not always the same and their spheres of interest not either. The wife cares about her children and home, but the husband may have several wives and homes to think about in addition to being an elder and participating in safeguarding the welfare of the communities of which he is a member. A man who acquires new wealth, e.g. after a bumper harvest or a successful raid, often invests it in the agricultural area in buying new farmland and places a new wife there. In that way the wife generates wealth for him. A man builds his own powerbase. As he grows older rivalries may arise between his various homes, between the wives and especially between his sons, about inheritance.



Picture 5. A bull with modified horns.

As already mentioned, this dissertation is a study of the perception of the traditional Pokot society about its masculinity, i.e. “hegemonic” masculinity, which is under great pressure.

1.7 Summary of the thesis

In chapter one I explain the reasons why I undertook this research project and my own background. I start by drawing the first strokes of a picture of the Pokot people by reviewing the most important literature about them, then I discuss important concepts, such as ethnicity and boundaries, and conclude that the boundaries have never been clear-cut but fuzzy. The chapter ends with a survey of the most important literature about masculinities in general and the little that has been written about the subject in Africa and finally, draw a picture of the ideal Pokot man and woman.

In chapter two I describe the West-Pokot district in general and the research area in particular. Trying to trace its origin I conclude that the Pokot people are a young ethnic group in the present form, a mixture of the aboriginal Cherangany people and their neighbors who are of mixed origin. The chapter ends with a review of their written history in the 20th century, which shows how an obscure group of people becomes a part of the world economy and world history.

Before starting to describe the world of the Pokot men, I prepare the stage in chapter three by clarifying some important concepts in order to put the Pokot reality into a wider theoretical context. First it is important to have a general understanding of African traditional religion and some of the most important ideas common in the religions of most ethnic groups in Africa, although each one has its distinct version. Three important concepts in the Pokot religion, and in the religion of most ethnic groups in Africa, are clarified specially, magic, ritual and sacrifices. Magic is a prominent force in every day thinking of the Pokot people and is a fundamental force in many rituals used to gain their objectives. Among the conclusions of reviewing the most important theories anthropologists have used to analyze rituals, I find van Gennep’s three stage theory of rituals and V. Turners further development of it still the most helpful tools to analyze the rituals of the Pokot people. Sacrifices are a part of all the most important rituals. The chapter ends with a discussion of oral traditions and their nature because the Pokot culture is an oral culture.

The rituals men go through are a part of the Pokot religion and cannot be properly understood unless we understand their context. Therefore, the world of the

Pokot gods and their relationship with man is discussed in chapter four, and the most fundamental concepts that are a prerequisite for the understanding and functioning of this religion. The Pokot high god, *Tororot*, created the world and gave men principles to live by in order to lead prosperous lives in peace and harmony, *pöghishyö*, among themselves, with him and the ancestral spirits, the so-called living-dead, who are a part of the society of the living. Therefore, *Tororot* punishes those who live contrary to these principles but blesses those who live in accordance with them. The Pokot religion is not about life after death, but life here and now, and is a tool to fight for life and against evil and misfortune.

One of the most important objectives of human life is to have descendents to live in as guardian spirits in order to secure an access to the group of ancestral spirits, the living-dead. There are several sorcerers and witchdoctors in the Pokot society. Sorcerers use magic only to harm but the witchdoctors use it in the service of the society. The group of elders has the knowledge and power to use magic in order to kill those who do not follow their rules. Fear of being cursed keeps young people subordinate to their will and is the glue that holds the social structure together.

In chapter five I describe how boys become a part of the Pokot society, mature and are changed into mature men. Children enter the society when they receive guardian spirits, *onyötoy*, but do not become full members until they have gone through an initiation process, circumcision for men, and female genital mutilation for women. The initiation is, however, much more than a physical operation but a series of ceremonies, rituals and teaching about what it means to be a mature person in the Pokot society. The whole process takes about three and a half months for the men. Through it boys become mature men, *mirön*, with its rights and obligations in the society. When the process has been completed the young men become a part of an age-set and do thus acquire a social age and become a part of a special group in the society. They call its members brothers and are obligated to help each other. Their age-set is a part of a bigger age-set system which all circumcised men belong to.

The objectives of the circumcision process are to create brave soldiers who can endure severe hardship and pain, and are willing to fight for their cattle, even to death if needed. They are initiated into the secrets of the community of elders and taught how to behave as a mature man towards older men, parents, women and children, and how to take care of a family. They are also instructed about the obligation of being elders of the society.

A ritual of blessing towards the end of the circumcision process is very important, where the gods, spirits and the whole creation are asked to bestow their blessings upon the young men. This shows how the religion is a natural part of Pokot life and life without it is unthinkable.

It is clear from the initiation process how important cattle are for the identity of Pokot men, because during that time they acquire a new name, which is derived from their favorite ox, and they are also urged to go and raid their neighboring ethnic groups and thus fetch wealth and prove their manhood. Antagonism between the sexes is nurtured during the initiation process.

In chapter six I describe further the maturing of the Pokot man. Although people say that it is enough to complete the circumcision process to become a full member of the Pokot society, it is a fact that the process is not finished until the young men have also gone through *poro*, in which they learn some cursing techniques aimed at keeping their wives subordinate. They can learn more about cursing by going through the *ngoritii* ritual, which gives them an opportunity to pursue further studies later to become witchdoctors, *kapoloki*, or sorcerers, *poni*.

The fact that young men are urged to go and raid their neighboring ethnic groups in the *tönus* and *sapana* rituals emphasizes further the centrality of cattle in the life of men. A raid needs careful planning. It is, however, a very serious matter and a soldier who kills an enemy might be the object of cursing from the family of his prey and must, therefore, go through a series of cleansing rituals and stay in the bush until it has been completed, lest the fertility of women and animals be affected. The Pokot elders perform an oath, *mis* with elders and soldiers of a neighboring ethnic group, to seal peace, when casualties have been high due to things getting out of control.

According to the Pokot tradition, the objective of a man for his life is to acquire wealth in the form of cattle and wealth derived from it, wives, children, respect and power. In order to avoid losing all of his cattle in epidemics or raids, he distributes them through the so called shared cattle ownership system, *tilya*, which helps him also to multiply the number of his animals. Men who have established such relationships have mutual obligations to support each other in many ways. This system weaves the Pokot society together across family and clan lines. The more *tilya* relationships a man has, the broader powerbase he has in the society and the more respect he enjoys.

In chapter seven I describe the rituals in the life of a mature man and thus complete my description of his life. Marriage, the cleansing ritual *parpara*, and the series of burial rituals conducted when a man who has raised children dies, are the last rituals that most men go through during their lives. The ceremonies conducted when marriage is established, reveal its economic foundation and again the importance of cattle.

PART I: SOCIAL SETTINGS AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

2. THE POKOT PEOPLE

“How can you move with your little children to Pokot? There are only cannibals and savages living there. This is not fair!” This is what a Kenyan lady said to my wife and I many years ago when we were attending a language course near Nairobi. She was from an ethnic group living far away from the Pokot land. People from the West have long had great prejudices against Africans but little has been written about the prejudice Africans themselves often have against each other, one ethnic group towards another.

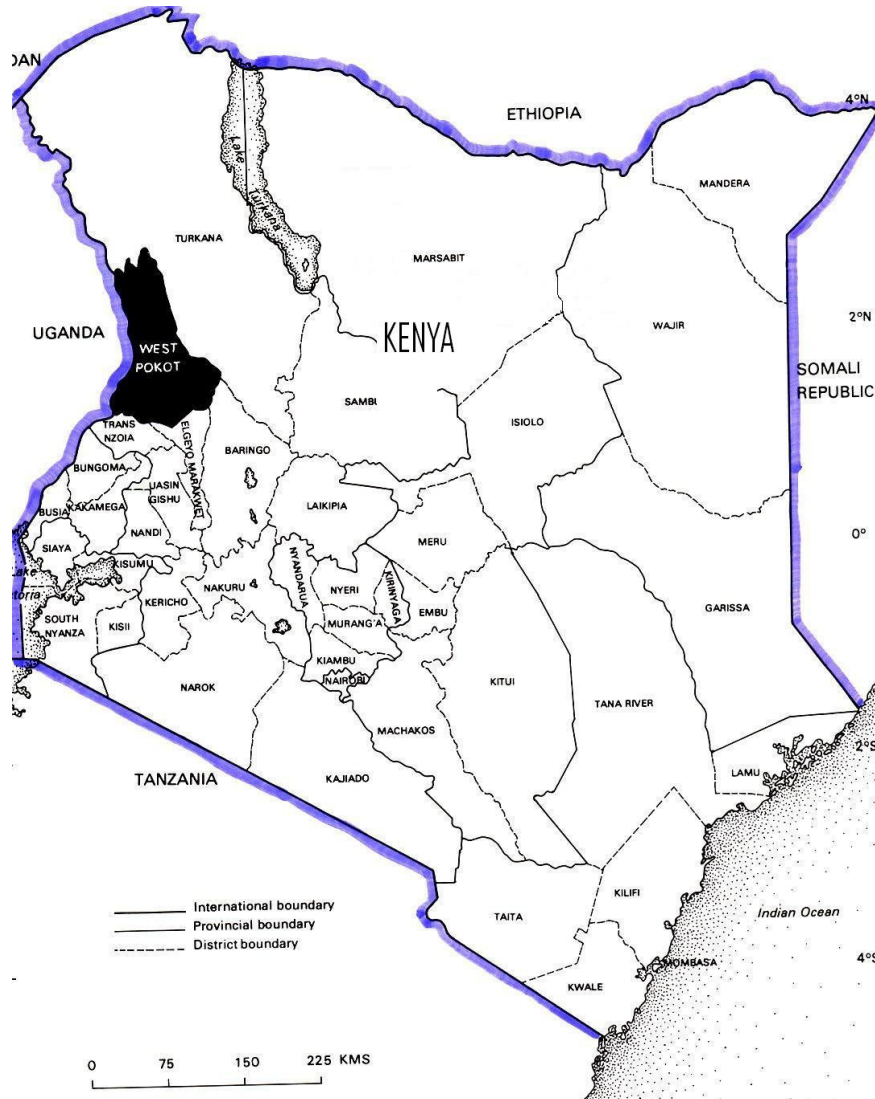
The colonial authorities considered Pokot-land a very remote area, not valuable enough to develop it economically or its infrastructure, and thus it was closed in to protect its inhabitants from exploitation, it was said. Until 1964, there was a signboard on the district border on which was written, “From now on you drive at your own risk” (Hendrix 1985:40). Since independence the Pokot people have battled against the prejudices of foreigners and fellow Kenyans of other ethnic groups, and fought for their existence as a small ethnic group in the community of over 40 others in the country, some of which count from one to several million members, such as the Kikuyu, Luo, Kisii and Kamba.

In this chapter I will try to trace the roots of the Pokot people in order to get a picture of where they come from, how they live and who they are. As a Kalenjin people group, which is a part of the Nilotes, it is important to know the main theories about the origin of the Pokot people, and thus also of these groups of people, because, according to many scholars, all of them seem to have some common roots. Finally, I will give an overview of the history of the Pokot people in the 20th century and discuss shortly the implications for the Pokot to become a part of the Kenyan nation and the world economy and thus how they have been affected by the globalization after independence from Britain in 1963. Firstly I will, however, describe in short the West Pokot district and the organization of the Pokot society.

2.1 West Pokot district

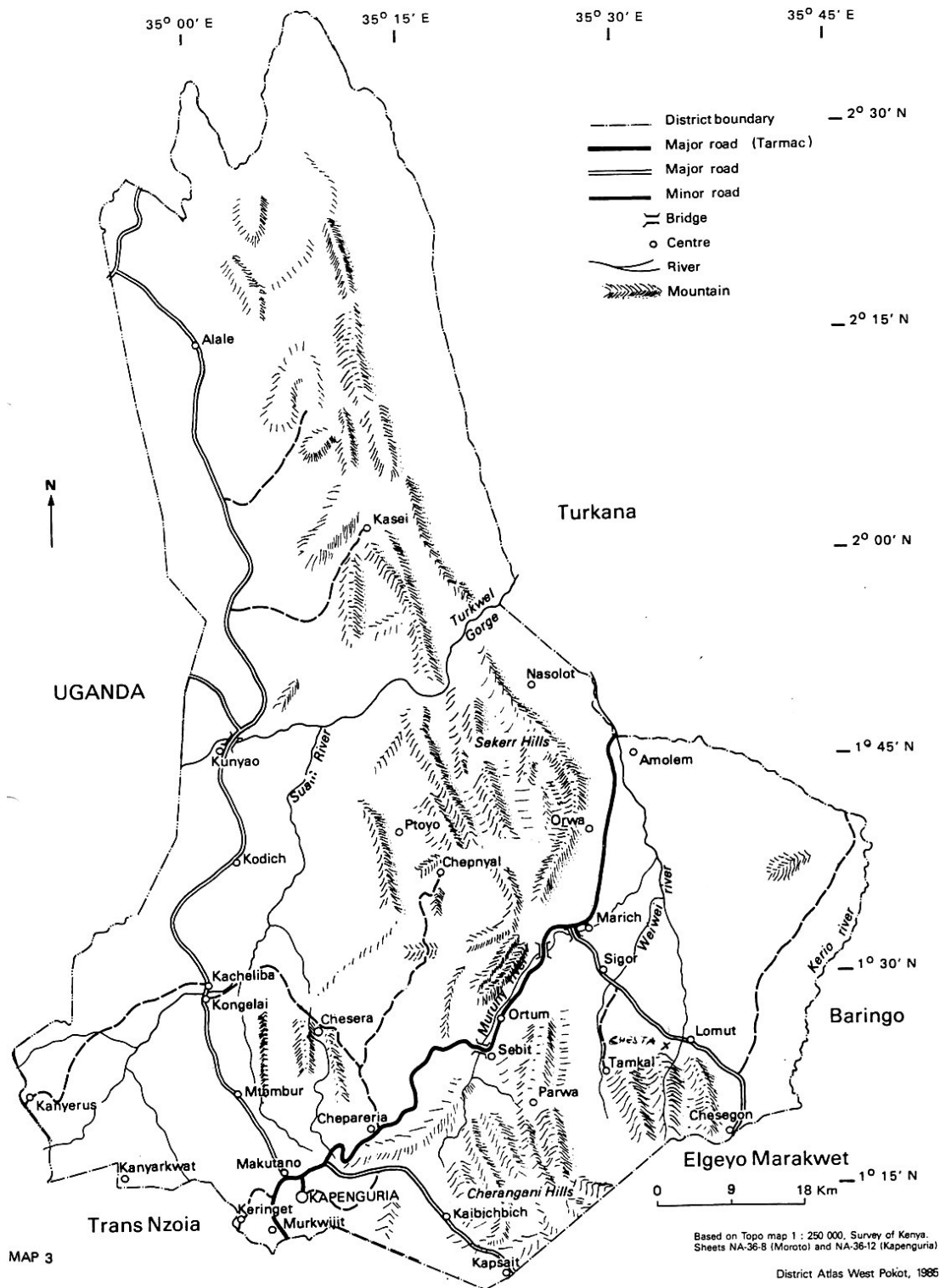
The West Pokot district is in northwestern Kenya, bordering several other districts, Upe and Sebei in Uganda to the west, Turkana to the north and east, Baringo to the east, Elkeyo-Marakwet and Trans Nzoia to the south. The district, which is in the big

Rift Valley Province, is 9.100 square kilometers (about 3.513 square miles) (Hendrix 1985:40), and the population was 308.086 in the 1999 census,¹² the majority of which was Pokot. In the 1979 census 11% of the inhabitants belonged to other ethnic groups, mostly to the Luhya, 5.312, Kikuyu 4.144, Turkana 3.855 and Luo 1.379 (Nangulu 2001:52-60).



Map 1. Kenya.

¹² Cf. Central Bureau of Statistics 1999.

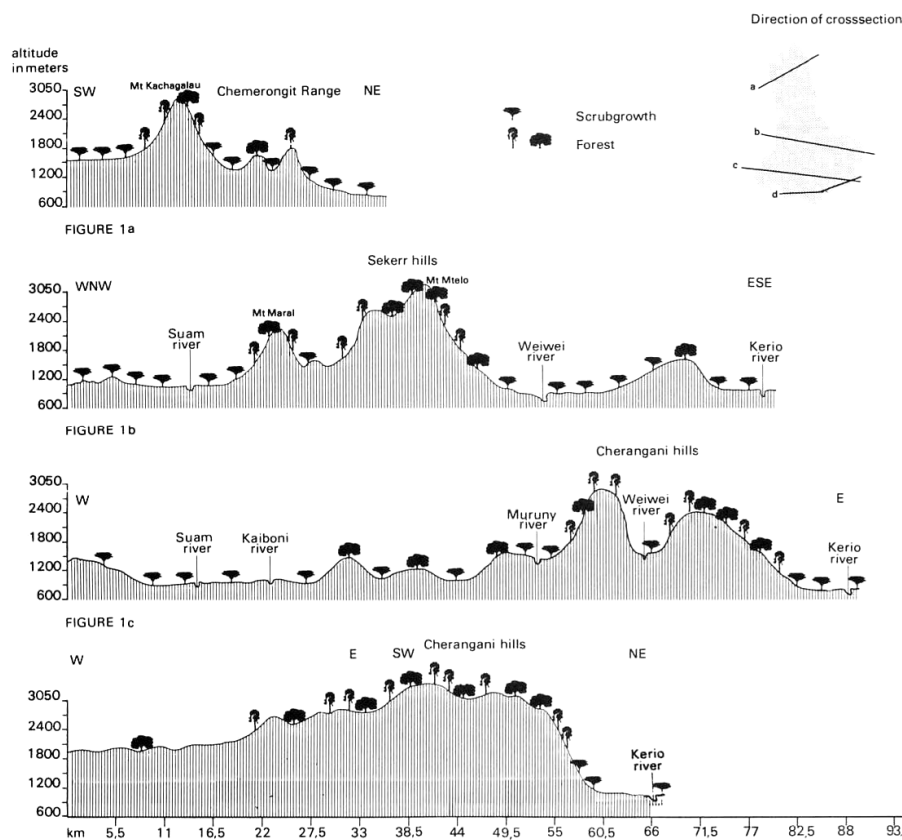


Map 2. West Pokot district, Kenya (Hendrix 1985:29).

The Pokot people live in three districts, most of them in West-Pokot, 308.086 in 1999, as already mentioned, about 39.000 in Baringo District, according to the 1989 census (Bolling 1996:58), and about 11.642 in Upe District in Uganda 1985 (Dietz 1987:132). The population of Baringo and Upe Districts consists mostly of

pastoralists. Although some of these figures are old they give an idea about the distribution of the Pokot people between the three districts.

The altitudes of the West Pokot district range from 1.000 to 3.000 m (3.000 to 10.000 feet, see map 3) and include four ecozones, the high mountain tops, *mosop*, which are heavily forested, steep mountain slopes, *kamas*, where finger millet is traditionally grown, the flat land in the valleys, *tow*, where most of the farmland is, and the parched dry-lands, *kew*, (Nangulu 2001:61; Hogg 1984:2; cf. Porter and Sheppard 1998:263-265).



Map 3. Pokot cross sections (Hendrix 1985:14).

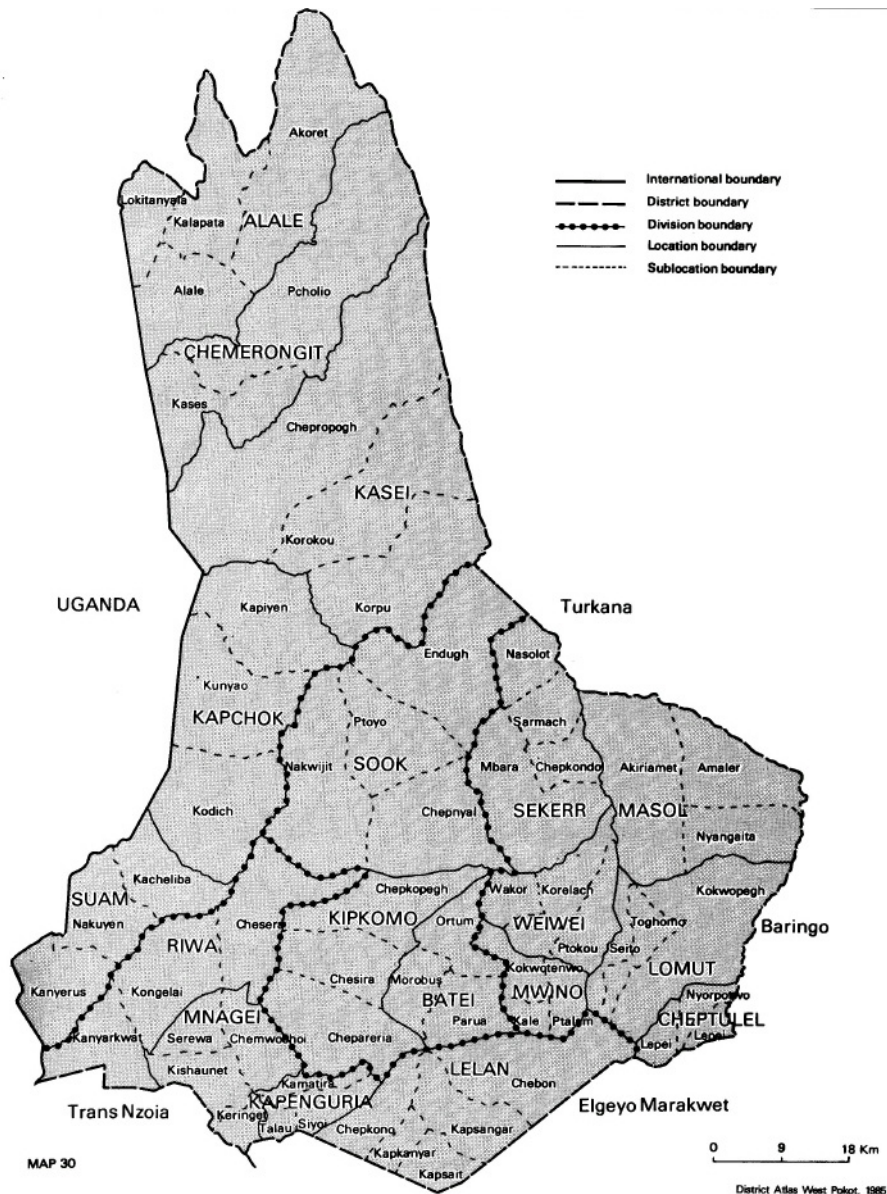
According to the 1999 census, about 20% of the population of West Pokot was pastoralists who lived on the hot, dry plains in the northern and western part of the district, 59.709 in Karapokot, and 2.960 in Masol location in the Kerio Valley. They live mostly from the products of their herds, milk and milk products, blood and meat, and keep cattle, goats, and sheep, but in some places people keep camels as well. The pastoralists try to have access to more than one ecozone to broaden their subsistence base and grow usually some finger millet, which needs little rain and can be stored for

years without getting spoiled and in addition is very nutritious. The rest of the population is mainly farmers with mixed economy, agriculture and animal husbandry, living at higher altitudes, mostly on the plains of the Cherangany Mountains and Sekerr where there is more rain than on the plains, the climate is cooler and droughts are not as frequent as at lower altitudes. They grow maize, which is the chief ingredient of the staple food, beans, millet and vegetables, and keep cattle, goats and sheep. Some agriculturalists in the vicinity of Kapenguria, the main town of West Pokot, have started to grow pyrethrum, tea and coffee, which provide more income than other cash crops, and they also keep milking cows of European stock or cross breeds, that yield more milk than others.

The Pokot people have developed an advanced system of animal exchange, *tilya*, or joint animal ownership, where surplus animals, not needed for the household, are distributed to relatives and friends who live in various ecozones. In this way animals are scattered widely, which provides security against losing the herds completely in raids, or in times of drought and epidemics (cf. Bolling 2000). Men, who engage in *tilya*-relationship, grow mutual trust and support. This institution will be described in detail in 6.6 (Joint cattle ownership, *tilya*).

The inhabitants of the Mwino Valley and the Chesagon area in Sigor division, have developed an advanced irrigation system which enables them to grow fruits and vegetables they would otherwise not have been able to do.

West-Pokot District has traditionally been divided into divisions, *kor*, and the modern administration has followed it to a certain extent (Hendrix 1985:47; Kjartan Jónsson 1991:66). The number of divisions has been gradually increasing after independence, and in 1995 there were five divisions, Alale, Kacheliba, Chepareria, Sigor and Kapenguria, and 22 locations (Nangulu 2001:41; see map 4). A district officer (DO) leads a division but the district commissioner (DC) is the highest administrative leader of the government in West Pokot. Every division is composed of several locations, led by chiefs, which are again divided into several sub-divisions, led by sub-chiefs.



Map 4. Administrative boundaries of West-Pokot District 1983.

Traditionally there is no centralized authority among the Pokot people but the society is composed of many neighborhoods, *korok*, which are usually demarcated by natural landmarks, waterways and hills (Conant 1965). They are led by the council of elders, *kokwo*, which usually holds its meetings in the cool shadow of a big, thick-leaved tree. All circumcised men are members of the *kokwo*, which meets when needed to solve matters and problems of the community as a whole, such as land disputes, criminal cases, communal grazing and to make decisions about where people may break new land for farming. The council also deals with matters of individuals, e.g. marriage problems. Although only men are allowed to sit in the council of elders, sometimes women sit near by and listen to the proceedings of

important matters and are allowed to participate in the discussion of special matters, e.g. about domestic problems. This reflects the social relationship between men and women, and that men rule the society and have power over women.



Picture 6. A council of elders, *kokwo*.

Sometimes men from several neighborhoods meet to discuss problems affecting bigger areas and many neighborhoods, e.g. epidemics, building of schools, etc (Conant 1965:430-431; cf. Kjartan Jónsson 1991:64).

2.2 Cheptulel

As explained in 1.2 (My background), I did my field research in Cheptulel location in Sigor division, which is composed of six locations, Sekerr, Masol, Weiwei, Mwino, Lomut and Cheptulel (Hendrix 1985:46-47). Cheptulel is divided into two sub-locations, Nyorpotwo and Lepei; each led by one chief and two sub-chiefs.

As a pastor in the Cheptulel parish of ELCK, I often climbed the high and magnificent mountains to visit my congregations. Usually I left home between five and six in the morning while it was still dark and drove for one to three hours before I reached the place where I started to climb. Normally it was Chesagon town, near the

border of Marakwet, where I met an evangelist or someone from the congregation I was visiting. Before starting the journey to the highland we visited a “hotel” for a cup of tea and “chapati,” a thick pancake made of wheat and cooking fat and exchanged news, to make sure we would have energy for the trip. Chesagon is the only town in Cheptulel and the most important marketplace. It has plenty of running water so that people have made irrigation channels surrounding the town and can grow vegetables the whole year round, which are then sold in the market and transported to other markets in the district for sale, especially in the dry season. They also grow fruit trees, such as bananas, mangoes and oranges, which they sell also to other markets, giving them considerable income.



Picture 7. Cheptulel is in the magnificent Cherangany Mountains.

It was around 8:30 and the air still chilly, when our uphill climb commenced and it took us usually the whole morning to conquer the huge, forested mountainsides before reaching our destination, around noon, when the sun was burning hot, in its highest position on the sky. This walk was a considerable exercise for me but it seemed as if my traveling companions were walking on flat land and that the rate of their heartbeat did not increase. Indeed, this was generally the condition of the people living in the mountains. They were so used to the terrain, that it was if they could run up and down the mountainsides without much effort. Sometimes we paused for a

talked far into the night lying in bed before we started to doze and were eventually overtaken by the heaviness of sleep. I learned much on these trips; about the persons I was traveling with and the Pokot culture and heard a lot of news and gossip.

There was traffic on the narrow paths, people climbing or descending, everyone carrying burdens, because no roads had yet been built in the mountains in spite of the fact that the inhabitants had been pleading with the government for decades, asking them to build roads into the huge and fertile mountain area, so that they could improve their economy and modernize the communities. But the only answer they had been given was that they should start digging the roads themselves by hand and then the government would help!

Therefore, Cheptulel is remote, and the few roads there are in the location, are all on the lowland at the foot of the mountains, where only a few people live due to the hot climate and fear of raids from Turkana. The roads are a part of the main road system, connecting the towns. Services are on the lowland, the health service provided by the government and the Lutheran church and shops. All surplus harvest from the farms in the mountains and other goods people needed to sell in order to acquire money must be carried down to the lowland to the market places, especially Chesagon, and only a few use donkeys. The farms are thus small because no tractor can reach the area to enable the farmers to expand their fields which have to be tilled manually.

Seriously ill patients must also be carried on foot down to the lowland and then by car, if it can be found, to one of the two health institutions in Sigor division, Chesta clinic or Sigor health center. Infant mortality, i.e. children who die two years or younger, is for that reason very high and many people do not attend a health institution until they have become so ill that people fear for their lives. In recent years some people have settled below the mountains to be near the clinics, as around the Lutheran center in Chesta, west of Cheptulel. The ELCK has offered regular mobile clinics in some of the communities in Cheptulel once a month, transporting the health personnel to some of them by helicopter. It has also established schools in the location and supported small development projects.

Due to the lack of economic opportunities in Cheptulel, very few of the young people who manage to get education return there for employment. Those who do, come as teachers. Young, educated people normally leave the rural area to seek employment.

Relatively few people live on the steep mountain slopes, but in some places they have dug shelves into the mountainsides to make places for their small homes, consisting often only of one round house of clay walls with a thatched roof, a small corn store and a cattle kraal. The fields are also small. The lower parts of the mountains are suitable for growing finger millet, the traditional Pokot crop, but at higher altitudes the climate yields more rain, and maize becomes more common.

When we reached our destination, a big group of people had gathered in an open space in the shadow of big trees, one to three hundred, waiting for us, singing with joy and clapping their hands. Some of them came from other congregations and had walked for one or two hours. The church service took at least three hours, and was brought to an end with a special Pokot custom, when everyone left the “church” row by row, singing. The first person who came “out” stopped and greeted the one following him or her. Then the next person stopped beside him or her and greeted the third, which had already greeted the first one. In this way the people created eventually a circle where everyone greeted each other. If the mood was good people took an extra song when the greeting was over before the circle was dissolved. This custom emphasized the value of belonging to a community. When everything was over some people who had come from far away began to leave, but most of the guests stayed to enjoy the fellowship, the women in one group and the men in another. The people had prepared for the trip in the morning before they left home, with a heavy meal of maize porridge, *pan*, milk or vegetables, because the day was put aside for this purpose. The guests accompanying me and I were invited for a delicious meal, maize porridge, *pan*, or *ugali* as it is called in Swahili, and often a hen in curry and tea afterwards. During the discussion over the meal, usually some people asked for a lift home from Chesagon to some places on the way I would pass, a clinic in Sigor, a secondary school in Ortum, or they had errands in Chepareria or Kapenguria. There were few cars in the area and transport was expensive, a large part of a day’s salary for an unskilled laborer. Thus I was again accompanied by a group of people on the way back and usually the car was full when I left Chesagon late in the afternoon and reached home one or two hours after dark.

Once I stayed for a week in the mountains and walked across the whole of Cheptulel on the high plains where most of the people live due to the healthy climate there, which is cool at night and during the rainy season, and has fertile soil. Winds rarely hit and people have usually enough food. In fact the people from the lowland,

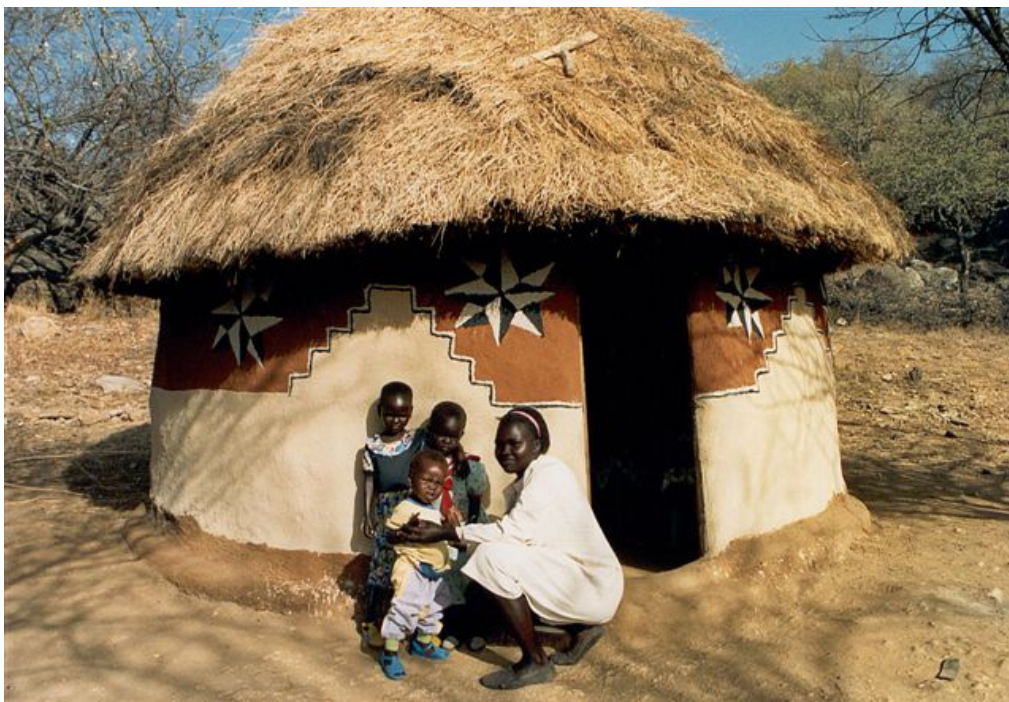
e.g. the Masol plain, often climb the mountains in the dry season to buy food. Due to the high altitudes, there is little malaria in the area but many babies and children suffer and die from pneumonia. People can grow most of what they want, maize, beans, vegetables, fruits such as bananas, and tobacco.

I went on the trip as the leader of the ELCK in the district and visited congregations, schools we had helped to establish and small community development projects. One of my evangelists had planned the trip and was my guide. We stayed with friends, went from one home to another and enjoyed the generous hospitality of the Pokot people, food, housing and caring love. During these days I also experienced the unspoiled nature of Africa in the highland we passed on our way between the communities, where the water in the brooks was clear and uncontaminated by animals and we could drink it without fear. Although the mountains are covered with forest, many places have been cleared for fields and human settlement and in large areas it has become thin. The big, unpopulated mountaintops are, however, still covered with thick, original virgin forest, composed of high African tree types, some yielding timber of hard wood. In fact deforestation is a general problem in Cheptulel and West-Pokot, and indeed in Kenya as a whole. People used to clear new land for farming by burning the forest indiscriminately, but it has now become illegal and the government has emphasized the importance of reforesting as much land as possible. Soil erosion is thus a big issue in Cheptulel and both the government and the ELCK have put efforts in helping people to preserve the soil, teaching them to dig soil conservation furrows to stop water from eroding the mountain slopes. In the beginning of the 1990s the ELCK established a few tree nurseries in the mountains to assist the inhabitants to reforest the area and to assist them to grow fruit trees, but the result was meager. Apparently they were not ready for it.

During the days we walked from one community to another. My guide told me stories about the places we passed and taught me about the plants, trees and nature phenomena on our way. It is incredible how the Pokot people seem to know all the plants in nature and about their qualities, especially whether they are edible, poisonous or can be used as medicine. I was like a sponge and eagerly absorbed all his learning. He was a fantastic companion and I felt privileged to have a personal guide in the heart of Africa to which only a few people from outside have access.

The people we visited lived according to the rhythm of the sun and nature. They woke up at sunrise, about six a.m., the women first before the others, starting the

day by making tea with a lot of milk and sugar. But first they had to milk the cows, which yielded only two or three liters of milk, the whole flock, and sometimes they had to fetch water from a nearby stream as well. It is strictly a woman's job to fetch water and it is humiliating for a man to be seen doing it, except when his wife is too sick to do it or no one else in the home can do it. As the sun crawled up the horizon, other members of the home got up and went out to let the rising sun warm them up in the still chilly air, sipping the hot, sweet tea, usually their only breakfast. People took good time and small talked. Soon other duties called. The animals had to be tended to; the cattle driven out of their kraal and the goats and sheep out of their house for grazing and to be watered. When the corn is still in the fields a herder must follow them the whole day to make sure they do not eat it because the farmers have too little income to afford proper fences.



Picture 8. An ordinary Pokot house.

If the animals, however, enter a neighbor's field, they have to pay him a fine. Several people can take care of the animals usually the women or children do it, but sometimes the men do, especially the cows. It is the responsibility of the wife to take care of the home and the children and make sure the family gets food at meals. A big part of her day goes in preparing food, fetching water and fire wood, grinding maize and finding vegetables to serve with the *pan*, which she prepares at night without fail.

Sometimes, especially during the dry season when all the vegetables are finished in the garden, she looks for wild edible vegetables, often leaves from certain trees. If she is going to serve a feast meal, as when guests arrive, she serves meat with the *pan* instead of the vegetables. During the rainy season it is also their duty to weed the cornfields. They have also all kinds of other duties, such as to take care of their vegetable garden, if they have one, mend clothes, clean calabashes for the milk, take care of small maintenances of the home etc. The men do not help them but usually make sure there is maize in the corn store and sometimes sugar for the tea. Often they also buy clothes for the family. Everything else is the duty of the wife. The meals are thus few during the day, only two or three; the morning tea, a light meal at noon, and supper at night. A generation ago, and still among some of the pastoralists, there is only one meal a day, composed of the *pan* and vegetables or milk, served in the evening. Soon after people went to sleep, between eight or nine p.m. when darkness had descended. Sunset is about 7 pm.



Picture 9. A Pokot home.

The worlds of the men and women are almost completely separate. Women develop intimacy with each other and men with friends especially of their age-set. Traditionally, couples do not confide in each other and sometimes there are hostilities between them because their goals and dreams in life are not always identical, and even contradictory. Some men do not treat their wives well. The women take care of

their duties at home and do not go far. Their world is small and many mature women have never traveled beyond a radius of 20 or 30 km. Many of them have not had the opportunity to go to school and can neither read nor write. They meet other women by the water stream and at the grinding machine where the corn is prepared for the *pan*. If they use finger millet instead of maize for the *pan*, which is considered better, they have to grind it manually on a stone, but it takes much time and energy. The community is of vital importance for the Pokot people and it is unthinkable for a person to stand alone, because he or she is what they are as a part of a family, clan and neighbors. People do not like to be much alone. There is mutual support among the women and they are open towards each other. It seems as if they can tell each other most things and do not keep secrets. When one of them gives birth to a child the others assist her, fetch water, make food, clean the house etc. As mentioned in 1.6.3 (Pokot Masculinities), the aim of a woman's life is seen to give birth to sons, and fulfill the society's role as a good wife.

The men live in a different world. They normally leave home after breakfast in the morning and do usually not return until the evening meal, except when they have work to do at home, building a house, making or mending the fences around the cornfields or making them ready before the rain starts, sowing in March and April, and harvesting in November. Otherwise, it is not fitting for a man to stay at home during the day and he should not go to other people's home during that time. Men laugh at a pal who stays at home without an apparent reason and say that his wife rules him. If he needs to visit another man he does it early in the morning before the man leaves his home. Men often stay in the shadow of thick trees, where they rest and talk during the middle of the day. Sometimes they meet as the council of elders, *kokwo*, to discuss important matters. Some of them look after their animals and others are constantly traveling, sometimes for days, visiting *tilya*-friends to see if they have got calves they can take home (see 6.6 Joint cattle ownership, *tilya*). A man never tells his wife where he is going when he leaves in the morning and not either if he goes on a journey, so she does not know, who his *tilya*-friends are, which can create great problems when he dies (cf. 6.6 Joint cattle ownership, *tilya*). Thus she does not know if he will show up at night and does not worry about him unless she has not heard from him for a long time, e.g. a month. Polygamous men divide their time between their wives and make sure that their homes are sufficiently far apart that they do not meet normally. The dreams of a Pokot man are to become rich and enjoy blessings of

the gods and spirits, i.e. to become prosperous and respected, to have many cattle, wives and children and enjoy respect in the community (cf. 1.6.3. Pokot masculinities).



Picture 10. Cows play a central role in the life of the Pokot people.

The size of the homes in the communities we visited varied. In some, people and animals lived in the same house, only separated by a thin wall. In the part for humans, people slept and cooked their food, all in the same room. There had been a great propaganda for a long time to educate people to build at least three houses, one for the goats and sheep, a kitchen, and at least one house to sleep in. It had bore fruit, and in several homes people slept in separate houses, sometimes big. The church personnel had even succeeded in convincing a few men to undertake the difficult job of digging pit latrines, which some of the old people found incomprehensible and even madness. Usually people had small cornfields, one or two acres, where they grew mostly maize, but also beans, enough to feed their families, and sometimes a little surplus to sell. During the rain period many women grew vegetables in separate gardens. They also kept animals; cows, goats and sheep, which in addition to providing food, were like bank accounts, and could be sold when cash was needed to buy commodities, pay for health services or school fees for the children.

There, in the exotic mountains people lived immersed in the Pokot traditions, where religion and rituals are an inseparable part of all life, forming a whole. No

important event was without a ritual and problems were usually solved by performing an appropriate one. Here we meet the old Africa. Of the few places in Pokot of religious importance, one of them is in Cheptulel, Kaporo, a cave where the last ritual in the circumcision process, *wititagh*, is performed and the *poro*-ritual is held. Both will be explained later, in 5.2.20 (What has been completed, *wititagh*) and 6.1 (*Poro*).

In every community we visited, a meeting had been organised with the people, where community development and other issues were discussed and they explained their problems and wishes. It was very interesting and informative. We suggested some solution if we could and encouraged them to continue to do what they could to improve their lives. Everywhere they expressed thanks for the help they had received. On the last day of the mountain tour we descended again down to the heat of Arpolo, a community at the foot of the Mountains. There we visited a friend who was also the chief of the area. He received us as honored members of his family, slaughtered a goat and prepared a great feast for us, made me sleep alone in his house to make sure that I would sleep uninterrupted. He and my guide slept in another house. His farm was well developed and was a show ground for other people who came to learn from him. He had much running water and so could water his fruit trees and vegetable garden. The people living on the lowland can, however, never be safe from the ever-imminent raids from the Turkana, who sometimes come unexpectedly in the cover of darkness, heavily armed. Normally the people of Cheptulel live in peace with their other neighbors, the Keyo and Marakwet to the east, both Kalenjin groups, and people have settled freely on both sides of the district border and intermarried. They have, however, sometimes raided each other, the Pokot being the most aggressive part, and these neighbors are presented as enemies in the last ritual of the circumcision process, *wititagh* (cf. 5.2.20 What has been completed, *wititagh*) in Cheptulel.

Our friend, a former headmaster of a primary school, had done his best to convince his people of the importance of education, that it was the key to the future, and had fought for the establishment of schools in Cheptulel. He, as many parents in the location, had dreams for his children that they might get a good education and well paid jobs. Many parents, especially mothers, struggle very hard to make money to pay school fees for their youth. They carry corn to sell at the market, sell fruits and vegetables, even their only goats, burn charcoal, engage in various kinds of business, etc. to collect enough. Some succeed, but unfortunately others do not. For their

children the only option is to stay at home and be small scale farmers. The least respectable job is to be a herder of other people's animals.

The next morning I woke up with the song of the birds and the smell of the brewing tea. We were served tea with exceptionally much milk, which itself made it naturally sweet and delicious, and chapati. After a relaxed and long breakfast in the fellowship of good friends, we started the journey home in my car, which had been brought there.

Now I have given a short glimpse into the life of the people of Cheptulel. Before describing their traditions, it is valuable to get an idea about their historical roots, because the present is part of the past. First I will try to trace their origin as a part of Kalenjin and the Nilotes.

2.3 Pokot as a part of a greater whole

As pointed out in 1.5 (Ethnicity and boundaries), I argue that the Pokot people is a relatively young ethnic group in the present form, probably only from the 19th century. They lack a myth of common ancestry or origin but share fundamental values, religion and language, and have a sense of solidarity and common identity.

Where do the roots of the Pokot people lie? It is important to have an idea about their origin in order to get a picture of who they are and about their identity. As mentioned above in 1.5, several theories have been put forward about the origin of the Nilotes and thus the Kalenjin as a part of them. I will start by reviewing the most important theories about the origin of the Kalenjin, of which the Pokot is a part, but not go into details about the Nilotes.

2.3.1 The Nilotes

Nilotes is the name of a group of several ethnic groups living in southern Sudan, northern Uganda, eastern Congo, western Kenya and northern Tanzania,¹³ with a combined population of more than seven million people at the end of 20th century (Encyclopedia Britannica, online, <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?tocId=9055858>).¹⁴ The name referred originally to the habitat of the so called Western Nilotes,¹⁵ i.e. the

¹³ Sanders (2001:250) claims that 50 ethnic groups belong to the Nilotes. His list is not quite accurate, at least some Kalenjin groups are not mentioned in it, but it gives an idea of the size of the group.

¹⁴ Distefano believes J. Ludwig Krapf first introduced the term "Nilotic" in 1850 (1985:32).

¹⁵ The Western Nilotes are: Burun, Shilluk, Anuak, Acholi, Lango, Alur, Luo, Jur, Bor, Dinka and Nuer (Greenberg 1963:85).

region of the upper Nile and its tributaries, their linguistic and cultural affinities (Sanders 2001:2-3), but Greenberg (1963), classifying African ethnic groups primarily by their languages, followed Köhler (1955), and lumped together in one group the so called Nilo-Hamitic and Nilotic languages, and called them Nilotes, which he sub-divided into Southern, Eastern and Western Nilotes (Greenberg 1963:85-86). Sutton (1968:81-84), following Greenberg’s classification, modified the names of the Nilotic subgroups and called them Highland, Plains, and River-Lake Nilotes (instead of Southern, Eastern and Western Nilotes), a classification I prefer because it indicates better the location of their habitat. Otherwise I follow Greenberg’s classification.

The Highland Nilotes are divided into Dadog, and Kalenjin to which the Pokot people belong.

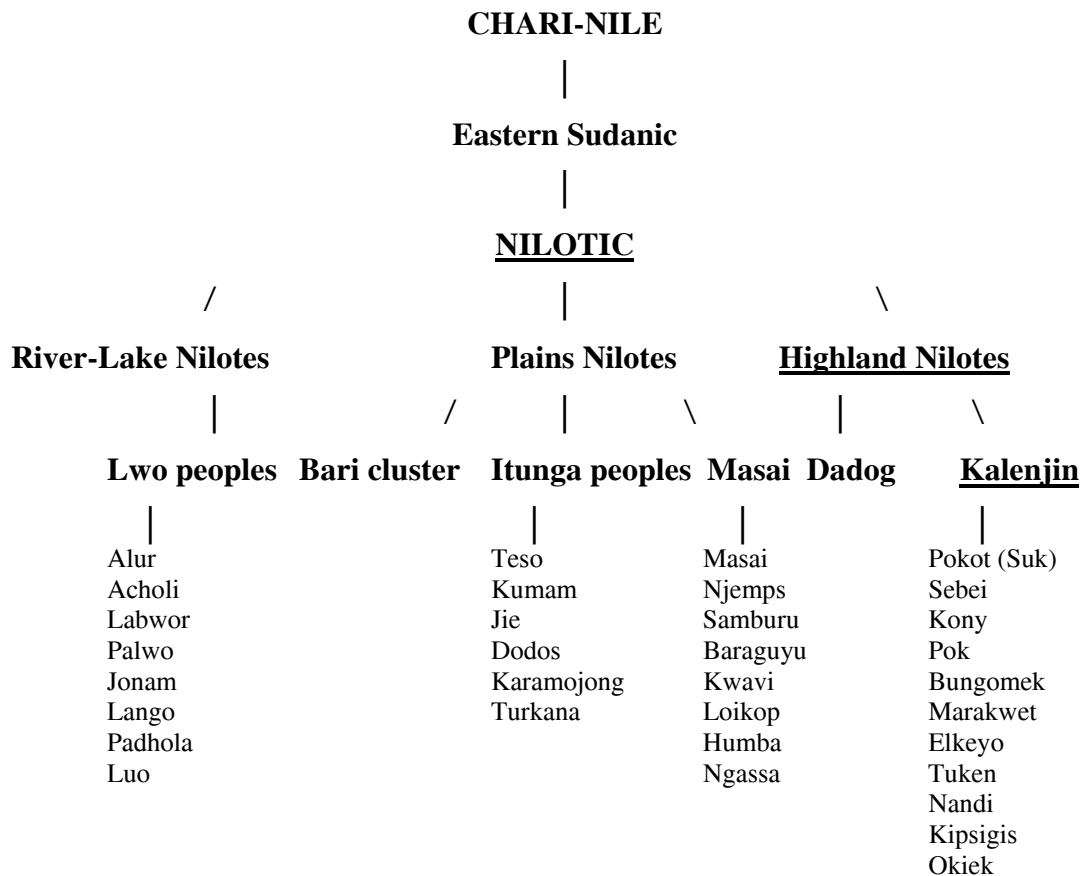


Table 1. Languages of East Africa
(Adapted from Ogot 1974:82-83 [1968])

Cattle are important in the cultures of many Kalenjin groups and they have usually a rich cattle vocabulary because several of them are or have been pastoralists. Their basic cultural values are traditionally connected to cattle, which in their minds,

are the highest form of wealth, aesthetics, and ritual offerings. Many Nilotes supplement their pastoralism with cultivation, fishing and even some food gathering. Some have become primarily sedentary agriculturalists, e.g. the Luos, the Anuak and most of the Kalenjin groups (<http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=57261>).

2.3.1.1 The origin of the Nilotes and the Kalenjin

As mentioned in 1.4.2 (Scholarly studies), practically no written information exists about the history of the Kalenjin before the year 1900, scholars who have tried to trace their origin and history have used archaeology, ethnographic material and linguistics to acquire more information. Theories put forward by Ehret (1971) about the emergence of the Nilotes and the Highland Nilotes, (which he called Southern Nilotes) have been most prominent among scholars who have written about the Pokot people. His theories are based on glottochronology, a method used to find out how long time ago different languages evolved from a common source language, and lexicostatistics, a statistical technique similar to the carbon 14 method used in archaeology, to estimate how long ago different languages evolved from a common source language (Renfrew 2000:xi; Swadesh 1960, 1972; Embelton 2000:147).

This methodology has been highly criticized for its inaccuracy (Embelton 2000; cf. Wright and Suny-Courtland 1999). I join this criticism and doubt seriously the validity of Ehret's conclusions about the emergence of at least the Kalenjin group of peoples and argue that they are greatly overestimated and speculative. As will be discussed in 2.3.1.2.2 (Multiple origin, a result of fusion), I believe the Kalenjin came about as a result of fusion.

Based on his methodology, Ehret postulated that a proto-Kalenjin group came into being about 1000-1200 AD from which a proto-Nandi, a proto-Pokot and other proto-Kalenjin groups separated, probably at about 1500 AD. As Ehret goes further back in time he argues that the proto-Highland Nilotes may have emerged in the first centuries AD and the proto-Nilotes as early as 3000 BC (Ehret 1971:27-31; cf. Ehret 1972 and Ehret et. al. 1972). He estimates that the homeland of the proto-Nilotes comprised a belt from northern Kenya and Lake Turkana running west and northwest towards the Nile (1971:35).

2.3.1.2 Kalenjin

Most theories about the Nilotes and their sub-groups, such as the Highland Nilotes or Kalenjin,¹⁶ assume that they came about as whole groups and moved or emigrated as such. This may be regarded as a part of the evolution theories dominating anthropology in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. The theories about the origin of the Kalenjin can be divided into two main groups, first, that the Kalenjin groups moved into their present home area from outside, and secondly that they did not emerge as a result of migration, but of fusion between aboriginal Okiek groups (see 2.3.1.3 The aboriginal Okiek) and the neighboring people groups of Bantu origin living in the areas where the Kalenjin now live. I will now explain these theories in more details.

2.3.1.2.1 As a result of migrations

There are four main theories about how the Kalenjin migrated into their present home area. Firstly, that they came from the north, without specifying from where, and that some of them settled at Mt. Elgon but others moved onwards from there (Hobley 1906:2).¹⁷

Secondly, that they came from Lake Turkana and moved to Mt. Elgon from where the Nandi, Kipsigis and other groups continued their migration to their present home districts via the Lake Baringo area (Hobley 1906; Huntingford 1950:2; 1953a:2; 1953b:14; Langat 1969:73-93; cf. Ehret 1971).

Thirdly, Ehret argues that when the proto-Nilotes emerged, they expanded from their home areas in a triangle between south-eastern Sudan, south-western Ethiopia, and northern Kenya, some towards the south, normally to less densely populated areas, and were influenced by the cultures they came into contact with, e.g. the Afro-Asiatic population (Ehret 1971:78).¹⁸ He is of the view that in the beginning of the second millennium AD, proto-Kalenjin groups lived somewhere in a belt

¹⁶ The name Kalenjin means „I tell you.“ A program, which was on the Kenyan national radio in the 1940s, started with these words, and contributed considerably towards creating a common identity between the ethnic groups that belong to this group of peoples (Omosule 1989).

¹⁷ Hollis believed that the Lako, Kony, Mbai, Sabaot, Sapin, Pok and Kapkara stayed at Mt. Elgon but the others moved on to the south and east and settled in Nandi, Lumbwa, Buret, Sotik, Elgeyo and Kamasia (Hollins 1909:2).

¹⁸ The term Afro Asiatic is used here instead of Hamites. I follow Sutton (1968:95-96) who accepts Greenberg's suggestion in use of this terminology. Ehret believed that the Kalenjin adopted male and female circumcision, circular age-set system and prohibition to eat fish from the Afro-Asiatic population (1971:36).

running southwest from Mt. Elgon to the Rift Valley from where they expanded gradually to their present home areas and that their dialects branched and evolved into various Kalenjin languages. The groups living on the eastern slopes of Mt. Elgon expanded from the eastern part of the mountain to the southern and northern part of it. He is further of the opinion that the ancestors of the Pokot people lived around the Cherangany Mountains and the adjacent part of the Uasin Gishu plains, and that the Pokot expanded from there towards the north, i.e. from the Cherangany Mountains (1971:66).

Distefano (1985), following the basic outline of Ehret's chronology, modifies it and reiterates the claim that the Highland Nilotes entered the Rift Valley between Mt. Elgon and the Cherangany hills from the area of southern Sudan, northern Uganda and western Kenya.

The fourth and last migration theory maintains that the Kalenjin originated in Egypt. *Misri* is the name of Egypt in Arabic and Swahili. The so called Misri legends recur time and again in the oral traditions of the Nilotic and Kalenjin peoples, and are believed by some to indicate that Egypt is their place of origin. Many scholars reject these traditions as unreliable and rule out the possibility that people from Egypt, e.g. Jews, have mixed with Africans of Bantu or Nilotic origin and brought their traditions with them. Others have suggested that these traditions are of Christian origin. Ochieng (1972), however, believes they are historically valid and places Misri north of Mt. Elgon. Cox (1972) believes also, that the origin of the Pokot is at least far towards the north. Distefano, without referring to the Misri legends, maintains that Misri may be situated in southern Sudan (Distefano 1985:139).

In addition to these four theories, Peristany (1939:1-2) and Orchardson (1961:4) believe that the origin of the Kalenjin is near Lake Baringo.

2.3.1.2.2 Multiple origin, a result of fusion

Mwanzi (1977), who calls his standpoint the evolution school (:5), argues that the Kalenjin have never existed as one group nor moved from an area of common origin but are an outcome of fusion between various ethnic groups. He gets support from several authors, Johnston (1902), Barton (1921), and Huntingford (1969), who

pointed out that individual Kalenjin peoples are a mixture of several ethnic groups. Sutton (1976) believed that the Kalenjin have lived in their present habitat for 1-2.000 years.

In his doctoral research on the Kipsigis, Mwanzi concluded, based on both written sources and oral traditions, that the Kipsigis had never moved to their present home area but were basically the outcome of an interaction between the Nilotic Okiek aboriginal groups and Bantu-speaking peoples (1977:38). Further he found no evidence for a single founder of the Kipsigis community (1977:10).

Mwanzi's theory about the origin of the Kipsigis supports my findings about the emergence of the Pokot people, that they are a collection of people of different origins. There is thus a reason to believe that our findings can be applied to all the other Kalenjin groups, i.e. that they have all come about as a fusion between various clans and groups of people, but all having an Okiek group as a common denominator from which they got their language. This is most probably true about the Pokot people, who live in close proximity with the Cherangany people (Sengwer) in the West Pokot District, which is an Okiek group (Reynolds 1982:30-38, cf. 1.4.2. Scholarly studies).

2.3.1.3 The aboriginal Okiek

As mentioned in 1.4.2 (Scholarly studies), scholars believe that the Okiek, a group of aboriginal peoples, hold the key to the understanding of the history and origin of the Kalenjin.

According to Blackburn (1971), there are at least 33 local groups scattered widely over western and central Kenya to northern Tanzania, each socially distinct with its own individual name, but all classified as Okiek.¹⁹ They do, however, regard themselves as one ethnic group, which they say became separated in the past, and speak a Kalenjin language, although different dialects (Kratz 1988:4, 53; Blackburn 1974:141). They claim, supported by their neighbors, that they are the original

¹⁹ Blackburn (1971:14-15) lists their names and provides maps showing their home areas. The groups are: 1. Cherangany, 2. Digiri, 3. Kipkurerek, 4. Kakimengirin, 5. Kipsanan, 6. Koibate (Kaivatet), 7. Kinare, 8. Loliin, 9. Lalaroik, 10. Omotik, 11. Suiei, 12. Masula, 13. Lanat, 14. Werkile, 15. El Molo, 16. Dundule (unconfirmed), 17. Mosiro Kisankasa Mediaki, 18. Kony, 19. Kipchornwonek I, 20. Kaplelach, 21. Kapsupulek, 22. Kierisho, 23. Saleta, 24. Nosubukia, 25. Lorkumi, 26. Oldonyo Purro, 27. Longinye, 28. Narianda, 29. Chepkurerek, 30. Mareshionik, 31. Kipchornwonek II, 32. Tinet, 33. Sisiyuet.

inhabitants of the areas they live in. Blackburn (1971:8-9), following Ehret, believes their origin is in northern and northwestern Kenya.²⁰

It is of importance for my argumentation, that the Pokot people live in close proximity to the Okiek group, Cherangany, who call themselves Sengwer as the Pokot do. According to Reynolds, there has been a long-standing relationship between these two. In pre-colonial times they lived in the forests and subsided on hunting, gathering, cultivating millet, and bee keeping. Nowadays they live primarily in Talau, a sub-location of Siyoi, near Kapenguria town (Reynolds 1982:30-31). During my research I found that some of the Pokot clans originate in the Cherangany hills, some, or at least some of their sub-clans, probably among the Cherangany people, e.g. the Tulin, Sanyökin, Talayn, Köymö, Koghoghin and Kopil.

After providing a basic picture of how the Kalenjin groups in general have come about, I will now be more specific and try to answer the question how the Pokot people emerged.

2.4 The Emergence of the Pokot people

There has long been some confusion about the meaning of the name of Pokot. As mentioned in 1.4.1 (Travelers and government officials), the Europeans who wrote about the Pokot people and their district at the end of the 19th century till the beginning of the 1960s, called them Suk. Beech (1911:2), Totty and Chaundry, believed the name came from the Maasai who used it about the Pokot people living in the highland, “because they carried a “chok,” a short curved bill-hook” (1944:3). It is not clear how the name Suk came about, but informants told me that when a representative of the British colonial power asked a Pokot man to which ethnic group he belonged, he answered that he belonged to the Suk, which means a tree stump in the Pokot language. The reason for the answer was that he was unwilling to reveal his true identity for fear of taxation. Nyamwaya (1982:21) and Bianco (1992:74) confirm this explanation. As independence drew near, the Pokot refused to use this name

²⁰ The Okiek are primarily hunters and gatherers. Honey has the same status and importance among them as cattle among other Kalenjin groups (Blackburn 1971:95-284). They occupy high forests all over Kenya (:13) and divide their land into five or six ecozones where they find various types of food during different seasons of the year. Each lineage has a strip of land crosscutting all the ecozones (Blackburn 1974:146). They normally live in close proximity to other ethnic groups, Kalenjin or Maasai, and speak their languages as well. The Okiek are keen on adapting to their environment. Although many of them keep domestic animals nowadays and cultivate crops, they still collect honey, wild foods and hunt game (Blackburn 1982:10).

because it was regarded derogatory, and the name Pokot has been used instead by the administration from the early 1960s (AR 1961:3).

There is a tradition among the Pokot people, which traces their origin to one founder called Pochoh,²¹ but is not supported by many. The most common view among the Pokot people is that the name Pokot is derived from the word *pö-köt*, which means escape, and that the name Pokot thus means refugees.²² In my survey of the history of Pokot clans, problems of some sort, famine, war, diseases or hunger were most often the reasons for people's migration to Pokot, which supports the common understanding among the Pokot themselves that they are a collection of refugees (cf. Hyde-Clark 1933:1738).

I found also, as mentioned in 1.5 (Ethnicity and Boundaries), that the Pokot clans came to Pokot from various directions at different times, mostly from other Kalenjin groups such as the Tugen, Keyo, Marakwet, Nandi and Sebei, but a few from other neighboring groups as well, the Njemps, Samburu, Turkana and Karamojong. Together all these groups formed the Pokot society. Cox, who served as a medical doctor in Pokot for many years, supports this view by pointing out that the physical features of the people in the district vary widely (Cox 1972:21).

Looking at their religion further supports the multiple origins of the Pokot people. Some clans claim to own certain rituals, e.g. the Talai clan declares ownership over *kirongon* and *sintagh*, and the Moyoy clan over *simar*. Only their representatives are allowed to perform them and be present when their secretive parts are performed. This may indicate that members of these clans have brought these rituals to Pokot. Some rituals may have already been common among several groups before they arrived in Pokot, e.g. circumcision, because representatives from several clans may perform them as will be explained better in chapter five.

Other elements of the Pokot religion are not identical everywhere in Pokot land, although the gods and the basic religious ideas and values are. As mentioned in 1.5 (Ethnicity and Boundaries), the major rituals, such as the most common cleansing rituals (*kikatat*, *tisö* and *moy*), life cycle rituals (name giving, *katakata oi*, and circumcision, *mutat*), *sapana*, *parpara* (a cleansing ritual performed for a married couple when the wife has become pregnant with her first child), and the funeral rituals (*kinto* or *so*) are used all over Pokot land, even if there may be some variations in

²¹ The name *Pochoh* is derived from the word *poropchon*, which means an obedient man.

²² *Pochon* sing., *Pokot* plural.

details. Some local ideas also exist, which are not followed by all the Pokot people, such as tree worship, which is most common in Baringo district (East Pokot), especially among the people living near Mt. Tiyatiy, and there are some rituals a few people here and there adhere to, which have been adopted from other ethnic groups.²³ Seasonal rituals such as *simar*, *kironгон* and *sintagh* are, as mentioned in 1.2 (My background), only performed in Cheptulel, but their outcome is believed to affect the entire Pokot land and people all over the district wait eagerly for their outcome.

2.4.1 Fluid boundaries

Although the Pokot people is of multiple origin they normally regard other Kalenjin peoples as “close” to them (Eriksen 2002:66 [1993]), even relatives, as the majority of their clans originate among them and some are found in more than two.

As mentioned in 1.5 (Ethnicity and Boundaries), the Pokot and Kalenjin as well as other ethnic groups are in constant making and interacting with their neighboring ethnic groups (Vansina 1990; Barth 1969). In some places there are intimate relations between these groups, e.g. through trade and intermarriages and they co-exist more or less in harmony. It is clear that there has long been much contact between some of the Kalenjin groups and the boundaries between them were fluid before the coming of colonial rule and that they are to a certain extent its creation, as is the case with many other ethnic groups in Africa.

Moore has pointed out that the Marakwet is composed of five groups,²⁴ which did not regard themselves as one group before the colonial authorities lumped them together as one and that they had probably as much in common with other Kalenjin groups as with each other (Moore 1996:13).

The situation is similar among the Sebei. They were several independent groups before the colonial administration lumped them together as one ethnic group (Goldschmidt 1969:14-15; 1976:11; 1986:3).²⁵

The same holds true about the Kipsigis, as mentioned in 2.3.1.2.2 (Multiple origin, a result of fusion). Mwanzi points out that the land of the Kipsigis is composed

²³ I describe this in Appendix 2, ritual no. 15.

²⁴ The groups composing the Marakwet are Almo, Cherengani, Endo, Kiptani and Marakweta (Moore 1996:13). Kipkorir (1973a:4) adds a sixth group, Borokot.

²⁵ The Sebei consists of three groups living on the northern and northwestern slopes of Mt. Elgon in Uganda, the Sebei, Mbai and Sor. They are culturally and linguistically affiliated with three groups on the southern slopes of the mountain on the Kenyan side, the Bok, Kony and Bojom and form together the Sabaot Union (Goldschmidt 1976:11).

of three main regions and that the people living in each of them had “different names” (1977:52-53) and that the unification of the Kipsigis into one group was completed during the colonial time in the 20th century (:64).

The situation was also the same among the Luyah, neighbors of the Pokot to the south in Trans Nzoia, as explained in 1.6 (Ethnicity and boundaries; cf. Southall 1970; Fedders 1980:99).²⁶

Bolling (1996:67), who conducted a research among the Pokot people in the Baringo District and studied their oral traditions, believes that several Pokot lineages have a “non-Pokot” origin and that “many Eastern Nilotic and Eastern Cushitic speaking peoples were integrated into a rapidly expanding group of cattle keepers, i.e. the pastoral Pokot. To become a legitimate member of the Pokot society they had to be “washed” by a Pokot lineage” and thus adopted. Their relationship was confirmed by a ban on intermarriage between the adopting and adopted lineages. As will be explained in more details in 2.5 (Europeans and the British Colonial Power), immigrants of Sebei origin in the West Pokot District were given the choice, in the first half of the 20th century, of being integrated into the Pokot society by undergoing a Pokot initiation rite, or leaving the district. Some of them accepted the offer and became a part of the Pokot society but others left.

Many Turkana people have moved to Pokot, and some have adapted to their way of living and been taken into the Pokot society, and some Turkana women, captured during cattle raids, have settled as wives of Pokot soldiers. This phenomena, to absorb people into the society is, according to Kopytoff (1977:14), common in Africa due to the constant need for working power.

Bolling says, about the boundaries between Pokot and other ethnic groups, that “[e]thnic boundaries were marked against the Maasai and Karamojong while they were blurred against other Kalenjin speakers (1990b:75).”

Coy (1982), who studied blacksmiths among several Kalenjin peoples,²⁷ found that they often located themselves between ethnic groups in order to have a larger market. The Moyoy clan of blacksmiths in Pokot, which originates among the Keyo people, is a good example of people changing their ethnic identity and becoming members of a neighboring ethnic group, other than their fathers’, but people do

²⁶ The colonial authority unified into one ethnic group, the Luyah, 12 to 18 groups, depending on how they are defined, although all of them were distinct and had individual names and identity (Southall 1970: 33-34; Fedders 1980:99).

²⁷ The Tugen, Keiyo, Marakwet, Endo, Pokot and a few Okiek groups (Coy 1982:43).

normally belong to the same clan and ethnic group as their fathers even if their mother is from another. The traditional land of the Moyoy clan in West Pokot is in the vicinity of Chesagon town, near the boundary between Pokot and the Keyo, but many descendents of the clan have now settled in various parts of the district as Pokot and have other occupations.

All these examples verify that the boundaries between individual Kalenjin groups, and even some non-Kalenjin groups, seem not to have been as clear cut before the coming of the colonial rule as nowadays, and based on that, it can be argued that there has been a steady flux of people over them. This is further supported by the fact, which has already been mentioned several times, that many clans exist in two or more groups, and that their identities as “big” ethnic groups, as we know them today, did not exist then as now. The similarities in languages, religion and social structure of the Kalenjin groups, supports this view further. There is thus a reason to believe that individual Kalenjin ethnic groups in the present form are of rather recent origin. I believe that most likely many Kalenjin clans were loosely connected in a similar way, as among the Marakwet people, before the colonial period, where geographical proximity regulated the intensity of contact, as mentioned above. This supports further my view that the Pokot and the other Kalenjin groups have not moved together as whole entities from an area of common origin, but emerged as a result of fusion between Okiek groups and their neighbors.

The Pokot people have adopted customs and rituals, the age-sets system, cow-names, etc. from the neighboring ethnic groups, as will be explained further in later chapters. The boundaries with their neighbors are fluid, and the Pokot people have been open to innovations from other peoples as long as they have strengthened their subsistence economy but avenging if they have threatened it (Nangulu 2001:29), as they often were towards innovations of the British colonial power.

I have explained where, in my view, the roots of the Pokot people lie and how they have come about. It is now right to give an overview of their history in the 20th century based on written sources, of which handing-over reports of the district commissioners are a very important source material.

2.5 Europeans and the British Colonial Power

The present day Kenya, Uganda and parts of Ethiopia and Sudan came into the British sphere of influence with the Anglo-Italian agreement in 1891 (Tully 1985:81), when

the area from the city of Mombasa to the Rift Valley became a British protectorate in 1895, administered from Zanzibar (Mungeam 1966:1-20; Ogot 1974:255-259 [1968]). Kenya was made a British colony in 1920 (Nangulu 2001:36). In 1902 the Nyanza and Naivasha provinces were transferred from Uganda to the British East Africa Protectorate, Baringo, belonging to the latter, included the whole of Pokot land.

2.5.1 The colonial power in Pokot

The first government outpost among the Pokot people was established in Baringo District in 1903. An officer was posted there in 1909 as the region was transferred to the Turkana district (Tully 1985:35, 83).

The purpose of the administration was to watch over the Turkana district, which covered the present day West-Pokot and southern Turkana districts. A district officer was placed in 1910 at Ngabotok in southern Turkana, near the present day Kainuk, but the office was moved to Marich in the Sigor division in October 1913, because it was too far into the Turkana district for the Pokot people to go there (AR 1912-1913:10; Bianco 1992:50). In December 1915 the office was again moved, this time to Kacheliba, which was then on the Uganda side of the border between Kenya and Uganda, but was moved to Kapenguria in 1930 due to the healthier climate there for the colonial staff (Bianco 1992:50; Hyde-Clark 1933:1741; Nangulu 2001:36-37).

The West Suk district was created in 1918 and became a part of the Naivasha province and belonged to it until 1921. Until 1929 it was a part of the Kerio province. It was then transferred to the Turkana Province to which it belonged until 1941 when it became a part of the Rift Valley Province and has been a part of it until this date (Bianco 1992:50; Hyde-Clark 1933:1741; Nangulu 2001:36-37). In March 1961 the name of the district was changed to West Pokot District because of its derogatory notions (AR 1961:3), as has previously been explained.

Karapokot, which means the closed Pokot, the area northwest of the river Swam to the present border of Uganda, was administered from Uganda until 1922 when it was handed over to West Pokot. In 1926 the eastern and western boundaries of the district were defined and the eastern boundaries demarcated but the western boundary was demarcated two years later, i.e. in 1928 (Hyde-Clark 1933:1741; Nangulu 2001:37-38). From 1930 to 1970 Karapokot was administered from Amudat in Uganda in an attempt to harmonize the relationship between the Pokot and the Karamojong (Brasnett 1958:119-121), but on September 2nd, 1970 the area was

officially handed over to Kenya (AR 1970:1). Karamoja has rich dry season pastures but little water for their cattle. The Pokot, on the other hand, have access to much water but insufficient pastures for their livestock. This has often caused clashes between these neighbors, especially during the dry period (Hyde-Clark 1933:1742-1743, 1747), and still the problem has not yet been solved.

According to Tully (1985:83), the fixing of the boundaries between the Pokot and its neighbors disrupted past patterns of migration, dry season grazing, raiding and alliances, making intertribal raids fiercer than before. Nangulu is of the opinion that this was part of a divide and rule tactic of the colonial power, i.e. to make it easier to alienate land for European settlement (2001:34-35). In 1926 rights of the African population to land was restricted to the reserves (Tully 1985:90). West Pokot was a “closed district” from 1913 to 1964 allowing the district commissioners to restrict movements across the district boundaries and to deport people who were considered dangerous or believed to cause disorder (Tully 1985:16).

The official reason for this isolation was to protect the indigenous population against European or African outsiders, who would want to take over their land, but it isolated them also from the rest of the nation. Closed districts such as West Pokot, therefore, lagged behind other parts of Kenya in social and economic development at the time of independence (Hendrix 1985:49).

For long periods during the first half of the 20th century, the Pokot were prohibited to export cattle from the district because it was put under quarantine although the inhabitants were at the same time accused of overstocking. The aim of this policy was, according to Tully, primarily to “keep African cattle from undercutting the settlers’ market” (1985:94-95). At times immunization programs were launched although a livestock officer was not stationed in West Pokot until 1949. During the Second World War, restrictions on the sale of cattle and meat were removed when there was need for beef in the country, and in the fifties the Pokot were urged to export more animals than they had ever done before so that the government could acquire cheap stock and meat. This reflects the policy of the colonial government, which in Tully’s view, was to protect the interests of the settlers, but not that of the Pokot people, nor the indigenous population. It acted when the settlers demanded protection from livestock diseases and made the district a buffer zone against diseases and raids from the north, i.e. Turkana (AR 1949; Tully 1985:112,153).

The hut and poll tax was introduced in 1901 in all British administered areas and the administration started to collect it soon after establishing itself in Pokot land, i.e. in 1910, and it was one of its main activities. The hut tax was payable on all dwelling houses owned by taxpayers who had reached the age of 16 but the age limit was raised to 18 years in 1936 and the Poll tax was payable by all able-bodied men not liable to pay the hut tax. The incoming revenue was spent on government expenses and projects, such as infrastructure in the district, but a considerable part of it, often about 40-50%, was invested outside the district in more fertile settler areas. The colonial authority marginalized the West Pokot district and regarded it economically unprofitable because it was believed not to have any exploitable natural resources (Nangulu 2001:47-48). The result of the first year of tax collection, 1910, was very meager, only 971 rupees (AR 1911), but the income increased the next year and was usually 50.000 - 140.000 sh. a year until the end of the colonial period (AR 1922:17; 1939:18; 1962).

The Hut and Poll Tax was initially three rupees, but was raised to five in 1918, six in 1920, and changed to twelve shillings in 1922, equivalent to six rupees (AR 1939:18). The aim of this taxation was to force the population to seek employment on settler farms in the neighboring Trans Nzoia District, which they were initially very reluctant to do. Some people living on the lowland tried to evade the tax by moving to Karamoja in Uganda, where the tax was only 5 sh., but most people paid the tax by selling goats or sheep. Gradually Pokot men sought employment in Trans Nzoia, and in 1924, when Pokot was stricken by severe drought, the district commissioner reports with delight, that 400 of them did and believed that the government had now succeeded in making them seek employment on regular basis on the European owned farms outside the district. Monthly wages were only five to six sh. but the tax was twelve, and the average worker was employed 4,45 months a year. In 1933 the number of individuals who went to Trans Nzoia to work had increased to 800 (AR 1924:18; AR 1933:9; Tully 1985:96-99).

Because the law of the colony favored the white settlers, the indigenous population was not allowed to grow the most profitable crops such as coffee, tea and pyrethrum and the settlers held “a monopoly on community exports, bulking, pricing and transport of meat, dairy products, and grain” (Tully 1985:114). The government was not prepared to build the necessary infrastructure to allow the Pokot or other

ethnic groups to compete with the Europeans as producers of crops for export or as “commercial ranchers” (Tully 1985:152; cf. Odinga 1967).

The colonial authorities tried to introduce new crops in West Pokot, such as maize and beans, and new commodities such as blankets and utensils, without much success, and accused the inhabitants of apathy when they met with little response. One of the district commissioners (DCs) wrote in his annual report that the Pokot were lacking “not only intelligence but, apparently, any interest in their own welfare” (AR 1933:4), but the Pokot have always resented interference with their subsistence economy (Nangulu 2001:29).

The authorities did not put much effort into introducing education in West Pokot but established the Government African School (GAS) in Kapenguria 1928, a primary school with emphasis on practical teaching, especially how to grow vegetables and crops, such as maize and beans. The school was best known under the leadership of Chaundry (1931-1943) and was considered a success as stated many times in the annual reports of the Pokot DCs (AR 1931:22; Chaundry 1939, 1947, 1948).

People from other ethnic groups moved to West-Pokot during the entire 20th century. In the first half Sebei were the most numerous, but the Nandi and Bukusu²⁸ were also many. The influx increased sharply when squatters’ stock was expelled from settler farms in Trans Nzoia and Uasin Gishu districts in the 1940s and the newcomers settled mostly in the best agricultural areas of Mnagei, Lelan, Riwa, Kipkomo and Kapenguria locations. All these immigrants and their animal herds caused concern among the Pokot, that it might lead to overstocking and thus, they requested them to adopt Pokot customs or else be expelled from the district. In 1948, the colonial authorities accepted this request with the result that some of the aliens were initiated according to the Pokot custom, but others chose rather to leave (AR 1947, B (1); AR 1948:1; AR 1952:1). The subject of immigrants, surfaces time and again in the annual reports of the district commissioners (DCs) until the time of independence and even longer.

Another matter of concern for the DCs in Pokot was the activities of Dini ya Msambwa.²⁹ In their view the district was normally peaceful and the Pokot people did not create unrest as they had no interest in the politics of the colony and wished only

²⁸ Bukusu is one of the groups belonging to the Luyah.

²⁹ Dini ya Msambwa is Swahili and means the religion of the ancestors (cf. Usher –Wilson 1952:125).

to be left alone. This was different from some other ethnic groups, e.g. the Kikuyu and Luo, where freedom movements were formed to fight for independence, e.g. the Mau-Mau among the former. The concern about the activities of Dini ya Msambwa is often expressed in the DCs reports during the middle of the century and beyond independence, where it is emphasized that the movement could not be tolerated.

Dini ya Msambwa originated in Trans Nzoia District among the Luhya people around 1943 where it was a millennium movement protesting the presence of the European settlers and their own marginalization. The goal of its leader, Elijah Mashinde, was to expel all Europeans from Kenya before 1950.³⁰

When Dini ya Msambwa was discovered in Kiringet, near Kapenguria in West Pokot District in 1948, its leader, Lucas Pkiech wero Kipkolol, was arrested and sentenced to two years imprisonment, but escaped from prison a year later and as a result the movement continued to expand (AR 1949:8). He urged the Pokot people to follow him to Zion, probably located somewhere in Mt. Elgon, where they would get thousands of cattle, goats, sheep and camels, farms, eternal life and freedom from taxation as no white men, their enemies, would live there and they would live in peace. He succeeded in convincing several hundred people to join him and started the journey in April 1950 (Kipkorir 1973b). Unfortunately the group clashed with the police at Kolloa in East Pokot and he and twenty-eight³¹ of his party were killed and four policemen, three being Englishmen. In addition to that, about fifty Pokot men were wounded (AR 1950:1-2; de Wolf 1983:270; Usher-Wilson 1952). As a result of the subsequent trial, eight more Pokot were executed and the Pokot people as a whole was fined 5.000 heads of cattle (Lundeby 1998:41) and prohibited to carry spears for a while (Wipper 1977:210-217). Kipkorir believes Lucas and his party had no hostilities in mind. Dini ya Msambwa did, however, not gain much strength after this incident, which is still like an open wound in the soul of the Pokot people. I believe the reason why Lucas succeeded in gathering such a big group to accompany him to Zion were his promises of riches in the form of animals, because they are the ultimate form of wealth in the minds of the Pokot people, and it was also tempting to be able to

³⁰ Scholars have tried to classify Dini ya Msambwa. H. Turner (1989) and La Fontaine (1959) believed the group was a religious movement, Jan de Wolf (1966) that it was a millennium movement, J.D. Welime (1967) that it was a political movement with a religious touch and Buijtenhuijs that it was sociological and a cultural protest movement (Binsberg and Shoffeleers 1985:323). Wipper (1977) believes the movement was all of this, and so do I.

³¹ Usher-Wilson (1952) maintains they were 29.

evade the taxation of the authorities. The political emphasis of the group was much softer in West-Pokot than in Trans Nzoia.

Authorities in West-Pokot were, however, nervous every time traces of Dini ya Msambwa activities were discovered in the district, and they detained its members immediately. In 1954, 122 of its followers were detained. Four years later 221 members were in detention and then it was decided to prohibit 29 Dini ya Msambwa leaders to return to their homes in Pokot upon release but be forced to live in the Samburu district, which is far away from their homes. The decision was, however, not implemented (AR 1955:9; AR 1958:1-2).³² Small groups of the movement are still found in the district, but they are quiet and do not cause concern among the district authorities any more.

Before the middle of the 20th century the population of West Pokot was estimated to be less than 25.000 most of the time, e.g. 23.823 in 1925, and 24.733 in 1947 (AR 1925:9-10; AR 1947: App. A). In the 1948 census it had gone up to 42.771, in the 1989 census to 225.449 and 308.086 in the 1999 census (Central Bureau of Statistics 1999). There are several explanations for this enormous increase. Firstly there is an ingrown reluctance of the population to reveal the size of their families and herds for fear of increased taxation and fear of jealousy among some of their neighbors that might lead them to use black magic for evil purposes against them. In the first half of the 20th century the government clerks only asked taxpayers about this information but did not verify them by going to their homes themselves. This changed in the censuses of 1948, 1962, 1969, 1979, 1989 and 1999.

An improved health service in the district is another explanation. It can be accounted for the lowering of the infant mortality rate, which is, however, still far higher than in many other districts in Kenya. The problem is greatest in the remote rural areas where the health service is very poor or still does not exist at all. In spite of improved counting methods and health care the population growth can not be explained only by natural increase, but also due to increased influx of non-Pokots into the district, especially after independence when the district was opened (Hendrix 1985:32-41; see also Schneiter 1953:18-19, 360).

³² The most cooperative Dini ya Msambwa detainees were placed in an open camp in Kamatira, which is in the Cherangany Mountains north of Kapenguria, where they worked with reforestation (AR 1958:2, AR 1959:11).

British missionaries arrived in Pokot in 1931. Their contribution to the Pokot society was mainly in education and linguistics. Emphasizing the importance of education for girls, they established a school for them in Nasokol, near Kapenguria. They also translated the New Testament, the first major book that was published in the vernacular language. Roman Catholic missionaries established themselves in Tartar, not far from Kepenguria, and built the Ortum Hospital (AR 1955:37; Bianco 1992). Their contribution to education, health care, and linguistics is considerable, especially after independence. Other missionaries, especially Lutherans, have also contributed considerably to education, the health service and community development, but they came in 1977.

When it dawned upon the Pokot people that the colonial power would come to an end and Africans would assume the supreme power in the country, many of them, especially the educated who realized how “backward” the district was, worried about how the situation of the Pokot would be in the unified Kenya under Kikuyu leadership, which they feared would seize much of their land in addition to the White Highlands as soon as the Europeans would leave. As a result, many of them stockpiled traditional weapons in 1960, preparing to fight the Kikuyu. They allied themselves with the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), which supported a regional system of government in the hope that their claims for land in the Trans Nzoia district would succeed, but they had claimed parts of Trans Nzoia for the Pokot for decades arguing that they had used it for grazing in the dry seasons before the arrival of the colonial power. They hoped Kapkai, a big farm on the boundary of Trans Nzoia and Pokot, would at least be returned to them. They managed to get two representatives in the Parliament upon independence (Tully 1985:147) but not to obtain any land in Trans Nzoia.

In preparation for independence, the officers of the administration included native Pokots on various boards and committees but the general public did not mind who ruled Kenya and were not concerned about the politics of the country outside their district, because they regarded themselves first and foremost as Pokot and wished to lead their lives without interference from outside. Daniel arap Moi, later the

second president of the country, conducted the first political meetings ever held in the West-Pokot district, in April and September 1960 in Makutano.³³

The participation in the general election in February 1961 reflected how little the political awareness was among the Pokot people, as only 3,284 of them were registered as voters and not more than 80% of those did actually vote (AR 1961:1-2). Kenya gained full independence in December 1963.

2.6 Pokot as a part of Kenya after independence

Great changes have taken place in the West Pokot district after Kenya gained independence, although it has continued to be marginalized in many ways. The Pokot people is a small ethnic group compared to the biggest in the country, Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya and Kisii, and its influence in the national politics has been accordingly, the district being as one of the DCs put it, “rather far removed from areas of political activities” (AR 1964:1). West Pokot has at present three representatives (MPs) in the national parliament, for Karapokot, Kapenguria and Sigor divisions, but very few Pokot MPs have held senior offices in the government. The power of this legislative assembly is mostly symbolic, but the real power is vested in the office of the president. Until 1993 Kenya was a one party state with only one political party, Kenya African National Unity (KANU), which had branches in all districts of the country. People contested for the available seats of their constituencies in the parliament within KANU but the numbers of parliamentarians for each ethnic group was based on the size of their population. It has been the responsibility of the Pokot members of parliament to promote the needs of the Pokot people in the national assembly, and to make sure funds are allocated to their district in the national budget and that general development, such as health care, education, creation of infrastructure and community development in Pokot is taken care of. Many political parties have been formed in recent years due to pressure from Western countries to make democratic reforms in the country.

As Pokot was a closed district for decades, the government services were at a minimum at the time of independence. All communications were difficult, roads were few and bad, and telecommunication hardly existed, the health care system was very

³³ Moi was elected as a representative of the Pokot people in 1955 in the so-called Coutts Commission (AR 1955:2). A large KADU meeting was held at Kisiaunet, near Kapenguria, on 17th December 1960, which he attended among others (AR 1960:1).

undeveloped, the same being true of the educational system. The services of other government departments were very poor, if existing at all. As time has passed there have been gradual improvements in the district, especially in education. In 1964, there were only 27 schools in West Pokot, eighteen lower primary schools with first to fourth grade, eight full primary schools and one so called intermediate school. The number of pupils enrolled in the schools that year were 3.085 in the primary schools and 120 in the intermediate school. In the coming years the number of schools increased gradually and in 1973 the government declared that primary education was to be free, resulting in a jump in the school enrolment, from 4.832 in 1972 to 8.232 that year. In 1979 the president, Daniel arap Moi, declared that primary education was to become compulsory. Church leaders were asked to help the government to build the school system in the district, to which they responded very positively. The following year, 1980, the number of schools jumped from 93 to 193 and the enrolment of pupils from 17.079 to 28.637. In recent years the education system has been expanded further and diversified. The number of secondary schools has increased greatly and a number of polytechnics have been established as well. Christian churches have built most of the schools.

The infrastructure has been improved in West Pokot in recent years, especially with the coming of a tarmac road through the district, improved telecommunications, although still very limited, and expanded health services as private clinics have been opened as a supplement to the limited government health care system, which has also been improved. The district has, however, still a long way to go to catch up with the development of some of the other districts in the country, which started many decades earlier. Considerable part of these improvements in West-Pokot has been financed by foreign aid and the assistance of expatriates.

The isolation of West Pokot district has partly come to an end, and it has become a part of the global village, with its positive and negative effects. Fluctuations in commodity prices and the prices of raw materials on the world markets affect the Pokot economy as other parts of the Kenyan economy, and the district has got its share of structural adjustment measures of the World Bank. Tourism has started in Pokot in recent years and globalization and westernization is impacting the life of the Pokot people as other societies in Africa, resulting, among other things, in a slow erosion of some of its old traditions and values, although Cheptulel location is still one of their strongholds.

2.7 Summary

In this chapter I have continued to draw a picture of the Pokot people. I described the Cheptulel sub-location in Sigor division and West Pokot district. I tried to trace the roots of the Pokot people and other related ethnic groups, and concluded that they are of mixed origin of the aboriginal Cherangany people, which is one of the many Okiek groups scattered widely over Kenya, and their neighbors of various origin. I gave also a review of the documented history of West Pokot from the coming of the British colonial power until independence and through the 20th century and described how the Pokot people were drawn into the world economy and family of nations, mostly against their will.

Before I can begin to describe the rituals Pokot men go through, there are still some more key concepts that I need to clarify, African traditional religion, theories about rituals and related concepts, such as magic, traditions and sacrifices, and how they relate to the Pokot religion and reality.

3. CONCEPTS OF RELIGION

This thesis is a historical anthropology, because in it I try to trace the origin of the Pokot people and provide an outline of its history in the 20th century in order to get a better understanding of who they are. It is my opinion that this gives more depth to the ethnographic part, emphasizing the fact that the rituals and institutions of the Pokot society have a history, whether we know it or not. Individual clans brought them when they moved to Pokot land, others have been invented or copied from other ethnic groups for various reasons and used as a means to cope with life. They have changed in the course of history as they and the society have adapted to new situations (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; 1993).

In this chapter I will continue to account for important concepts in this thesis. I start with an overview of African traditional religions, a short account of “magic,” and review of the most important theories about rituals before ending with a discussion about tradition and sacrifices. I rely heavily on the Kenyan theologian, John S. Mbiti, in my description of African traditional religions and Catherine Bell in the section about rituals.

3.1. African traditional religion and philosophy³⁴

A general understanding of African traditional religion makes it possible to put our knowledge of the Pokot religion into the African context, although I am interested in it in its own right, as previously stated (cf. 1.3.1 Western epistemology). Generally speaking, religion permeates all spheres of life in African societies and, as the Kenyan theologian John M. Mbiti puts it, “[w]herever the African is, there is his religion” (1969:2). Knowledge of the religion is the key to the understanding of African cultures (cf. Mbiti 1973:17; p’Bitek 1973:85-86), because it “exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people” (Mbiti 1969:1). In the religion we see into the African heart, it is the African’s “whole system of being” (Mbiti 1969:3). Thus Harold Turner (1977) describes the African universe as

³⁴ When I use the term “African” about African traditional religions, or in other contexts, I am talking about Africa south of the Sahara.

“sacramental” (:30-32). A distinctive feature of African religion is that it is primarily “experiential,” not “a set of dogmas” (Gehman 1989:50).

Scholars have debated whether African traditional religion should be spoken of in singular or plural. Although there are many similarities among the religions of the peoples south of the Sahara, it is important to note that every ethnic group has its own distinct religion, which is confined to its territory. There are, however, many similarities, which it is useful to be aware of, such as belief in a high god who has created the world, and the spirit world, to which the ancestral and evil spirits belong. These ideas are expressed through rituals with a rich variety of symbols, myths and usually sacrifices. Mbiti (1969) is probably the best known of those who describe African religion in singular and in general terms, and who has influenced greatly the discussion about African religions in the last three decades. He based his writings on accounts of religions from many individual societies. This method has been highly criticized, especially in recent years, and he has been accused of generalizations and reductionism. In my view it is important to have in mind that his approach is not sufficient as a description of the religion of a particular people and that it only provides superficial generalities. Olsen (2001) and Cox (1998) emphasize rightly the importance of researching every religion specifically in its context (Cox 1998:80), but Mbiti’s method has the advantage of providing a general overview over African religions, and focuses on the many similarities. I will now follow Mbiti’s method and give a short summary of some of the most fundamental parts of African traditional religion because the Pokot religion fits well into this general picture. In the next chapter I will describe the most fundamental parts of the Pokot religion specifically.

Religion in Africa is generally anthropocentric and is as much a community affair as for the individual, and its primary concern is the life here and now. Rituals mark all major events in the life of individuals and the society (Ray 1976:78; Parrinder 1962:79-100; Idowu 1973) and they are a means to strengthen life and avenge evil, to reassert order (Herzfeld 2001:209), or as Ray (1976:17) puts it, “almost every African ritual is a salvation event in which human experience is re-created and renewed in the all important ritual Present.”

It is unnatural for most African peoples to divide life between natural and supernatural spheres, the sacred and the profane, as is common in modern Western cultures due to the philosophy of rationalism and the enlightenment, thinkers such as R. Descartes and E. Kant, (cf. Copleston 1963 [1960], Vol. 4:74-161; 1964 [1960]

Vol. 6, part 2; Lund et. al 1962:84-86; 220-235:280-288; Leach 1954:10-14; Bosch 1991:262-274; Brown 1969:48-53; Descartes 1991 [1637]; 2001 [1641]; Kant 1993) [1784].

It has been discussed if there are one or many philosophies in Africa. According to Mbiti, African religion and philosophy is one and the same thing: “A study of traditional religion brings us into those areas of African life where,...., we may be able to discern the philosophy behind” (1969:1; cf. 1970; 1975:12; p’Bitek 1973:17, 85-86; Olsen 2001:85, 124). It is expressed in various ways in the religions of the ethnic groups (Mbiti 1969:1; Magesa 1997:15). Hountondji (1983) represents an opposite view, that there are many philosophies in Africa, as many as the ethnic groups (cf. 1.3.1 Western Epistemology). In my view it is as with the African traditional religions, there are many similarities between African societies but each one has its own version.

In times of rapid changes in modern times, it is important for the coming generations of the Pokot people to know its roots, its cultural heritage and religion, in order not to lose its identity, because it provides them with a continuity for the future (Olsen 2001:45, cf. 1.5. Ethnicity and Boundaries).

3.1.1 What kind of religion?

African traditional religions have been defined in various ways, predominantly by Western scholars. The first definitions reflected their prejudices when they described them as “childish,” “savage” or “primitive.” African traditional religions have often been described as animistic, because spirits are the most important, transcendental beings people deal with. Tylor defined African traditional religion, as “belief in Spiritual Beings,” which was, according to him, the meaning of animism, a concept he invented (Tylor 1913 [1871], Vol. 2:424-426; Mbiti 1969:7). The word animism is derived from the Latin word *anima*, which means “breath of life,” or “soul.” Animists are said to believe that spirits dwell in trees, rocks, rivers, plants, and even animals.³⁵

³⁵ Tylor was of the view that by defining religions of “the lower races” broadly and including “belief in a supreme deity or of judgement after death, the adoration of idols or the practice of sacrifice” many tribes might have been excluded “from the category of religions” (1913, Vol. 2:424). He defines animism as “the doctrine of souls and other spiritual beings in general” (1913, Vol. 1:23). Van Rheenen defines animism as the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power (1991:20).

Many Western and African scholars have rightly found this concept unacceptable and inaccurate because it deals only with the world of the spirits and excludes the gods. The concept has also been discarded as a description of African traditional religions because Tylor, and some evolutionists, presupposed that religions had evolved from “primitive” towards monotheism, placing African religions at the bottom of the evolution. p’Bitek asserts that concepts such as “Animism,” “Fetishism” or belief in a High God are products of the Western mind” and claims that there are no “animists” in Africa (1970:57).

John Taylor (1963) invented the term “primal,” meaning “that which is “basic” or “fundamental” to all religions,” in an attempt to avoid the word “primitive” (Cox 1998:17). However, several scholars are of the view that the term implies that African traditional religions are inferior to world religions, especially Christianity (p’Bitek 1970; Magesa 1997:19-20). As the concept comes from theology, Cox finds it unsuitable for the science of religions in general (1998:23, 30). More expositions by Africans of what African traditional religions and philosophy is about in their own right are still lacking. Smith (1964) preferred to use the term “cumulative traditions” about African traditional religions because they are never static and always adapting to changes, and Cox talks about the religions of “indigenous” peoples (1998:31), but a lot of debate has been about that concept among missiologists, which in my view makes it problematic. I prefer simply to talk about African traditional religions or the religions of African ethnic groups.

3.1.2 High gods

High gods are found among most ethnic groups in Africa. Many writers describe them as omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, which is obviously a vocabulary from European philosophy and Christian theology.³⁶ Such gods are said to be the creators of the world and its sustainers, to be at the top of its hierarchy with commanding power over lesser gods, and to see and hear everything that happens in the world. They are often “the personification and guardian[s] of the tribal ethic” (James 1958:70). The nature and thoughts of the high gods are, however, largely beyond

³⁶ p’Bitek has rightly criticized that African high gods are described with concepts from European philosophy and theology such as omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent because they are a part of an epistemology foreign to Africa and asserts that they are unfit to describe African reality. “African peoples may describe their deities as “strong” but not “omnipotent”; “wise”, not “omniscient”; “old”, not “eternal”; “great”, not “omnipresent”. The Greek metaphysical terms are meaningless in Africa” (p’Bitek 1970:88; cf. Mazrui 1980; Mugambi 1992:96; Olsen 2001:58-68).

human comprehension. In some societies they are believed to have power to heal the sick and to intervene in human affairs, sometimes even causing death of humans and their animals.

The Kwoth of the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1956) and the Nhialic among the Dinka (Lienhardt 1961) are examples of such gods among Nilotic peoples. The concept of high gods is not deistic, i.e. that the gods created the world and then left it alone, to be self-sustainable. The high gods are, on the contrary, believed to be involved in maintaining and operating the world by giving sunshine, rain, fertility etc. (Gehman 1987:192). Mbiti rejects the idea that the great world religions, Judaism, Christianity or Islam may have influenced the African ideas of the high god, because, according to him, the “African soil is rich enough to have germinated its own original religious perception” (1969:30).

Human beings were originally close to God in many African religions but due to their sins, God became remote and unreachable. God is, however, good and merciful and governs the universe according to his will, which people do not question nor do they blame him for their misfortunes. The African high gods do also have human attributes in many societies, e.g. they are said to have eyes, which are believed to be the sun, moon or the stars, and that they eat and drink sacrifices offered to them in a metaphorical way, e.g. through the smoke when sacrifices are roasted or by consuming their blood when it is poured down. They are believed to have created lower deities, and nature phenomena such as the sun, mountains, rivers, lakes, rocks, and weather, which are generally associated with them or believed to be divine themselves. People wish to enjoy the blessings of the gods (Mbiti 1969:29-57; Parrinder 1962:31-43 [1954]; Ray 1976:49-76; Gehman 1989:189-215; Adegbola 1983:338-366; Robertson-Smith (1956 [1889]).

The power of the African high gods is usually confined to the territory of individual ethnic groups and to their members only. They are normally remote from everyday human life and for that reason African traditional religions deal mostly with the spirit world and misfortunes the spirits may have caused. The high gods are divine but not the ancestral spirits, which are the spirits of deceased human beings, that continue to be a part of their families and clans and participate actively in the life of the living here on earth.

The Pokot people have three gods, *Tororot*, *Asis* and *Ilat*. *Tororot* is their high god, the creator of the world, *Asis* is *Tororot's* eye, or the eye of the world, and *Ilat* is a

kind of a fertility god or gods, but he is both talked about in singular and plural. *Tororot* is believed to participate in several important rituals and accompanying meals with the elders when they sit in their semi-circular council, *kirket*, receiving the meat through the pleasantly smelling smoke when it is roasted.

People are in closer contact with the ancestral spirits than the gods in everyday life. I will now describe African ideas about ancestral spirits.

3.1.3 Ancestral spirits

Ancestral spirits play an important role in the life of most African ethnic groups. Mature people, who have given birth to sons, continue to be a part of their families and participate in their lives. They are remembered as long as someone alive remembers them by name, for four or five generations. During that time they belong to, what Mbiti calls, the group of the “living-dead,” and are in the state of “personal immortality,” which “is tangible in the physical continuation of the individual through procreation, so that children bear the traits of their parents or progenitors” (Mbiti 1969:25). This may be e.g. as guardian spirits or that they are reincarnated in their progeny. People are also actively remembered when their descendents show them respect, by carrying out the instructions of the tradition to share food with them through libations of milk and beer, and by slipping small portions of food to the floor at meals and sometimes even tobacco. It is of great importance in many societies to bury people properly, failure of which may anger the ancestral spirits so that they may turn against their descendents and harm them, e.g. by striking them or their animals with sickness. Seers often find out that angry ancestors are the cause of people’s misfortunes and prescribe remedies in order to appease them.

When everyone who remembers a spirit, belonging to the group of the living-dead, has died, his spirit goes, according to Mbiti, into the state of “collective immortality” where they are no longer formal members of the family and people lose personal contact with them. They become part of a general mass of spirits and do not communicate with people anymore. “Their names may still be mentioned..., especially in genealogies, but they are *empty names* which are more or less without a personality or at best only with a mythological personality built around fact and fiction” (Mbiti 1969:26).

Not everyone can become an ancestral spirit. Children, people who have died an unnatural death, e.g. have been struck by lightning, by hanging, drowning, during

pregnancy or have not been given a proper burial, are not given access to the group of living-dead in many societies. Their spirits may perpetually haunt and harm the living instead (Gehman 1989:137; Wambutda 1983:129; Idowu 1973:174-175).

The ancestral spirits³⁷ usually live in the vicinity of their progeny, in the bush, underground where they are buried, in hills etc., and take lively interest in the affairs of their families, their health and fertility. As owners of the land, they in some places fertilize it, and make sure their folks follow the prescriptions of the traditions of their people. The ancestral spirits communicate with the living through dreams, calamity, ecstasy and trance, spirit possession, prophets and divinations. In societies with big pantheons of gods, the ancestral spirits tend to be less prominent than where the gods do not have a strong position (Parrinder 1962:57-61; Gehman 1989:139-143).

Even if the living-dead play an important role in the lives of African peoples, it is not right, according to Mbiti (1969:9), to describe the communication with them as “worship”³⁸ because it is rather “fellowship, hospitality and respect.” Parrinder (1962:66), on the other hand, is of the opinion that “many African tribes have no true worship of gods; their place is taken by the ancestors.” In my view, people speak or pray to the ancestors, especially in times of need, asking them for help, without regarding them as divine powers in the same category as the gods, but rather as intermediaries between the world of gods and humans. The spirits are often feared, which makes people execute their duties towards them out of fear and in some societies people wish them as far away as possible (Parrinder 1962:59-60).

Ancestral spirits play an important role in the life of the Pokot people and the Pokot religion is in many ways similar as this general description of the ancestral spirits of African traditional religions. *Tororot*, the Pokot high god, is rather remote in the everyday life of the Pokot people but the ancestral spirits are near the living to help and to protect them. These topics, the ancestral spirits and the gods of the Pokot people will be expanded at length in the next chapter.

³⁷ A good example of what it means to be an ancestral spirit is found in the religion of the Akan people of Ghana. Pobee writes: “To qualify to be an ancestor one must have lived to a ripe old age and in an exemplary manner and done much to enhance the standing and prestige of the family, clan or tribe. By virtue of being the part of the clan gone ahead to the house of God, they are believed to be powerful in the sense that they maintain the course of life here and now and do influence it for good or for ill. They give children to the living; they give good harvest; they provide the sanctions for the moral life of the nation and accordingly punish, exonerate, or reward the living as the case may be” (Pobee 1979:46).

³⁸ The phrase “ancestor worship” was used by Herbert Spencer (1885) to describe his speculation about the place ancestral spirits had in the life of African peoples but it had been used for a long time before that.

3.2 Magic

As previously mentioned magic thoroughly permeates the Pokot culture and is an underlying principle in the Pokot rituals. Many of them are performed in order to obtain their objectives magically, such as cleansing rituals, where evil spirits are chased away. Rituals are important instruments in restoring harmony to the world (cf. Douglas 1966:72; Rappaport 1999:117). In Frazer's view, magical thinking rests on two fundamental principles, first that "*like produces like*, effect resembling cause," also called the "Law of similarity" or "Homeopathic Magic," and second that, "*things which have once been in contact continue ever afterwards to act on each other*," a principle he also called "Contact or Contagion" or "Contagious Magic." By using the first principle, "the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it in advance," and by using the second principle he believes that "whatever he does to a material object will automatically affect the person with whom it was once in contact" (Frazer 1959:7). Both benevolent and evil specialists of magic in the Pokot society work according to these principles.

Evans-Pritchard (1976 [1937]) makes a distinction between sorcery and witchcraft. According to him, sorcery is the magic used with evil intentions and witchcraft the magic used in the service of the community. This distinction is useful and fits the Pokot reality. The sorcerer, *ponin*, is the ultimate evil and antisocial person in the Pokot society because he works secretly and has only evil objectives, i.e. to inflict harm, usually death, upon people only out of sheer jealousy and evil. The *kapolokion*, who uses some of the same methods, is not bad because he uses magic in the service of the community. I will describe the work of the *kapolokion* and the *ponin* in more detail in 4.4.2 (Specialists who use magic).

3.3 Theories of rituals

According to Bell (1992; 1997:1) it was in the late 19th century that scholars began to study rituals specifically when they constructed theories about the origin of civilization and religion. Among questions asked was whether the origin of religion and culture was rooted in myth or ritual, and which was original, myth or ritual. I will now review the most important theories about rituals in anthropology and account for the most important theories I use.

3.3.1 Myth and religion

Robertson-Smith, who is regarded by many as the originator of modern ritual theory, believed religions were rooted in rituals, which he saw as “the primary component of religion,” which objective was “the preservation and welfare of society” (Bell 1997:4). He believed myth was derived from ritual, which substituted dogmas in societies where no such existed, and that the behavior in rituals was more important than the spoken word among the Semites (Robertson-Smith 1998:27-30 [1889]). His theories laid the foundation for the so called myth and ritual school, and influenced Emile Durkheim’s understanding, that religion was “a social creation” with the aim of preserving society, and the psychoanalytical school, initiated by Freud (Bell 1997:5).

In a moderate version of the myth and ritual school, myth and ritual are only said to have originated together but may have become separate (Segal 1998:1). Kluckhohn showed convincingly how they can emerge in different ways. Sometimes the ritual may be more original, as when it exists in many places at the same time accompanied by different myths, or the myth may be more original, as in the case of the Christian Eucharist (1998:317 [1942]).

The word “myth” is derived from the Greek word *mythos*, which means a story, where emphasis is on the spoken word, a told story. The Kenyan theologian Samson Njuguna Gitau defines myth as “an authoritative story that is narrated in order to transmit the cherished values and ideals of a society. It actualizes and represents realities or phenomena of a society” (1994:123).

The study of myths has been approached from basically two points of view. Firstly, Durkheim, and the tradition he established, believed that they reveal the “social characters” of a society, and thus act as “models for the behavior of individuals” belonging to it (cf. Durkheim 1995 [1912]). Secondly, that they focus on “the intellectual procedures behind myths” (Herzfeld 2001:203), i.e. that their roots lie in the construction of the human brain (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1963; 1966; 1978; Leach 1964; Lévy-Brühl (1966 [1922])).

One of the guiding theories of the myth ritual school was the belief that in rituals myths were re-enacted. This was manifested especially in the annual ritual of the death and resurrection of the king, which was practiced in the middle east and southern Europe, in order to increase the fertility of the nature, the vegetation and animals, because in the ritual, primordial events are made present and in a way

repeated. This theory has been widespread among many ritual theorists, and some anthropologists, such as Herzfeld, who holds the view that ritual “restores temporality to historical consciousness, linking the pace of presentation with the passage of the *long durée*” (2001:61). We see influences from the Old Testament and Biblical scholarship in this theory, where it is believed that in some Jewish festivals, e.g. the feast of Unleavened Bread, and in the Christian Eucharist, past events are re-enacted and made contemporary (Richardson 1958:367; cf. von Rad 1975 Vol. II:99-125; Jacob 1958:191-192; Eliade 1995 [1957]; 1963; Fabian 1990; McCall 1999).

Cox has criticized the application of the theory of the re-enactment of rituals on the African reality. I share his view that it is better for the understanding of rituals in the Pokot society to see them as “acts of remembering” rather than re-enactment, and that the concept reflects the interpretation of ritual in Western Christianity (Cox 1998:74).

As ritual theorists have struggled with the question about the origin of religion and civilization, ethologists, such as Lorenz (1966) and Huxley (1966), have concluded, from studying animal behavior, that “ritual gestures of animals serve as codes or signals that transmit information useful to the well-being of the group,” and some have seen the root of human culture in such animal ritualization (Bell 1997:31). In my view, it seems as if the origin of religion is as old as man and all theories about determining how exactly it came about will always be guesswork.

3.3.2 Structuralists view of rituals

The German Friedrich Max Müller (1985 [1869]) introduced the so-called “phenomenology of religion,” the study of religion as a “non-theological and non-philosophical approach to religion” (Müller 1985:xi, xx [1869]). Those who followed this stream of thought emphasized the primacy of myth over rituals, that myth was about “how through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence” (Eliade 1963:5-6), and that ritual was an “enactment of primordial events” (Eliade 1959;1969). Rudolf Otto (1950 [1917]) approached religious experience as a genuine phenomenon in itself and was convinced, that the experiences of the holy was unique, “wholly other,” and downplayed the importance of its historicity. The “phenomenologists” tried to identify “ahistorical universals,” which they believed were located in the human mind constituting man as *homo religiosus*, and they saw manifested “in multiple historic forms” (Bell 1997:9-10) in the religions of the world.

In this way the phenomenologists held basically the same view as Lévi-Strauss and the structuralists, that social phenomena, such as kinship, myth, ritual etc., were derived from structures in the human brain, not in the social structure. He saw the relationship between myth and ritual as that between form and content, the ritual being the form and the myth the content (Lévi-Strauss 1963:204, 232; 1981:679). According to him, people express themselves through symbols (1987:16 [1950]) and impose “symbolic systems on social relations in order to structure and organize them (Bell 1997:42).

Many leading anthropologists, who have focused on the social function of ritual, have approached it ahistorically. Durkheim believed that religion, by which people sanctify their social structure, and rituals, contributed toward recreating and strengthening society and its structure, its faith and norms, as well as its collective awareness. This happened when society met for celebrations (1995:60, 445 [1912]). For Radcliffe-Brown rituals were “regulated symbolic expressions” transmitting the fundamental values of a society (Radcliffe-Brown 1945). He believed the structured relationship among symbols had to be linked to the structure of society. He and other social functionalists saw rituals as a means to stabilize and regulate life of the social system (Bell 1997:34).

3.3.3 The three stage model

Van Gennep pointed to the functional and contextual dynamics of symbols as expressed in his theory of death, rebirth and regeneration that takes place especially in initiation rituals, i.e. the rites of separation, transition, and incorporation (van Gennep 1960:11). Gluckman and Turner developed his theories further and Gluckman believed rituals are an expression of social tensions, not unity, and that they are a “symbolic enactment of social relations” as they really are, but then they restate, “time and again, a group unity which transcends, ... the ... conflicts of its component elements” (Gluckman 1963:48).

Victor Turner’s writings about the role and meaning of rituals in Africa have owed a strong influence on ritual theory. He, as Durkheim and the functionalists, saw the social structure reflected in the rituals of a society, and thus its ideal life, norms regulating behavior, and its moral values. He went so far as to say that rituals “create society” and that changes in the social structure affect the rituals. He believed thus

that rituals play an important role in preserving the unity of a society (1969:104; cf. Lévi-Strauss 1987:16 [1950]).

When he described and analyzed the Mukanda initiation among the Ndembu in Zambia, Turner used van Gennep's three-stage sequence in initiation rituals and called the period, when initiates stayed outside the normal life of the society during the initiation process, "liminality." Bonds were created there that lasted for a lifetime. He described the fellowship among the initiates during that time as "communitas," and the social structure there as "anti-structure", not because it was in opposition to the rest of society but because it was different. All the initiates were equal in the liminal stage, regardless of their position in the society outside the communitas (Turner 1969:80-152; 1974:45, 53, 272-273).

Turner developed further van Gennep's three-stage sequence of separation, transition and re-incorporation and applied it to situations where conflicts occurred between groups in the society, which were indeed, according to him, conflicts in the social structure. He believed rituals were "social dramas" where tensions and stress could be expressed and solved and "integrational deficiencies" of the society resolved and bad feelings and unsolicited passions alleviated. The outcome was a new social equilibrium, a change in the social structure. In this way rituals were a means to act out social conflict (Bell 1997:40). He called the period of tension and social disorder within the social structure "liminality." In this way he, unlike other functionalists, saw the social structure not as fixed but flexible (Turner 1996:xxix-xxxii, 38-42, 289-291 [1957]; 1974:23-57).

3.3.4 The meaning of rituals and symbols

Turner defines ritual as "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers" (Turner 1967:19). Every ritual forms a complex system of symbols with specific values, aims, and roles and can be a part of a bigger system of rituals. The same symbol can occur in several rituals, normally with the same meaning in all of them in spite of different settings. Thus, by repeating the symbols in different rituals, they transmit the basic values of society to its members (Turner 1968:4-5). When symbols are analyzed, it is important to look at their external forms and observable characteristics, the meaning people in the society give them (exegetical meaning), how they are used in rituals (operational meaning) and the meaning they get from

their position in each ritual, as well as their relationship with other symbols in the society (positional meaning) (Turner 1967:19-20, 50).³⁹ Another property of many ritual symbols, especially the so called dominant symbols, is their “polysemy” or “multivocality” (Turner 1965:82; 1969:37), i.e. their ability to incorporate many meanings at the same time. They are “structurally bipolar,” i.e. refer to human feelings and “moral norms and principles governing the social structure” at the same time (1965:87; 1967:20-21, 24). It depends on the context which of the meanings will be extracted at any given time. Therefore Turner can say that ritual is a “mechanism that periodically converts the obligatory into the desirable (1967:19, 30) and that a religious system “is a cluster of sacred symbols, woven into some sort of ordered whole” (1965:129).

Opposed to Durkheim and Mauss, who saw the origin of symbols in the social structure, Turner believed that it was in the human body, and that the colors white, red and black were of fundamental importance because they represent the way a ritual affects and functions socially, i.e. that it is interrelated to society (Turner 1967:57-92).

The word “symbol” is derived from the Greek word *symbolos*, which means literally to put “together of that which has been divided” (Firth 1973:47). Firth defines symbol as: “[O]bjects or actions that represent other entities in virtue of some arbitrary-assigned conceptual relation between them” (1973:176). Because religious matters are abstract, the German-American philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich, followed by Rappaport (1999:54), has pointed out rightly that it is impossible to talk about spiritual matters without using symbols because they can open up dimensions of reality that would otherwise be closed.⁴⁰ Tillich makes a distinction between a “symbol” and a “sign.” Both point to a reality outside themselves. Symbols “participate in the reality of that to which they point,” while signs do not (Tillich 1957:41-42). Leach makes a similar distinction and maintains that a symbol creates “a metaphorical, paradigmatic, or synchronic relationship between itself and what it refers to” and that a sign evokes “a metonymical, syntagmatic, or diachronic relationship between itself and its referent.” A sign is never isolated, but is a part of a

³⁹ Richards referred to these three levels of symbolic meanings before Turner, calling them, primary purpose, secondary purpose and deduced purpose (1956:112-119).

⁴⁰ Geertz, talking about religious symbols, asserts that man “depends upon symbols and symbolic systems with dependence so great as to be decisive for his creatural viability.” He points out how important symbols are for our general understanding of life, i.e. “general *orientation* in nature, on earth, in society, and in what we are doing: the symbols of our *Weltanschauung* and *Lebensanschauung*” (1973:99).

set, e.g. a green light, which is a part of red, yellow and green lights (Leach 1976:9-16; Bell 1997:65). Therefore, signs can be replaced for reasons of expediency or convention, while symbols cannot. A national flag is an example of a symbol (Tillich 1957:41-42; cf. Cohen 2000:146).

Turner divides rituals into two main groups, life-crisis rituals and cults of affliction. Rituals of the first type are performed at important times in the lives of individuals, e.g. rites of passage (Turner 1967:93-111). The cults of affliction, deal with problems that arise in society, e.g. angry ancestral spirits who may affect the success of hunters, fertility of women, the harvest, or cause various types of sicknesses (Turner 1996:292-297 [1957]; 1968:52-79).

Mary Douglas developed a model of what she called “grid” and “group,” which was an important contribution to ritual theory. She believed symbols in general and their interpretation were “socially determined” (Douglas 1970:9). Grid refers to rules about interrelations of people in a society, order, classification, and its symbolic system. Group refers to being a part of a society and having to follow its rules. (1970:viii). The better peoples’ roles are defined in a society, the more formal their relationships are and greater their social distance. The less peoples’ roles are defined, the more a society is characterized by confusion, familiarity and intimacy (1970:71). These are two examples, one of a strong group and grid and another of a weak group and grid. The society in the first example is ritualistic and the individual is subordinate to its rules. In the second example the importance of the individual is great and the social structure is weak. In such societies rituals are used for individual purposes and witchcraft is common (cf. Bell 1997:45). Many have used this model to classify societies. Ritual for Douglas is “preeminently a form of communication” (Douglas 1973:59). It restates collective acceptance of fundamental postulates so that orderly social life can proceed as if there were in fact ultimate and absolute truths and thus they have a structuring effect (Douglas 1966).

Rappaport has written extensively about rituals. Bell characterizes his approach to the subject as “systems analysis” because for him ritual plays the key role in maintaining a social system (1997:30). He is convinced that ritual is “the social act basic to humanity” because its form adds something to its “symbolically encoded substance” which could not have been expressed otherwise, and that the ritual form relates to its content like a “frame,” “context marker,” or a “metamessage” (Rappaport 1999:31). According to him, ritual is “the ground from which religious conceptions

spring” (1999:3) but the participants must be trained in advance to be able to understand and receive its message (1999:111). Certain messages are difficult or impossible to transmit except through ritual (1999:52). For him the most important nature of ritual is its formality (Rappaport 1979).

Some anthropologists, such as structuralists led by Lévi-Strauss, the so called symbolists, semantics, or semiotics led by Geertz, emphasize the “autonomy and language-like nature of a cultural system of symbols” and believe that a culture can be analysed “independently of social structure” (Bell 1997:61). As previously mentioned, Lévi-Strauss saw the root of social structure and symbols in the construction of the human brain, and that “[a]ny culture can be considered as a combination of symbolic systems” (1987:16 [1950]). He was strongly influenced by structural linguistics, such as Saussure and Jakobson, and saw similar rules governing cultural systems and rituals, as human languages. Geertz maintained that meanings can only be “stored” in symbols (Geertz 1973:127), and that culture, as a symbolic system, does neither reflect the social structure only nor is it completely independent of it (1973:112). He argued that it is important to focus on ritual when cultures are interpreted because they display the feeling of the people in a community, but do not solve their problems (1973:444, 448). The anthropology of Geertz and Turner has been called “symbolic,” “semantic,” and “semiotic” because it is concerned with interpreting the meaning of “statements, activities, and events” (Bell 1997:68).

The so-called performance theorists see culture, not as a fully made product, but as “a changing, processual, dramatic, and indeterminate entity” (Bell 1997:74). For them a ritual is an event. It acts, as Rappaport pointed out and was mentioned above, as a “frame” for its content, and has the power to transform ideas, consciousness, and people’s identity, e.g. boys into mature men (cf. Bateson 1978:179-189 [1955]). This ability to bring about an “effect,” has been called “flow” or “concentration (Schechner and Appel 1989:4). Theorists, such as Turner, have pointed out that performers of rituals are an audience for themselves, and thus there is “reflexivity” among the participants of a ritual (Bell 1997:75).

Humphrey and Laidlaw have showed that the intentions and thoughts of the participants in a ritual do not matter for the “identity” of the act. Different thoughts may go through their heads during its performance and each individual may add his own meaning to it without affecting the essence of the ritual (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:5, 187). All kinds of actions can be defined as ritual in religious and non-

religious settings, but they become ritualised “with a particular modification of the normal intentionality of human action” (1994:71). It is the intentionality that is of fundamental importance. They argue further, that ritual is “archetypal,” i.e. that people learn a name for a certain action, “of which they have a simple mental representation...” “prototype,” which “enables them to reproduce the act they have learned” (1994:144). The ritual did thus exist “ontologically” and “historically” prior to its performance (1994:158). They characterize the question, whether participants mean what they are doing, and the insistence that a ritual must have a meaning, as a “protestant attitude” (1994:223), because it does not matter.

The praxis or practice theorists have much in common with the performance theorists, especially their focus on the acting individuals, not only as intellectual beings, but as physical bodies, when they analyze social and historical changes. Many of them have paid special attention to the role politics play in the social structure when analyzing culture changes. Sahlins has argued that, “practice brings together structure and history, system and event, continuity and change.” For him ritual is a fundamental element of culture in general, especially when it and the traditions of the community are applied to new situations, because then people are making their own history (Bell 1997:77).

In Bourdieu’s view, it is important to focus on human acts, not abstractions. With the concept “habitus” he attempted to explain the relationship between the individual and society, which he saw as the “place” where history is made. „To speak of habitus is to assert that the individual, and even the personal, the subjective, is social, collective. Habitus is socialized subjectivity“ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:126). To him ritual in general is “strategic practices for transgressing and reshuffling cultural categories in order to meet the needs of real situations.” Rituals can sanction fundamental social changes and thus alleviate tensions and dangers that might otherwise have followed (Bell 1997:78).

Humphrey and Laidlaw have pointed out that humans perceive through their bodies. Referring to Mauss (1979), they claim that the way people use and move their bodies in daily life is culturally determined (cf. Douglas 1970:69). This is also reflected in the way the body is used in rituals in various cultures. According to Merleau-Ponty (1958 [1945]), the body is not only a tool for the inner intellectual consciousness but has its own memory and intentions. It is important to see it as a

totality, mind and body. This point is especially important when the human body is changed for life in circumcision and female genital mutilation.

3.3.5 Evaluation and criticism of ritual theories

Bell asks which presuppositions scholars who study ritual have, whether ritual studies are “objective,” or if researchers find just what they are looking for, because symbols are often multivocal. She asks further if the “idea of ritual is itself a construction, that is, a category or tool of analysis built up from a sampling of ethnographic descriptions and the elevation of many untested assumption” (1992; 1997:21)? Crapanzano, criticizing ritual theory in general, believes that it “may reflect less the reality of the ritual than the culture of the anthropologist” (1981:16). I believe the study of ritual will never become fully objective rather than ethnography or other social sciences, but the research methods can be improved. It is true that “ritual” as a concept is a product of western scholarship but the realities it describes are often not. As I pointed out in 1.3.1 (Western epistemology), it is urgent for anthropology as science that people from cultures outside Europe and North America join the anthropological community to enrich it and the study of rituals, with their various worldviews and approaches to its theoretical framework.

Bloch (1974) demonstrated the “poverty” of expression of ritual because, in his view, the ritual action, i.e. what is done in ritual, is more important than what is said. Staal (1979) went so far as to say that ritual has “no meaning, goal or aim,” that it is “pure activity,” and that only such a hypothesis could answer most questions about it (1979:8-9). In that way he discarded van Gennep’s theory about initiation rites, theories that myths are re-enacted in rituals and, that rituals transmit certain messages, reflect the value system of a society, or its structure. He also discarded the distinction between the sacred and the profane. Staal came to this conclusion after studying Vedic ritual, which he believed is the best source material for ritual studies available because it is, in his view, the largest, most elaborate, and best documented ritual in the world. Ritual, for him, is primarily an “activity” governed by certain rules (Staal 1979:4). It is older than language, which syntax is, according to him, derived from ritual syntax (1979:19), and that human ritualization often resembles ritualization of animals. Some scholars have followed this argument so far as to believe that the meanings attached to religious rituals have been added to them in retrospect, because they were not there in the beginning (Nielsen 2004:44). To attach

symbolic meanings to rituals is, according to Staal, not derived from the study of rituals themselves, but from social scientists using their own tools of analysis, because there is no “intrinsic” connection between them and ritual studies (Staal 1991:230; Cox 1998:74).

Humphrey and Laidlaw criticize anthropologists for insisting that only one official meaning of rituals be reproduced in the communities where they do their researches, by asking just a few informants, and for failing to report the fact that many people in the same community may not understand them properly or in various ways. They point out that the way informants interpret rituals may indeed only reflect their own imagination and creativity (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:264), claiming that people with various social backgrounds and understanding can participate in the same ritual without its essence being changed. They urge anthropologists to stop insisting that rituals must always be performed in exactly the same way, because the performance, which may vary slightly from time to time, is nevertheless counted as correct (1994:123). They conclude that the “consensus in the interpretation of ritual, [is] ... a socio-historical product which arises in the context of only certain kinds of attitude to ritual” (1994:254-265).

I agree to a certain extent with Humphrey and Laidlaw’s criticism that people of the same society may have various understandings of its rituals and some of its symbols, or that they do not understand them at all, as with the rituals of baptism and Eucharist in Christian churches. This is especially true in large and composed societies, as in secularized Europe.

They are also right in their criticism against the demand that rituals should always be performed in exactly the same way. As will be discussed further below in 3.4 (Traditions), there is always room for improvisation when rituals are performed in oral societies such as the Pokot, and in that way they are actualized and, as performance and practice theorists have pointed out, are applied to changes in society (cf. Bell 1997:204). The insistence that rituals should always be performed in the same way reflects the situation in Western societies where rituals, e.g. of the Christian church, have been written down and the written form has become a norm for their performance. Performance theorists are right, that some people participate e.g. in church ceremonies in Western countries without understanding properly what is going on and may add their own personal understanding to them without affecting the objective of the ritual. I will discuss this topic further below in 3.5 (Sacrifices)

Several scholars have criticized van Gennep and Turner's three stage model. Crapanzano finds it too simple because what rituals accomplish is much more complicated than what the theories state, e.g. that a boy is changed into a mature man in one ritual (1981:32). Humphrey and Laidlaw observed that it is the outcome of researches in, "closed, local communities with a shared culture and symbolic code" resulting in the understanding among anthropologists, that "symbolic consensus" is what characterizes ritual (1994:80). They ask if van Gennep and Turner's conclusions would have been different had they done their researches in big, composed societies.

Caroline Bynum has criticized van Gennep and Turner's theories of initiation from the women's point of view, and believes they fit the initiation and transition of men, but do not describe the experience of women during their initiation. According to her, these theories are better suited to describe the situation of those who have a certain place in the social structure, i.e. the elites or, in the case of the Pokot, the men, who constitute in effect the social structure (1984:113-114, 118-119; Bell 1997:56).

I disagree with Staal and others who do not see any meaning in rituals, only action. Why should people perform them if they have no meaning (cf. Nielsen 2004:72)? In my view it is important to study rituals in their setting and to find out the meaning people who perform them give to them (cf. Bell 1997:81; Cox 1998:80).

I believe that ritual has always been a part of human society in the same way as religion, whether it has had a religious meaning or not. I agree with Geertz (1973:127) that meanings are stored in symbols, Tillich (1957) and Leach (1976), that it is impossible to talk about religious meanings without the use of symbols, and Turner's way of interpreting them. I believe that they reflect the values of a society.

3.3.6 Ritual theory and Pokot

There is much in the various ritual theories reviewed above that are applicable to the Pokot society. Although I fully support Humphrey and Laidlaw, and Bynum's criticism on van Gennep and Turner's three stage model of rituals, I still find it very valuable and a good tool to describe and analyze the Pokot rituals, especially the circumcision. As mentioned in 3.1 (African traditional religion and philosophy), it is unthinkable for the Pokot people, as people generally in Africa, to go through major events without appropriate rituals. Therefore, Staal's theory, that rituals have no meaning is bizarre among the Pokot people, because in them people join together as a community, accompanied by the ancestral spirits and sometimes their high god,

Tororot, in order to support and strengthen life and social well being and combat evil. Often the objectives of a ritual are partly or totally achieved with the use of magic, as discussed above in 3.2 (Magic), or as Herzfeld asserts, that they always entail “some degree of instrumentality” (Herzfeld 2001:209). I will expand that topic further in 4.4 (Ritual specialists).

Although people may have private understanding and experiences of individual rituals and symbols, it was, however, my impression that there is a general consensus among the Pokot people about the meaning of at least the most common symbols and rituals in the society. Initiated men have, however, generally more knowledge of rituals than others, especially women and uninitiated men, and old men have more of such knowledge than younger because they have experience and knowledge from more rituals. On the other hand, there are some rituals that are performed only locally or even privately in certain parts of Pokot land, which individuals have brought from other ethnic groups.

Some symbols are prominent in many rituals among the Pokot people, e.g. strong evergreen trees represent life and strength, e.g. the *simotwo*, *sitöt*, and *ptuyo* trees. Mt. Mtelo, the highest mountain in the Pokot district, represents *Tororot*, the Pokot high god, and is believed to be his dwelling place. The rising sun denotes divine blessing. For that reason, some rituals supposed to bring blessings are performed early in the morning, by sunrise. These symbols are parts of rituals that strengthen life and fertility. On the other hand, some plants, which cannot stand by themselves or have a pale color, represent death. They are used in cursing rituals and witchcraft. The descending sun is a symbol of evil and some cleansing rituals are thus performed in the afternoon in order that curses and misfortunes may go down with the descending sun. The three colors, white, black and red, also have a very important, symbolic meaning among the Pokot as among the Ndembu (Turner 1967:57-92, cf. 3.3.4 The meaning of rituals and symbols) and are widely used in rituals, as mentioned above. White denotes life, and is used to keep evil away. According to Peristany (1975:173), it is the color of the initiates and protects them from evil powers, which are heavy, *nikis*, and dark, *togh*. The white color singles them out as the protégés of Ilat, but female initiates paint their faces white during the initiation period. Black symbolizes death and evil. Animals that are killed by “bloodless strangulation” in rituals are usually black as in *tisö*. It is a “heavy” color that can both protect and exorcise evil spirits (Peristany 1975:174). Red is the symbol of blood,

danger and aggression against enemies, and protects the one on which a prophet has applied it, e.g. soldiers, and is thus a dangerous color. Green is not a prominent symbol but denotes fresh grass, which sprouts after rain, and thus life and fertility. Blue is not used often either as a symbol, but has symbolic affinities with white, and is used as well as green “in an auxiliary capacity” and are thus auspicious colors (Peristany 1975:174). The meanings of these symbols are usually very consistent in different ritual settings (cf. Turner 1967:57-92).

Rituals among the Pokot people transmit and reinforce the norms and values of the society and the social structure. This is especially true of the life-cycle rituals such as the initiation rituals, circumcision and the alternative initiation ritual, *sapana*, practiced among the pastoralists. Together they also transmit the fundamental magical perception of reality, which permeates the whole way of thinking of the Pokot society, as was explained in 3.2 (Magic). The social structure, rituals or the symbol system are not fixed and are open to new elements and changes. I find Byunum’s criticism above (3.3.5 Evaluation and criticism of ritual theories) of van Gennep and Turner’s theories that they do not describe very well the initiation of women true about the Pokot (Byunum 1984).

Ancestral spirits play an important role in Pokot rituals and are always present. The spoken word is rather an instrument to gain magically the desired objective of the performers rather than rendering a myth (cf. Hooke 1998:83 [1933]). It is most often addressed to the ancestral spirits, in order to make peace with them or to chase evil spirits away, forcing them to stop their harmful activities among humans. As mentioned above, ritual re-enactment is not the right way to interpret some African or Pokot rituals, e.g. the initiation. They should rather be understood as commemoration.

Most rituals in the Pokot society are without accompanying myths. There are, however, myths accompanying the initiation rituals, such as circumcision and *poro*, but they are told in order to remember the past and as a lesson for the initiates to follow and the rest of the society. These stories are not believed to be from primordial times.

Men go through more gender-specific rituals during their lifetime than women and their power and position in the society is strengthened in the process and their respect enhanced, especially against women, uncircumcised men and men who are below them in the “ladder” of society. Thus the rituals play a fundamental role in molding and creating the identity of the Pokot men, because when they have

completed them their identity and their position in the society has changed. They are not the same as before and have been given new responsibilities, have gained new knowledge, insights, and obtained rights, and have become members of a new group.



Picture 11. Girls during the seclusion period of initiation, female sexual mutilation, color their faces white before they mix walking in public.

Pokot women undergo cliterodectomy or female genital mutilation (FGM), an operation in which the clitoris is removed and a part of the *labia majora* is cut and then made to heal by uniting the wounded lips. Bleeding and infections often results in infertility and has serious consequences for the rest of their lives making childbirth and personal hygiene difficult and diminishes severely their ability to enjoy sexual pleasure. In the minds of the Pokot people, however, this operation goes under the same name as the circumcision of males, *rotwo*, (knife), and corresponds to the male circumcision in their minds, because it is composed of many of the same stages and includes teaching about what it means to become a mature woman in the Pokot society (cf. Meyerhoff 1981). Women do not, however, undergo rituals equivalent to the *ngokoi nko musar*, *poro*, *sapana* and several others.

In this thesis I use the terms “ritual” and “ceremony” almost synonymously although I tend to use the word ritual about bigger events than “ceremony.” Sometimes I use “ritual” and “rituals” almost synonymously, but “ritual” in singular tends to be more about ritual in general as a phenomenon.

3.4 Traditions

Oral culture has been described as active, participatory and expressive. These qualities tend to disappear when languages are committed to writing (Ong 1982, cf. Havelock 1986, and McLuhan 1965), and are replaced with the “linear, static world of print” (December 1993:2). The Pokot culture is still predominantly an oral culture, which means that information, beliefs, rules, customs, practices and knowledge is still handed down from one generation to the next by word of mouth. The term “tradition” comes from the Latin word *tradition-*, *traditio*, the action of handing over, and is defined in the Merriam Webster’s Dictionary (<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/tradition>) as

1. An inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom).
2. The handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction.
3. Cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions and
4. characteristic manner, method, or style.

Most of the material in this thesis is based on oral traditions, e.g. the description of rituals and the Pokot religion in general, knowledge about Pokot clans etc. Some of it was written down for the first time in the course of this research. For the purpose of clarification, I use the term “oral culture” about the totality of the Pokot culture. Terms such as “oral literature” and “oral traditions” are often used in the anthropological literature about folk literature, folklore, tales etc. (Okpewho 1992:3-5). I use the word “tradition” or “oral tradition” mostly in the same meaning as “oral culture”.

Because rituals are the most important part of my study, the research of Samson N. Gitau on oral traditions is of great importance. He studied how oral traditions in general are transmitted, actualized and stabilized.⁴¹ He examined circumcision rituals of African societies, among them Pokot rituals, in order to “establish a paradigm of the function of rituals in the transmission, actualization and stabilization of oral traditions, specifically in the pre-literary period of these societies” (Gitau 1994:2).

Under the influence of Culley (1963 and 1976), Gitau believes that oral traditions are preserved in at least two ways, memorization and improvisation, the

⁴¹ Gitau studied specifically how the circumcision traditions of the Hexateuch, i.e. the six first books of the Old Testament in the Bible, were transmitted orally before they were committed to writing.

latter being the most common, but memorization an exception. He does not believe the poetical part of a tradition is more stable than the prose part, because the former is the art of the few but the latter the art of the whole society (Gitau 1994:60).

Improvisation means that the received traditions are actualized. According to him,

...The transmitter had both freedom as well as restraint as the material he/she transmitted had both flexibility and stability. It was actualization for and together with the society“(1994:43-44). ...

...No conscious attempt was made to memorize traditions word for word just for its sake. Rather oral traditions were spontaneously committed to memory as a result of their being lived and actualized by succeeding generations (1994:46)...

...by the process of being created anew, when the essential outline of the work and many or all of the details are repeated but never in exactly the same way. Thus transmission is effected through continual re-composition. The process of recreation or the actualization of traditions is not the work of one person, but an on-going process that takes place in the life of an orally transmitting society (1994:51-52).

This means that no fixed word-by-word version of the oral traditions does exist because they are living and prone to change but the society limits the extent to which the performer can innovate (Gitau 1994:52-53) (cf. Vansina 1985:14 and Hobsbawn 1983:2).

The oral traditions are reactualized every time the rituals are performed in the Pokot society. The same ritual is thus hardly performed twice in exactly the same way and there is freedom to improvise, e.g. the words of the songs, which is a way of actualizing the ritual for the participants at a certain place and time. As time passes new themes emerge, but the content of the ritual is still basically the same. The rituals are, however, conducted in slightly various versions in different parts of Pokot land. A good example of how rituals are actualized is the war game in the *sapana* alternative initiation ritual where teams play armies at war and the elders choose which is the best. Nowadays some participants use automatic weapons or replicas of guns made of wood instead of the traditional spears and shields. I will describe *sapana* in 6.4 (The *sapana* initiation ritual).

3.5 Sacrifices

Sacrifices are an important part of most rituals in the Pokot society. According to Burkert, man copes with his guilt in the sacrifices (Burkert 1983:16, 22-23; cf. Segal 1998:341-346; Bloch 1992; Girard 1977). The Pokot people appease angry gods and

ancestral spirits through rituals and sacrifices but also keep them content by other means in everyday life, such as libations and by giving them food and tobacco, as has already been explained in 3.1.3 (Ancestral spirits).

It is Mbiti's opinion that sacrifices are a way to give food and drink to God in a metaphorical way, with the purpose of restoring harmony between God and man, and man and the spirits. As with many scholars, he renders four main theories explaining the function and meaning of sacrifices and offerings, the gift theory, the communion theory, the propitiation theory, and the thank-offering (1969:49, 59) (cf. Carter 2003). This system of explanation has developed under strong influences from Old Testament scholarship.⁴²

Explaining the meaning of offerings among Semitic nations, Robertson-Smith noted that they were always in the form of edible food. Among the Hebrews, domestic animals were the most prominent sacrificial animals reflecting the peoples' wish to give the best they had to God (1956:218 [1889]). The most important idea behind the act of sacrifice was, according to him, the offering meal in which the meat of the sacrificed animal was eaten in a feast, in which the god was believed to participate with humans and to enjoy the food, resulting in a renewed and strengthened relationship (1956:226-227). He believed this reflected the Semitic idea that friendship is established in a common meal (1956:269-271). The same idea is also present when the blood of the sacrificial animal was poured to the earth because the god was believed to drink it, and when its flesh was burned and transformed into good smelling smoke, the god was believed to consume it in a spiritual way (1956:233-

⁴² The Old Testament theologian Helmer Ringgren divides Hebrew offerings into four groups. First, some offerings were gifts, expressing people's gratitude. Several kinds of burnt offerings, *ola* in Hebrew, which means that which goes up, belong to this category some of which were atonement offerings in which oxen, heifers, rams, or doves were slaughtered. The blood of the sacrificed animal was poured on the altar and the meat cut into pieces and burned there to transform them into a smell pleasing to the Lord (Lev. 1,9b). An important part of the ritual was when the person, on whose behalf it was conducted, laid his hand on the animal's head indicating the intimacy between him and that of the animal substituting him. Second, the so called peace offerings, *selamim* in Hebrew, created communion with God in which the blood of the sacrificed animal was poured to the ground and the fat burned on the altar and the animal in that way given to God. The participants consumed the meat of the sacrificial animal in a meal marked by joy because God was believed to participate in it (Deut. 12,18). Third, the atonement offerings or sin offerings, *hattat*, were conducted when someone had broken the laws of the society (Lev. 3,1-3) and fourth, guilt offerings, *asam*, were conducted for taking in an inappropriate way what rightfully belonged to God (Lev. 5,15). The blood was smeared on the corners of the altar believed to be the atoning part of the sacrifice, not the flesh of the animal as the life was believed to be in the blood. The result of the offering was atonement in the meaning that the sins had been covered and removed. God received the offering and removed the person's guilt. The meat was eaten outside the temple area (Ringgren 1966:167-173). Scholars disagree whether the offerings among the Hebrews should be divided into three, four or five groups but agree generally about the meaning of the system.

236). By participating in the meal the gods accepted humans as their friends (1956:265).

Hubert and Mauss had similar ideas, asserting that offerings are a way of communication between the people who give them and the gods who receive them resulting in the forgiveness of sins and other benefits. This is the so called communion theory (Hubert and Mauss 1964:13, 57; cf. Bloch 1992:27-28). They pointed to two basic processes that take place in sacrifices, sacralization and desacralization. A profane offering is consecrated in order to be used as a means of communication between the sacred and the profane worlds. This is the sacralization. In order to reestablish the necessary distinction between these two worlds a process of desacralization must take place when the ritual has been completed (Bell 1997:26).

Several rituals among the Pokot people would fall under the communion theory, e.g. the *sapana* initiation ritual and some of the rituals in the circumcision process, such as *kipuno*, in which the meat of the sacrificial animals is roasted and transformed into a good smelling smoke believed to be pleasing to *Tororot* who receives the animal in this form and participates in the meal. *Tororot* is believed to be near and glad for the good food, and thus to bestow his favor and blessings upon his people in return. For that reason this is an offering meal. Visser has made the observation that roasting is the way men prepare the meat of sacrificial animals for eating, but that women boil it (1989:139). A sacrificial animal must always be without a blemish.

Tororot is believed to consume the blood of the sacrificial animals in many rituals, e.g. in cleansing rituals such as *tisö* and *kikatat*, but normally blood does not have a prominent place in rituals and sometimes it seems unclear if *Tororot* is believed to consume it or not. On the other hand, the meal is prominent and the sacrificial animal is always consumed after a ritual, the ancestors are given their share of the food to keep them content. The cleansing ritual *kilokat* is an exception (cf. Appendix 2, ritual no. 11 *Kilokat*).

Chyme, *aghian*, from the intestine of the sacrificial animals is generally very prominent in cleansing rituals among the Pokot people. People who go through cleansing rituals are smeared with it in order to make them clean of their impurities and the bad effects of evil spirits. This reveals the importance of the domestic animals in this society and the intimacy between them and the people.

3.6 Summary

In this chapter I have given a summary of some of the most important concepts of African traditional religion and philosophy because it gives a better understanding of the African epistemology. I discussed specifically the concepts of magic, ritual, tradition and sacrifices, which are also important in most African traditional religions, and for the material of this study. The tools we have to discuss and evaluate African rituals and sacrifices with are theories, most of which have been constructed by European scholars, or are strongly influenced by European scholarship and epistemology. Van Gennep and Turner's three stage theory is important in analyzing the Pokot rituals, and Cox's reminder not to see African rituals as a re-enacting of myths but rather as "acts of remembering," makes a distinction between the understanding of European and African rituals. Tillich's claim that it is impossible to talk about religious concepts without the use of symbols is also important.

In the next chapter I will continue to unfold the African way of thinking by going deeper into the world of the Pokot people by reviewing the most important parts of their religion. All rituals men go through are a part of the Pokot religion and it is thus of fundamental importance to understand its logic and spirit.

4. THE RELIGION OF THE POKOT PEOPLE

The men sit in the semi circled council of elders, *kirket*, under the cool shadow of the *simotwo* tree, which is a symbol of life. A big crowd of people stands facing them waiting for what will happen next. The remains of a fire and the carcass of the bull that was slaughtered early in the morning are in the middle of the open area between them. As the *sapana* initiation is coming to an end, a ritually clean, *tihil*, elder stands up to lead the crowd in a ritual of blessing, evoking gods, ancestors, and the heavenly bodies to bestow blessings upon the man, who is undergoing the ritual, in the form of good health, long life, many cattle and domestic animals, wives and many children and to grant him the favor of the gods. For every petition the elders utter a deep guttural sound, *mmm*, as a sign of agreement.

The general description of African traditional religion in the last chapter fits well as a general description of the Pokot religion, as I mentioned there. In this chapter I will describe the Pokot religion specifically, because the rituals men go through from birth to death are an integral part of it, and without an understanding of the religion, it is difficult to understand the rituals. I will describe the main ideas of the Pokot religion, the life and role of the gods and spirits, the role of ritual officials, and the meaning of some key concepts, such as sin and harmony of life, *pöghishyö*. As also mentioned in the last chapter, African traditional religion deals primarily with life here on earth, not so much life after death, and religion is an inseparable part of every aspect of life of most African peoples. This is also the case with the religion of the Pokot people, which is a means to strengthen life in general, enhance fertility, increase wealth, and avenge and deal with misfortune. The rituals described in this study are an inseparable part of the life of the Pokot people. As the religious tradition of the Pokot people has not previously been put into writing or systematized, it is sometimes contradictory, partly due to its mixed and composed origin. Visser's book about the Pokot religion (1991) is an exception of course, but the Pokot people have not taken it as a handbook of their religious life.

4.1 The creation of the world and the Pokot gods

Tororot is the high god of the Pokot people and is believed to have created the world, *ngwiny*, but they have very vague ideas about how it came about. According to an

informant, the world or the earth, *kor*, existed already when people emerged and thus they do not know how it was created, but it was completely covered with water at that time, so deep that mountains, hills and trees were hardly visible. *Tororot* drained it and made furrows, which became rivers and the mountains and hills emerged.

The Pokot people have unclear ideas about the creation of man but believe he originated from the east, *kong asis*, where the sun rises, and do thus face east in several rituals, which are supposed to bring blessings, e.g. the *mis* (6.5.5) and *putyon* (Appendix 2, ritual no. 4) rituals. According to an informant, man was hairy, *sapul*, in the beginning and ate raw food because he did not have fire, *ma*. He used sharp pieces of quartz, *songkwet*, as knives and, bark from trees such as *atat*, *kolowö*, *soitö*, *ses* and *poghiotwo*, as plates because it did not crack easily. One day he decided to rub two sticks, *pighon*, together and fire emerged.⁴³ This is how fire came into being and as a result animals were divided into two groups. Those who feared the light ran to the forest and are the wild animals, *tipö wuw*, but those who were attracted by the light ran towards the fire and man's home and are now his domestic animals, *tipö kaw*.

Man and *Tororot* were originally close, but are not any longer, because man sinned against him.

4.1.1 Tororot

Tororot, the high god of the Pokot people, has similar attributes as other African high gods described in 3.1.2 (High gods). He is good and the creator of the world. People do not know very much about him and his existence, but he is said to be morally pure and cannot be manipulated by man (cf. Sanders 2001:154). As creator, *Tororot* upholds the social order of the Pokot society and guards its values. He demonstrates his closeness to those who are faithful to his principles by blessing them with long life, many descendants and healthy herds. Such people are said to be clean, *tilil*.⁴⁴ Only those who follow the Pokot tradition faithfully can gain access to him (Sanders 2001:151-157). Old men who are believed to enjoy *Tororot*'s favor are sought after to perform cleansing rituals (Appendix 2, rituals no. 2 and 4), and rituals of blessings, which will be described in 5.2.18 (Coming-out, *kipuno*), 6.4 (*Sapana*), and 7.1 (Rituals of blessing, *kisoyonöt*) (cf. Peristany 1975:169). Normally he does not interfere with human affairs

⁴³ *Pighon* is the traditional equipment to make fire, and is still widely used.

⁴⁴ The word *tilil* means clean and is used in the Christian church as a translation of the word holy. The noun "[t]ililin is used to refer to an orderly situation in a family or a community, in the absence of sickness or social discord. The term implies cleanliness, purity and uprightness" (Nyamwaya 1982:65).

but may punish people who have broken taboos or sinned in another way, acting contrary to the moral principles and the basic values of the Pokot tradition.

The name *Tororot* is derived from the word *toror* which means high, far off, notable, well known (cf. Visser 1989:91; Baroja 1998; Steenberg 1991:3). *Tororot* has several other names, which describe his attributes, but the most important is *Tororot*, the uplifted or the most high. People use this name in order to praise him. He is believed to be the omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent creator of the world giving fertility to men, animals and plants and is, for that reason, called father, *papo*. *Tororot*'s sphere of power is, however, confined to Pokot land. One informant said that people know in their heart that he is the father of every Pokot, male and female.

People call *Tororot* with several other names, which describe some of his attributes, such as *Limöy*, the one who hears, which is derived from the verb *ke-lim*, to hear, *Terin*, he who listens, which is derived from the verb *ke-ter*, to listen. *Tororot* listens to life on earth and hears every sound, both of animals and human beings, and knows everything they say. This idea is reflected in the rituals of blessings such as *kisoyonöt*, which will be described in 5.2.18 (Coming-out, *kipuno*), 6.4 (*Sapana*), and 7.1 (Rituals of blessing, *kisoyonöt*), where he, the other gods, ancestral spirits and the whole creation are prayed to. When people pray to him for help, they assume that he hears every word.

Pöytohin, king, the one who has power over the whole creation, is another name of *Tororot*. All plants grow during the rain season and wither in the dry season according to his will. As the one who gives fertility, *Tororot* knows who are sinners and grants them few children and domestic animals. On the other hand he holds problems at bay from people by controlling the water in the rivers and preventing wild animals from destroying the crops in the fields. He avenges problems caused by fellow Pokot and prevents enemies from attacking. The sun rises daily because of his love for the Pokot people.

Pchengeyi, he who takes, is derived from the verb *ke-cheng*, to take, is a name, which describes how *Tororot* makes sure people follow the principles of the Pokot society. He can punish people in many ways for their sins, or for breaking the taboos of their clans', e.g. by making women barren or ordering *Ilat* to strike them with lightning, which may kill them.

The Pokot people pray to *Tororot* when they are struck by deadly sicknesses and famine. Sometimes, when all cleansing rituals have failed and death is inevitable,

people climb Mt. Mtelo, the highest mountain in Pokot land, believed to be his place of residence,⁴⁵ as a last resort, and pray for their loved ones hoping that he will hear them better there than at other places and intervene on their behalf. They also pray to him during severe droughts and at times of starvation. When he answers their prayers they say: *Kakirecha*⁴⁶ *Tororot*, *Tororot* has taken care of us, i.e. *Tororot* has hindered misfortune from coming.



Picture 12. The semicircular *kirket*.

Men face Mt. Mtelo when they sit in the semicircular assembly of elders, *kirket*, which comes together on important occasions, e.g. during the *sapana* initiation ritual. The meat of the animals sacrificed for the occasion is roasted in the middle of the *kirket* in order to share it with *Tororot* in the form of sweet smelling smoke who is believed to participate in the meal.⁴⁷ As meat is not often eaten in the Pokot society, the roasted meat is eaten with great joy in the *kirket* and the whole event has the characteristics of an offering meal as mentioned in 3.5 (Sacrifices) (cf. Robertson-Smith

⁴⁵ One informant said that people believed *Tororot* lived in places difficult to reach, such as mountains, lakes, trees and wells. Nyamwaya is of the view that *Tororot* inhabits the evergreen milk trees (1982:37) but in my view this is not the general view of the Pokot people.

⁴⁶ This is from the verbs *ke-kir* = to take care of.

⁴⁷ This is a similar idea as in the Christian Eucharist where the gone saints are believed to close the altar ring and thus participate with the recipients of the sacrament in a big community of believers.

1956:213-243 [1889]). According to an informant, people used to face Mt. Mtelo when they prayed to *Tororot* early in the morning asking him to protect them and their domestic animals during the coming day, but that it is generally not practiced any longer.

4.1.2 Asis

Asis is both a word for the sun, which is not worshiped, and the name of a deity. I believe Mbiti is right about the relationship between these two phenomena in African traditional religion, that, “[t]here is no concrete indication that the sun is considered to be God, or God considered to be the sun, however closely these may be associated. At best the sun symbolizes aspects of God, such as his omniscience, His power, His everlasting endurance, and even His nature” (1969:52).

Asis is called *kong pö Tororot*, the eye of *Tororot*, and sometimes *kong pö yim*, heaven’s eye, and is believed to see everything that happens among men. People pray to *Asis* when their animals have been stolen or have got lost because they believe he knows where they are because he sees everything that happens on earth. He does, however, not help humans unless invoked. *Asis* is remote as *Tororot* and is not prayed to except in times of need. Peristany quotes a prayer to him, “*Asis* you saw my cattle being stolen. You see everything, Eye of Above. Punish the thief, make him return my cattle!” (Peristany 1975:170). People also call upon *Asis* in rituals of cleansing, through an elder who has enjoyed divine favor and is morally clean, *tilil*, asking him to bless them with health, fertility and prosperity in form of children and cattle (Peristany 1975:172; Sanders 2001:157).

“East” in the Pokot language, *kong asis*, is derived from *kong*, eye, and *asis*, sun, and means literally the eye of the sun, i.e. the eye of *Asis*. As mentioned above, blessings are believed to come from the east, with the rising sun, and in several rituals people face east in order to receive blessings from where some people say that man originates. People curse all evil in cleansing rituals, commanding it to go down with the sun, i.e. to the west, and, therefore, such rituals are performed in the afternoon (cf. 4.1 The Creation of the world and the Pokot gods). *Asis* is thus a god of light and life. He is subordinate to *Tororot* but people have vague ideas about him.

Asis is also the name of the high gods among the Kalenjin people groups of Marakwet (cf. Massam 1927:188; Kipkorir 1973a:14), Nandi (cf. Mwanzi

1977:117)⁴⁸ and the Kipsigis (cf. Fish 1995:3), where he has similar attributes as *Tororot*, which shows how the Pokot people have been able to absorb various elements into their religion and culture and harmonize them. Mbiti rejects the idea that deities attached to the sun reveal traces of sun worship. He is of the view that, “[a]mong many societies, the sun is considered to be a manifestation of God Himself, and the same word, or its cognate, is used for both” (1969:52). We can thus assume that *Asis* symbolizes some of *Tororot*’s attributes such as his permanent presence, power and everlasting endurance.

Asis is the totem of the *Sotin*-clan.⁴⁹ Informants say that the sun was chosen as a totem because the clan originated in the east, the direction of sunrise and blessings.⁵⁰

4.1.3 *Ilat*

Ilat has many attributes both of humans and fertility gods of other religions. He is not as remote as *Tororot* and *Asis*, and is the god the Pokot people like most. People have various ideas about him and he seems to have fertilized the imagination of many creative minds. His name is used both in singular and plural form, *Ilat* and *Ilöt*, and can both denote him and rain. He is first and foremost the god of rain and water, who fertilizes nature, and makes it green during the rain season and thus creating good living conditions for the animals. Thunder indicates his presence and some people say that he speaks through it (cf. Peristany 1975:171). Others believe lightning comes from his eyes, i.e. that when he opens them they discharge. Peristany (1975:171) and Visser (1989:94) say that *Ilat* creates lightning by flapping his vast wings, emitting thunder from his armpits. There is a story of a girl who became *Ilat*’s wife. Soon after marrying him, she had a baby and went to visit her family in order to help in the corn fields. Upon arrival she forbid people to lift up the child’s arms. Overcome by curiosity her mother disobeyed, however, and lifted the baby’s arms and lightning discharged from the baby’s armpits.

There are various descriptions of *Ilat*. Some people say he is tall with a brown complexion and red eyes resembling human beings. He can also appear as a handsome young man or in the form of clouds or water. Visser adds a description of him as,

⁴⁸ The Nandi also use the name Cheptalil, the one who shines, about their high god.

⁴⁹ *Sotin* means the sun.

⁵⁰ Some say that the people of the clan were originally Njemps who lived on an island in Lake Baringo.

a being with vast black wings, which are green underneath, with head and legs that are human. Clouds constitute his clothes. With his wings he gathers water from lakes (e.g. Lake Turkana) and spills it onto places he favors or to which he has been sent by *Tororot* (1989:94).

Wind is a sign from *Ilat* that the rain season is coming. When strong winds destroy houses or crops in the fields, he is believed to be punishing people for certain sins. The same holds true for heavy destructive rain, hail and floods. He can also punish people for prolonged quarrelling and for abusing domestic animals, and is said to kill cows, which die suddenly, overnight, after giving birth to calves, being well in the evening but dead in the morning.⁵¹ No rituals are performed when cows die like that but the meat is eaten outside the homestead, which indicates mild uncleanness. *Ilat* can also punish people by killing all their domestic animals with lightning and even the people themselves. This is a serious punishment because it prevents people from becoming good ancestral spirits, *oy cho karamach*, and to participate in the life of their family after death, as will be explained later in this chapter (4.3.1.1 Guardian and evil spirits). *Ilat* can also cause blindness, insanity, and dumbness, and can paralyze people, partly or totally. A diviner can help people to find out if *Ilat* is the cause of their problems, in which case he will tell them to go and find a goat of a certain color, which may vary from case to case, and a man to perform the *kilokat* ritual, who has had the same kind of problem himself, but recovered because the ritual was performed on his behalf. The *kilokat* ritual is described in Appendix 2 (ritual no. 11). *Ilat* likes human food, especially unripe millet and milk. People believe that when a cereal pest, called *cheptaita* or *maitmut*, dries the corn in the millet fields very fast and then it is spoilt, he has eaten it. People who abuse *Ilat* are in danger of contracting a disease called *yomöt*, which means wind that has similar symptoms as asthma and affects people when the sky is cloudy during the rain season (Visser 1989:133). According to Nyamwaya (1982:59, 84), who did a research in Chepareria, *Tororot* sends the disease because someone has committed secret sins, unknown to his community and the remedy is to perform the *kilokat* ritual.

Ilat serves *Tororot* by helping him to preserve the traditions and values of the Pokot society, and punishing and blessing people according to their conduct, and to

⁵¹ Veterinaries identify this ailment as *anthrax*. According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, *anthrax* is “an infectious disease of warm-blooded animals (as cattle and sheep) caused by a spore-forming bacterium (*Bacillus anthracis*), transmissible to humans especially by the handling of infected products (as wool), and characterized by external ulcerating nodules or by lesions in the lungs” (<http://www.m-w.com/>).

preserve the social structure. He is *Tororot*'s messenger and prophets, *werkoy*, are his close friends because he informs them sometimes about how the coming rain season will be. People respect him but those who are weak, e.g. girls during the initiation period, *chemeri*, should not approach his dwelling places lest they might be killed by lightning. *Ilat* can show his favor by bestowing blessings upon people, e.g. by giving them many cows.

Ilat is believed to live in caves, inaccessible rocks, lakes, rivers and streams. People, especially girls, must be careful at such places because he likes beautiful, sexually pure, young women, especially those who have a brown complexion as he, but most Pokot people have a very dark complexion. There are many stories about his dealings with girls and in many of them he makes them pregnant. He is said to have many children with human wives and his offsprings live in two worlds, that of the humans and the spirit world and they have special access to his power. Some prophets are said to be *Ilat*'s children. According to Sanders, a ritual, e.g. *tisö*, is performed to separate *Ilat*'s children from other people (2001:159).

The Pokot people say that there are two types of rain, that which is accompanied with lightning and noisy thunder, and that which is quiet. The latter is *Ilat*, which is the totem of the *Ngisurin* and *Solyongin* clans. The *Ngisurin* clan is known for its many prophets. According to one tradition, these clans were originally one and the same and emerged from two of *Ilat*'s sons, *Ngisurin* and *Solyongin*.⁵²

4.1.4 The stars, *kokel*

Kokel is the Pokot word for stars in general. Its singular form is *kokelyan*. In rituals of blessings the leaders appeal to the deities, *Tororot*, *Asis*, *Ilat* and the stars, *kokelyan*, and other heavenly bodies such as the moon, *arawa*, as well as the ancestral spirits, *oi*, hills, trees, lakes, rivers and rocks and ask them to answer their prayers, bestowing blessings and prosperity on the person on whose behalf the ritual is performed.

Praying to the stars among the Pokot people is in accordance with what has been mentioned in 3.1.2 (High gods), that major nature phenomena are associated with a divinity in the religions of many ethnic groups in Africa, although they are neither divine in themselves nor worshipped among the Pokot people. I do not know of any

⁵² The Solyongin clan originates from Mt. Elgon and comes from the Sebei people (cf. Visser 1989:250).

incident where people prayed specifically to the stars. On the other hand the Pokot people watch the stars and their position must be right so that certain rituals can be performed, such as circumcision. Their position can also indicate how the coming rain season will be.

4.2 Peace and harmony of life, *pöghishyö*, and sin

People lead an ideal life in the Pokot society when they live together in peace and harmony without any conflicts or disputes, diseases or problems, have enough food and live in harmony with the unseen world. This condition is called *pöghishyö* and people do everything they can to preserve it and to restore it when it is disrupted, e.g. by sin. The concept *pöghishyö* has a similar meaning as *shalom* in Hebrew. I will now explain these two important concepts, *pöghishyö* and sin.

Once, when I participated in an evening meeting in a small Pokot church, a man entered and commanded his wife to exit the church room. Outside he scolded her severely and accused her of committing adultery, pointing a spear at her, threatening to kill her. This incident was regarded so serious that the elders of the community forced him to provide a goat, which was slaughtered early the next morning in a cleansing ritual performed to make sure that his threats would not harm his wife or unsettle the harmony of the life, *pöghishyö*, in the community.

Explaining the meaning of *pöghishyö*, Steenbergen (1991:2-3) provides some contexts where it is present:

1. The (extended) family is living peacefully in the homestead. There are no “bad words” that disturb the relationship.
2. There is harmony between human beings and nature. No wild animals are disturbing people. No “bad birds” are singing in the manyatta (homestead), no snakes are entering the home. A good tree provides enough shade during hot days.
3. Nobody is sick or feeling uncomfortable, but everyone is in good health. Also cattle, goats and sheep are in good condition.
4. There is peace in the land. Cattle raiders from neighboring ethnic groups (especially from Turkana) have not been around for some time. In fact the conditions for going out for a cattle raid to bring “home” the cattle from the other ethnic groups are becoming ideal.
5. God (*Tororot*) is not angry with the people. But is looking down upon them in favor from Mount Mtelö ...
6. Children, calves, lambs and goats are born plentiful and in good health.
7. People stand firm in life like Mount Mtelö.
8. There is, or has been, enough rainfall to make the grass grow for the animals and to grow sufficient crops. There is prosperity in the land.

9. People don't do anything wrong to one another. There is no stealing, fighting, adultery, witchcraft, bad words and the like.

The presence of *pöghishyö* is due, among other things, to *Tororot*'s favor when people have followed the tradition of the Pokot society. When the men sit in *kirket* during rituals, facing Mt. Mtelo, they try to please *Tororot* and make him glad in an offering meal, by sharing their food with him in the form of good smelling smoke when they roast the meat of the animals slaughtered for the occasion, knowing that he hears, listens and cares.

The concept *pöghishyö* reveals how interconnected the members of the community are, because one person can upset the balance of life and endanger the life of all the others by antisocial behavior. It also reveals how interconnected individuals, gods, and the spirits are because the preservation of *pöghishyö* depends on the humans, i.e. that they follow the traditions of the society and adhere to its values, respect the gods and the ancestors, and fulfill their obligations towards them. They enjoy their favor and blessing if they fulfill their obligations, but wrath if they fail. The concepts of sin, and *pöghishyö* are, therefore, linked, because sin can upset *pöghishyö*.

Sin and disrespect for the ancestral spirits may cause disruption of *pöghishyö*, which may lead to famine or sickness among animals and humans. Sometimes the reasons for such calamities are not obvious, and people need help from a diviner to identify them. When people have sinned they can normally be cleansed and the consequences removed with a cleansing ritual performed on their behalf.

4.2.1 Sin

The English word sin is used as a translation of several Pokot concepts, which all have different meanings, but all denote a breach of the values and principles of the society in one way or another. In such cases, as has already been explained, the whole community is affected and thus sin is in the end an offence against the people of the society. The meanings of some of the concepts translated as "sin" do overlap and people may have different opinions about how to categorize certain offences.

Ngoki is the most common concept of sin. Its meaning comprises offences such as to steal from another Pokot, lying, adultery, jealousy, witchcraft, and greed. A cleansing ritual is required to neutralize its serious effects.

Lelut is translated as “mistake,” “accident” or “error.” Its consequences are not as serious as *ngoki* and a cleansing ritual is not required. *Lelut* can be quarrelling between neighbors, which may, if not dealt with, disrupt *pöghishyö* and develop into *ngoki*. It can also be used about abuse of domestic animals, and when a man goes hunting and accidentally kills his friend.

Sirip describes people’s personalities, which can be reflected in bad words heaped on other people, which in turn may arouse anger that may have serious consequences, if the angry person uses sorcery in revenge.

Ptakal is usually associated with a deviating sexual behavior such as incest, homosexuality and bestiality, i.e. sex with animals. It can also be used about breaking taboos, e.g. if people marry within their clans. Purification of this kind of sin can be difficult to find. Often the person who has committed *ptakal* is ostracized from the society. I know of an example where the people of a community went as far as to execute such a person. Usually that is done when an abnormal behavior has taken place for a prolonged period of time and the offender has not shown any intentions of mending his ways, despite numerous warnings.

Pan, sorcery, is the most serious of all sins and is the worst anti-social act in the community. If people have reasons to believe that someone has practiced it for a long time they may execute him or her because that is the only secure way to eliminate it from the society. As explained in 3.2 (Magic), I follow Evans-Pritchard’s distinction between sorcery and witchcraft (1976 [1937]), and *pan* is sorcery in the Pokot society, according to his definition. This matter will be discussed further in 4.4.2 (Specialists who use magic).

Before a cleansing ritual can be performed in order to restore *pöghishyö*, it is essential that people confess the sins that have caused problems for the society and the disruption of *pöghishyö*. Confession of sins is for that reason a part of several rituals, e.g. circumcision and *parpara*.

4.3 Spirits

Although the Pokot gods are remote in the everyday life of most people, the ancestral spirits, both good and evil, are not and they participate actively in their daily life.

4.3.1 Ancestral spirits in the Pokot society

The ancestral spirits are very important in the life of the Pokot society and it is of vital importance for people to maintain good relationship with them. Their life and role is similar to ancestral spirits in general in the African traditional religion as described in 3.1.3 (Ancestral spirits). Every person has a guardian spirit, *onyöt*,⁵³ which is an ancestral spirit who is still remembered by the living, i.e. belongs to the living-dead, according to Mbiti's definition of the concept (1969:25-26) as explained in 3.1.3 (Ancestral spirits). The ancestral spirits are, however, usually referred to as *oy* and collectively as *kukö* (sing.),⁵⁴ and dwell among their descendents to protect them and to watch over the welfare of the society. They are good spirits, *oy cho karamach*. But people are constantly combating evil spirits, *oy cho ghach*, who are forgotten ancestors, a mass of unknown and unidentified spirits. The reason people perform many rituals, specially cleansing rituals, is to fight them. The ancestral spirits are especially near in rituals, e.g. during the circumcision process and *sapana*.

4.3.1.1 Guardian and evil spirits

Every man receives a guardian spirit, *onyöt*, in infancy, through the ritual *katkata oy*, to plant the spirit. Guardian spirits are also found among many other nations (cf. Hultkrantz 1953; 1955; 1980; Paulsen 1962; Sigurbjörn Einarsson 1954). The name of the ritual, which will be described in 5.1 (To plant the ancestral spirit, *katkata oy*), is derived from the verb *ke-katkat*, to plant, and the noun *oy*, an ancestral spirit. From the time the ritual has been performed, an ancestral spirit will be a part of the baby's life until death and affect it in many ways, its personality, manners and appearance. People often say that a child resembles the old man who is its guardian spirit, e.g. in his behavior. In spite of this intimate relationship, the ancestral spirit is distinct from the person of its host and is thus not reincarnated in the same sense as in Hinduism. The guardian spirit is normally a close relative, e.g. a deceased grandfather, who can be a guardian spirit, of many children simultaneously and can, as an example, live simultaneously in three children of the same family and up to ten children of the same clan. I did not hear much of female guardian spirits, which could be due to the fact that most of my informants were men. The guardian spirit is benevolent and guards its host against attacks from evil spirits but must in return be honored and respected and

⁵³ *Onyöt* (sing.), *onyötoy* (pl.).

⁵⁴ *Kukö* (sing), *kukötin* (pl.). *Kukö* means grandfather.

given food and drink, even beer and tobacco. At the beginning of every meal the host shares a little bit of his food by slipping it to the floor. It is important to keep the guardian spirit content lest its anger be evoked and it turns against its host, leaving him in extreme cases, due to his negligence. A person who feels threatened by the guardian spirit says that it has gone to the bush, i.e. that it has left him. Mental disturbances are sometimes believed to indicate this. A furious guardian spirit may kill his host. A good guardian spirit, on the other hand, is of great value and is a blessing to its beneficiary.

Despite the fact that the Pokot people do not have ideas about eternal life as found in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, they have ideas about prolonged life, which can last a few generations as they continue to live as guardian spirits, *onyöt*, and good ancestral spirits, *oy cho karamach*,⁵⁵ as long as they belong to the group of the living-dead. It is of utmost importance for people to have a male progeny to enable them to continue to live as guardian spirits as life passes from one generation to the next only through the sons. They are believed to carry the seeds of biological life, which they plant in the women's wombs as the seeds in the field. This feeling is so strong that if the first three children of a woman are daughters, her husband may take another wife in order that he may have sons with her. The thought of not becoming a part of the living-dead after death is terrifying. The distinction between a guardian spirit, *onyöt*, and ancestral spirits in general, *kukö*, or *oy*, is often unclear.

According to Sanders (2001:161), the interdependency of the living and the living-dead is clear when a guardian spirit is chosen because the living can decide if they want a certain *onyöt* to become a guardian spirit of their child or not. Rejected spirits become restless evil spirits. In spite of this possibility, I never heard of people who dared to reject an ancestral spirit, which had indicated that he wanted to become a guardian spirit of a child. I did not hear either about instances where more than one spirit indicated this kind of wish concerning the same child, but, at least theoretically, people have this power to accept or reject a guardian spirit, *onyöt*.

People, who die without descendents are called *mikulkipes*. Their guardian spirits are said to go to the bush because they will not become a part of the living-dead and have no place to stay. Evil spirits are generally believed to live in isolated places

⁵⁵ *Karamach* is derived from *karam*, good. *Karamach* means very good.

such as caves, mountains, and forests where they may harm people who pass, and in the bushes along rivers where they may make holes on calabashes or throw sand at people. The evil spirits live thus in uninhabited places, i.e. outside the human community. The spirits of parents, whose children have got married, are on the other hand, a part of the human community and stay in the vicinity of their children's and grandchildren's homes. There are, however, many contradicting ideas about the whereabouts of the ancestral spirits, e.g. that they stay underground, in bushes around the homes of their families etc.

Evil spirits, *oy cho ghach*, or unidentified spirits cannot become guardian spirits, *onyötoy*, because they do not belong to the living-dead any more. Angry guardian spirits, *onyötoy cho ghach*, who leave their hosts, become a part of the group of evil spirits, *oy cho ghach*, and are possibly the worst of all evil spirits, which is reflected by the fact that the word *onyöt* is used as a translation of the word Satan in the Christian church in Pokot.⁵⁶ Living outside the human community, evil spirits try to intrude by inflicting harm.

Most sicknesses, misfortune and death in the Pokot society, are believed to be caused by the *oy cho ghach*. The reasons can be many, such as unidentified evil spirits that have been evoked by sorcerers, *poni*, to harm people or domestic animals out of sheer evil intentions. It can be evil spirits evoked by witchdoctors, *kapolokä*, who are enforcing justice on behalf of the society, e.g. to punish an unknown thief or evildoer, or it can be unidentified evil spirits who only want to cause harm or angry ancestral spirits that have not been honored and cared for properly. Breaches of taboos and oaths activate evil spirits and are also believed to cause many deaths. Misfortune can also be caused by angry gods who punish people for their sins, as has already been explained. The aim of cleansing and healing rituals such as *moy*, *kikatat*, and *tisö* is to pacify angry ancestral spirits and drive evil spirits away in order to restore peace and harmony of life, *pöghishyö*. All these cleansing rituals are described in Appendix 2 (rituals no. 1 – 3). Not all diseases are believed to be caused by evil spirits. Some are held to be of natural causes but people have their way to differentiate between them (cf. Nyamwaya 1982; 1987). A man told me, when I asked about his family, that he had had eight children, but that three of them were dead, one as a result of sorcery, another from malaria, and the third from a sickness that had made it red.

⁵⁶ Satan is the translation of the Greek word *δίαβολος*, *diabolos*.

Ancestors are sometimes said to visit their relatives in animal form as puff adders and pythons. When these kinds of snakes enter a homestead peacefully, without aggression, they are believed to be disguised ancestors and should be given milk because they have most probably come because they are hungry. Visser adds that they should also be given tobacco (1989:102). Mothers are sometimes said to visit their families as porcupines. It can have serious consequences if ancestors visiting their descendants in this way are not properly received. They may become angry and punish their progeny severely as a result, e.g. with deadly sicknesses.

It is called *piytagh*, to throw forward, when people throw or pour food to the floor to share it with the ancestral spirits. Doing it they sometimes say: This is your child's food. Eat it, guide us, protect us and bless us. Keep diseases away from us and give us good health.

Sometimes people feed the ancestors by dropping food by the door, by the fireplace or along the fence of the homestead, because they are believed to stay closest to their relatives at these places waiting to be fed.

4.3.2 Life after death

In addition to having unsystematic ideas about life after death, the Pokot people abhor it. Those who have descendants continue to live in some of them as their guardian spirits, *onyötoy*, and for them as benevolent ancestral spirits, *oy cho karamach*, as has already been described. Death is not as bad for them as people who die without a progeny. The idea of dying without the possibility to continue to live as a part of the group of the living-dead is terrifying, which means to be cut off from the life of the society. People also fear to touch corpses, because they believe that the evil spirits, which are most often believed to have caused the death, may take hold of them and even kill them too.

I was constantly made aware of people's fear of death and especially of corpses. Sometimes people died at the two ELCK's dispensaries in West Pokot. I remember a mother, who was overcome by grief but did not dare to carry the body of her dear child home but threw it into a nearby cornfield by the dispensary to be devoured by the hyenas. She was too scared of the evil spirits to take it home. In another instance one of my evangelists lost a young son. After I had gone with him to fetch the corpse at the hospital where the son had died, we prepared a funeral at his home, but people are usually buried in their cows' kraal. On the way I invited some

friends to sit in the car, but some of them dared not because the corpse was in the back. Only Christian neighbors and friends attended the funeral, others were too scared of the evil spirits. During the informal funeral service, held in the main house of their home, the father thanked all the people who had come to express their condolence, support and care, and told them of an incident many years earlier when he and his wife lost their first child. They were young at that time, and grieved greatly, but were left alone in their sorrow, because their neighbors and relatives were too frightened to visit them and express their condolences. Alone they dug the grave and buried their child. No ritual was performed, because that is not done when children and childless people die.

I also remember an old, sick man I noticed in a big crowd of patients by one of the dispensaries when I passed by one day. He lay on the ground with his head on his son's lap who tried to pour some medicine into his mouth from a bottle. When I returned late that night, the lights of the car fell on something lying on the ground where he had been lying before. It was this old man, who was obviously dead, because the sheet he used as clothes had been drawn over him and covered him from head to toe. It was raining a little bit and the corpse was lying there, apparently abandoned. Early the next morning, when I passed the place once again, the corpse had been removed. When I had proceeded two or three kilometres down the road, I saw a man walking alone by the roadside. A friend travelling with me informed me that this was the son, and that he had already buried his father. He had carried the corpse and dug the grave alone. This is how people usually bury their loved ones and grieve in solitude because of the fear of corpses. This is in striking contradiction to the fundamental value and importance of the community in the Pokot society.

At most funerals I attended, cleansing rituals were performed on behalf of those who had been in touch with the corpse, i.e. the non-christian believers, in order to chase evil spirits away from them and avenge misfortune. A guardian spirit, *onyöt*, leaves a person at death. I will discuss this further in 7.4 (The burial ritual, *kinto* or *so*).

Ideas about the whereabouts of the ancestral spirits vary among people. In addition to living in the vicinity of their descendents, many believe they stay underground where life is said to resemble life on earth and that the ancestors have domestic animals as when they were living. Those who had few animals on earth will continue to have few and those who were rich will continue to be rich. Some people

say that the animals follow their owners when they die, and sometimes ancestors are believed to have come to fetch them when cattle die of certain diseases. A person's character does not change after death, and an evil person will continue to be evil and a good person to be good and there is no judgement after death over the life on earth. *Tororot* judges while people are still alive.

Many people in Cheptulel hold that the male ancestral spirits stay in the cave and bush at *Kaporo*, where the *poro* ritual is performed, from where they go to attend rituals in the community.

Ideas about how the spirit of a dead person reaches its dwelling place after death are very unclear. Only one or two people I talked to had ideas about it, but they were similar to the ideas of the Nandi people, who believe that the spirits have to pass through the stomach of the hyena to reach the land of the ancestors, i.e. that the hyenas had to devour the corpses (Huntingford 1953a:150; 1953b:38; cf. Kjartan Jónsson 1991:106). The Pokot people, especially those who live on the hot plains, only bury mature people, who have raised children, but drag others into the bush with a liana string to be devoured by the hyenas. Young unmarried men are reminded of this fact in the *lapan* ritual of the circumcision process and in the *sintagh* ritual, to urge them to get married soon. I will discuss death and ideas attached to it further in 7.4 (The burial ritual, *kinto* or *so*).

Death is the ultimate defeat of life. The Pokot religion, as African traditional religion in general, is, as previously mentioned, a means to fight for life against destruction, evil, misfortune and death. It is also a tool to obtain the objectives of society in accordance with its values. *Pöghishyö* is a fundamental value, creating a situation where other objectives can be obtained, especially prosperity of life. In order to strengthen life and combat evil forces, herbalists, ritual specialists and seers are very important. I will now proceed by explaining their roles.

4.3.2. 1 The herbalists, *chepsakityan*

The herbalist, *chepsakityan*, is always a woman⁵⁷ who uses herbs to cure diseases. She is usually not a seer, but makes medicines from medical plants. As previously

⁵⁷ *Che-* as a prefix indicates that a word or a name denotes a female. It is common in names, e.g. Cherotich, which is the Pokot name of one of my daughters who was born in the afternoon when the cows were on their way home from grazing. A boy born at the same time would be called Rotich. Children born at night might be called Chemnangat and Mnangat, which means night, and if the birth was difficult they might be named Cheporiot and Poriot, which means war.

mentioned, the Pokot people in general know the plants in their surroundings very well, but some have special knowledge of medical plants which they collect in order to make medicines. In communities where there is very little or no health service, such people are very important and good herbalists enjoy great respect. Often they specialize in certain ailments, as did one of my neighbors, and are highly respected. She helped people with many kinds of problems, malaria and other diseases, but her specialization was to cure infertility. People from far away, even other districts, both men and women, visited her and stayed in her home, sometimes for weeks, while they underwent treatment, consuming her medicines. This woman did not charge anything but accepted free gifts. Neighbors usually got the medicine they need with prescription about how to use it. Sometimes a herbalist could identify problems by looking at people or by touching them and examining their bloodstream, e.g. how she estimates the blood flow and its strength. A herbalist learns his secrets from others and from experience.

People in general believe that prayer and rituals can activate the medicine and thus do not see any contradiction in using them together, but rather they support each other (cf. Nyamwaya 1982:87).

4.4 Ritual specialists

There is no religious establishment or offices, such as priesthood in the Pokot society. Ordinary people can perform cleansing rituals, but usually circumcised men do it on behalf of their families and neighbors. They can also perform other rituals but it depends on which clan they belong to, because some clans claim ownership over certain rituals and only their people may perform them. The older the men are, the more they are sought after to perform rituals; especially those who are believed to enjoy Tororot's favor and be ritually clean, *tiril*. Such men perform rituals of blessings, e.g. in the coming-out ceremony of circumcision, *kipuno*, and the *sapana* initiation ritual (cf. 5.2.18 The coming-out ceremony, *kipuno*, and 6.4. *Sapana*).

Although the Pokot have no religious offices, they have several types of ritual specialists, diviners, sorcerers, witchdoctors, and herbalists who serve individuals and the community as a whole, depending on the task they are asked to fulfil. They work independently and have to prove their ability to be trusted. No one has monopoly in any field of specialization, because there are several specialists in every field, and the

same person can be a specialist in more than one, e.g. a prophet who can also work as a seer, *pkwanian*.

4.4.1 Seers

There are many kinds of seers in the Pokot society who are generally referred to as *chepsokoytin*.⁵⁸ They are prophets, *werkoy*, rainmakers, *mompo kaw*, milk diviners, *chepsokoyon nyo rosei chö*, and beer diviners, *chepsokoytin nyo rosei kumün*, those who examine the entrails of cattle, *pkwanï*, sandal throwers, *chepsokoytin kwegh*, and several others. I will now explain their roles.

4.4.1.1. The prophet, *werkoyon*

The prophet, *werkoyon*, is probably the most respected person in the Pokot society and he plays an important role as a mediator of divine messages, which he is said to receive from *Ilat*, through visions when he sleeps. He can both foretell future events, e.g. imminent famines, sicknesses and raids, and find out reasons for people's problems and prescribe remedies. Some prophets also have other gifts such as examining entrails of cattle and goats, but sometimes they cooperate with such specialists, called *pkwanï* (cf. 4.4.1.4 The reader of intestine, *pkwanian*).⁵⁹ Peristany describes prophets as "fierce individualists" (1975:210).

There are two types of prophets, the good stomach prophets, *chepkaram mu*,⁶⁰ and bad stomach prophets, *cheptuyumu*. The good stomach prophets tell the people in the community if they get message from the world of gods concerning their welfare. A prophet of this kind is also called child, *moning*, because his heart is open and he does not hide his prophecies. The bad stomach prophets are evil minded and are not concerned about the welfare of the people in the community. They do not disclose their prophecy unless other people approach them.

People use several names about prophets, others than *werkoyon*, which is their professional title. A prophet is called child, *moning*, which indicates, as already explained, that the prophet is innocent, open to the people in the community, is concerned about their welfare, and enjoys divine favour because he follows the principles of the tradition and is thus *tilil*. It is very respectful to call him *moning*. He

⁵⁸ *Chepsokoyon*, singular, *chepsokoytin*, plural.

⁵⁹ *Pkwanian*, sing., *pkwanï*, pl.

⁶⁰ *Chepkarm mu* is composed of *karam*, good, and *mu*, stomach. Sometimes they are called *cherelmu*, which is composed of *rel*, white, clean, and *mu*, stomach.

can also be called foreteller, *ngorin*, because he can see future events, and speaker, *ngolonin*, because he is unafraid to speak.

When the prophet communicates with the divine world, especially when he sleeps, he does not cover his head as his mind is said to go on a journey (Peristany 1975:197). Sometimes he goes to sleep during the day in order to receive guidance for people who approach him with problems that need to be solved. One informant, describing a sleeping prophet, said that soon after he went to sleep his lips moved as if he was talking. He murmured and his eyes blinked.

Due to the nature of his work, a prophet tends to become socially isolated, and “the greater the success, the greater his isolation from normal human contact” (Peristany 1975:199-200). When people approach a prophet with personal problems, e.g. to find reasons and a remedy for the outbreak of diseases among their livestock, or misfortunes in their families, they give him food and honey beer, *kumpa keet*, which is the only kind of beer fitting to give to a prophet.⁶¹

A prophet can tell people to perform rituals such as *putyon* or *punyon* to avenge misfortune from the community. He can either be male or female. A female prophet discloses her message to her husband who forwards it to the people of the community. The male prophet may also disclose his message to a few chosen people who make it public, but good stomach prophets often reveal their messages to the council of elders, *kokwo*.

Prophets' children who have the gift of prophecy wait until their parents die before they start practicing it because the older generation of prophets might feel threatened and fear that the young generation's prophecy is more accurate than theirs. They might fear that the young people will become more powerful and have more influence in the community than they. Therefore, the older people threaten to curse the young people to death if they do not obey them. This is indeed the power of the older generations in general in the Pokot society over the younger and how they force them to submit to their power and the rules of the tradition. This fear of being cursed is the glue that holds the society together and is the power that prevents young people from rebelling against the older.

Children of some prophets may inherit the gift of prophecy, but not all. The gift must be from *Ilat* in order to be genuine and is said to be found only within

⁶¹ *Kumpa* means beer and *keet* a tree. The name refers to the beehives, which are stored in trees.

certain clans e.g. the Chepöchetintö sub-clan of the Talay, and the Chepösera and some other sub-clans of the Moyoy clan, the Orö and the Sochon clans. Every prophet must prove himself and will not be trusted until his words have come true several times. Some prophets are considered fake. Normally prophets work in their home community but the reputation of a few has become so great that they have influence on people beyond their home area and even all through Pokot land.

Prophets play an important part in preparing warriors for raids and are consulted when the army wants to go, as will be described in 6.5.2 (Preparation for war).



Picture 13. The elders rule the Pokot society with the threat of cursing.
The man's cap is made of human hair.

4.4.1.2 The rainmaker, *mompokaw*

There are two types of rainmakers, *mompokaw*. They are prophets, *werkoy*, who can foresee future events, and elders in the community who have specialized in this type of divination. A prophet becomes aware that the rain period is about to start when he feels cold during the night. As a result he may ask people to slaughter a goat or a bull of a particular color, which is like water flowing on dust, *muserion*. The animal's meat is roasted, and thus shared with *Tororot*, but only men are allowed to eat it. Skin strips from the animal's hide are tied on people's hands as a protection against lightning when the rain will start.⁶² The idea to use skin strips as protection shows the unity between the participants of the ritual, the sacrificial animal, and *Tororot*. This ritual is believed to make the rain come sooner than if it was not performed, especially if the rainmaker belongs to the Ng'isurin clan, which has *Ilat* as its totem. A rainmaker may charge for his service by telling the people of the community to bring grains, e.g. a kilo of millet, sorghum or maize. The service of the rainmaker is especially sought after when the rain is delayed.

4.4.1.3 Milk diviner, *chepsokoyon nyo rosei chö*

Some diviners use milk, *chö*, when they divine. They interpret the pattern, which emerges on the surface of the milk when it has been standing for a while. The witchdoctor, *kapolokion*, divines by using milk and sometimes beer, *kumin*. Diviners of this kind can be either male or female.

As a seer, the witchdoctor watches the pattern that emerges on the surface of the milk or beer. Zig zag lines indicate lightning and that the rain will soon come even if there is no indication of it in the environment. He also examines the colour of the milk. If it is not white as it should be, but gray as the clouds, it is an indication that influenza is imminent. In order to prevent it from coming, he orders people to slaughter a goat of the same color as the gray milk and tells them to tie strips of its skin around their arms as prevention.

One informant told about a man who used milk and millet together. People approached him with their problem and gave him milk, which he poured into a wooden milk container, *alepüt*, the same kind as is used when cows are milked, and

⁶² Robertson-Smith describes similar ideas when he renders that in antique rituals among the Semites the god or its worshipers were clothed with the skin of the sacrifice, stressing the unity believed to be between the god, its worshippers, and the sacrifice. All were believed to be "members of one kindred" (1956:435-436 [1889]).

millet, which he threw into the milk container, whispering something. Then he took a small stick and stirred the mixture and left it to settle. From watching the surface, he could reveal the nature of the problem and tell the people what to do in order to solve their problem.

4.4.1.4 The reader of intestine, *pkwanian*

The reader of intestine, *pkwanian* reads the intestine of slaughtered domestic animals for good and bad omens. According to Visser (1989:156-157), a *pkwanian* reads the intestine of a goat as if it was a map of Pokot with mountains, rivers and communities, believing spots in the big intestine are raiders hiding in the bush. The small intestines are, on the other hand, healthy cattle, and show that there are few diseases in the land, and rain was imminent. A *pkwanian* is consulted on many occasions, e.g. to find causes of misfortune. He reads the intestine of the bull speared at *sapana* to find out if the future of the initiate is bright or if some measures must be taken to improve his situation. The intestine must also be read before warriors go on raids. A prophet does it if he knows how to do it, but otherwise he cooperates with a *pkwanian* to find out if the time is right to go or not.

4.4.1.5 Sandal thrower, *chepsokoyon kwegh*

The sandal thrower, *chepsokoinonon kwegh*, or *istoindokwe*⁶³ is always a man. According to the tradition, he should use sandals made of bull's hide, from an animal that has been killed at an official ritual such as *sapana* or *putyon* or at a community feast when the elders slaughter a bull to enjoy a good meal with the people of the community. Nowadays any kind of sandal can be used. Sandal throwing can be used for many purposes, e.g. to find lost wives, animals, and things, and even to locate a person who is on a journey. A sandal thrower can also be consulted to find causes of an illness and how it might develop (cf. Nyamwaya 1982:73). He may be asked to tell whether enemies are coming, or an epidemic is imminent, which may lead him to prescribe some kind of a remedy to prevent misfortune. He may tell people to slaughter an animal if sickness is imminent, at a place where more than three paths meet. If he sees enemies coming, he may tell them to paint themselves with clay of a certain colour, depending on the nature of the problem, because the colors are

⁶³ Cf. Peristany (1975:177).

believed to have power in themselves (cf. 3.3 Theories of rituals), or to smoke themselves with the smoke from burning leaves of the *simotwo* tree, a symbol of life, strength and longevity, as a protection against enemies.

When the sandal thrower divines he places the sandals in such a way that the heels face each other. He believes spiritual powers direct their positions when they land. Some of them are more specific and say that the ancestral spirits, *oy*, do it, which is more plausible because they are benevolent. The sandal thrower spits some salvia on the sandals, on many places, as a request to the spirits to assist him to solve the problem he is dealing with and to direct the sandals. Women do the same with other women's babies when they are new born. Spittle is believed to be a blessing. Then he throws them into the air several times until they land in a position he can interpret. As a result he is able to reveal the state of the problem, e.g. whether a sheep is dead or alive, whether it will return home on its own or will be brought by someone else. Sometimes he can even describe the person who will bring it and roughly locate the animal. In the same way he can describe different situations when he is dealing with other problems.

The sandal throwers must learn the symbolism of their specialization from experienced practitioners and anyone who wishes can learn their profession. The sandal throwers say that experience has taught them that the best time for sandal throwing is between 7 to 9 a.m. and 16 to 18 p.m. because the positions of the sandals are clearest at that time but unclear at other times of the day. There are no rules about how often the sandals can be thrown during a divination session but the sandal thrower continues to throw the sandals until he has received a clear message.⁶⁴

4.4.2 Specialists who use magic

Magic is a very prominent force in the Pokot religion and in the Pokot rituals. As discussed in 3.2 (Magic), rituals are often performed in order to obtain the desired result of the performers by the way of magic. Frazer's description of contagious magic, discussed in 3.2, fits the Pokot reality very well. Many rituals among the Pokot people are based on the principles of homeopathic and contagious magic, e.g. *tisö*,

⁶⁴ Peristany mentions three other diviners, the *kakorokion* who examines the entrails of cows and the *amoross* who examines the entrails of goats for omens. According to him, they can both be bribed to obtain a desired result. The third diviner, *chepokopo*, uses water mixed with milk as a means of divination (1975:177). I will not describe their work here because sometimes different names are used about seers who use similar techniques.

putyon, *punyaon*, (cf. Appendix 2, rituals no. 3-5), *wiitagh* (cf. 5.2.20), and *parpara* (cf. 7.3), as well as the techniques of specialists who use magic, such as the sorcerer, *ponin* and the witchdoctor, *kapolokion*. All the components of such rituals, the spoken word, symbols, and the ritual acts, are believed to obtain the desired result magically.

As explained in 3.2 (Magic), Evans-Pritchard's (1976 [1937]) distinction between witchcraft and sorcery fits the Pokot reality very well. The *kapolokion* is the witch but *ponin* the sorcerer. The sorcerer is the ultimate evil and antisocial person in the Pokot society, but the witchdoctor, who uses some of the same methods, is not bad because he uses magic in the service of the community. He may, however, sometimes work secretly as a sorcerer and then turn into an evil and antisocial *ponin*. Among the Azande the witches are said to inherit a certain substance, which is located in their stomach and is the source of their power. It can harm people even though they do not have any intentions to inflict harm. To my knowledge, nothing equivalent is found among the Pokot people, but people who are said to have an evil eye can harm others unintentionally, especially children, just by looking at them. The power of sorcerers and witches in the Pokot society comes, on the other hand, from manipulating the unidentified, evil spirits, *oi cho ghach*. The practitioners learn their skills from other sorcerers and witches.

In addition to the danger from people with evil eye, the shadow, *rurwö*, of some people can also be harmful, especially to babies, because it is considered polluted in some way and thus a cleansing ritual must be performed. The reason for the pollution is that people may have broken a taboo, be regarded ritually unclean because they have just had sexual intercourse or touched a corpse.

The sorcerer, *ponin*, in the Pokot society is utterly evil and performs black magic with evil and anti-social intentions. The witchdoctor, *kapolokion*, uses similar methods but in the service of the society. He can turn into a sorcerer, thus people both respect and fear him. Their work has only one objective, i.e. to kill. Both of them must learn their techniques from others and the dividing line between them is sometimes unclear.

Many rituals, especially cleansing rituals, are performed to chase away evil spirits believed to cause misfortune and sicknesses. In some instances they are harming people because they have been manipulated by sorcerers or witches.

4.4.2.1 The sorcerer, *ponin*

As previously explained, the sorcerer, *ponin*, is regarded as the worst and most anti-social person in the Pokot society, because his work has only one aim, i.e. to inflict harm and death upon people out of sheer evil, envy, and greed. His antisocial acts are defined as a special category of sin, *pan* (cf. 4.2.1 Sin). An informant told about a sorcerer who removed his front teeth in order to look ugly so that people would laugh at him and make him angry, to give him a reason to curse them in revenge. A sorcerer usually learns his technics from another sorcerer and works in secrecy. He may learn bits and pieces on his own but must be trained by a qualified person who is willing to train him in return for payment, even if he lives outside the boundaries of Pokot. The aim of the mentor is to make the novice cruel and willing to kill even members of his own close family. When people of the community believe they have discovered a sorcerer they may execute him as that it is the only secure way to put an end to his activities. All the people of the community participate in beating him but a son or a close relative is forced to finish the killing, e.g. by hanging him or giving him the final blow in order to avoid the severe consequences of murder, such as enmities between two or more clans. Among the consequence of murder is a taboo forbidding people of these clans to intermarry for generations, and the performance of the *lapay* ritual. In it the murderer and his clan are fined severly, up to 60 head of cattle. The fine is collective so that the extended family must participate in paying it. If the family does not own so much, it is allowed to keep a few animals but the relatives of the deceased person come and take their offspring as they are born until the fine has been fully paid. Sometimes this situation keeps people in poverty for the rest of their lives. *Lapay* can be brought to an end many years later with a ritual of reconciliation. The evil effects can finally be brought to an end in the *parpara* ritual (cf. 7.3 *Parpara*, a cleansing ritual for newlyweds). The *lapay* ritual is described in Appendix 2 (ritual no. 6). Sorcerers were killed several times in the communities where I lived in West Pokot during my stay there and still are.

Sorcerers use a great variety of materials to curse and to protect themselves, such as herbs, clay of various colors and many other things, which may differ from place to place, e.g. dried lizard flesh, mixed with herbs, dried hawks or snakes, skin from flayed corpses, or sticks decorated with the colors of the rainbow, which are believed to have bewitching powers. They store their bewitching materials in safe places, e.g. in caves. Sometimes the sorcerers are exposed because people have found

such materials buried under the fireplace in the houses of people they supposedly wanted to bewitch, with the intention to spread the curse among the people of the home with the smoke when the fire burned. They also bury such materials in the middle of kraals in order to kill the cattle.

According to one informant, meetings could be arranged in former times between the clan of an alleged victim of sorcery and the clan of the sorcerer. If people agreed that guilt had been proven, the sorcerer's relatives might be asked to hang him and sometimes they did it without delay.

Some sorcerers carry bewitching materials, *ponut*, to protect themselves against curses from others. They may inherit them from their parents or buy them in exchange for animals. If people of a community suspect that someone is a sorcerer but lack evidence, they can make him or her go through the *sapit*-ritual, which will draw the person to death if guilty but leave him or her untouched if innocent. People are normally afraid to anger other people for fear that they might take revenge and curse them or pay a sorcerer to do it. A sorcerer can both be a male or a female, but most often he is a man. In Appendix 3 there is a description of how a man becomes a sorcerer.

4.4.2.2 The witchdoctor, *kapolokion*

The council of elders, *kokwo*, often calls upon a witchdoctor, *kapolokion*, to perform cursing rituals, e.g. *mutat* or *kiralat*, on its behalf when thieves or murderers are unknown (see Appendix 3).⁶⁵ The word *kapolokion* is a Turkana word, which means literally a big man (Visser 1989:165). As previously explained, he uses methods based on the same principles as those of the sorcerer, *ponin*. Among others, he uses clay of various colors, which is believed to affect his victims, black to kill or confuse people totally, red to kill, but it symbolizes blood and is life threatening, and white to indicate that someone will soon die and his bones be visible because white symbolizes bones of corpses. He also uses soft lava stones, *manga kogh*, to curse wrongdoers in the community, but also to protect himself and his family against the curses of other sorcerers and witchdoctors, and pebbles of soft green precious stones, symbolizing his confidence. He mixes all these materials together and applies the mixture to himself, on the forehead, shoulders, and the whole body, morning and night, for two days, and

⁶⁵ This *mutat* ritual must not be confused with circumcision, which is also called *mutat*.

walks around the mixture four times each time. This mixture is believed to be very powerful. People use various kinds of materials to protect themselves against curses, all based on the principles of homeopathic or contagious magic.

If someone is believed to be sick as a result of a curse, the *liakat*-ritual is performed to make it ineffective (see Appendix 2, ritual no. 10). The witchdoctor may even wear a lion skin when he performs a cursing ritual to show that he is more powerful than his prey.

The *kapolokion* is normally a man and is often a diviner as well, who can foretell future events by watching the surface of milk, *chö*, and beer, *kumìn*, as has already been explained. People try not to cross him for fear of being cursed. He may ask sick people, who approach him with their problems, to bring milk or beer so that he can find a remedy for their problem by watching its surface. He may have to decide, for example, whether an almost brown goat with black stripes on its face, *adir*, needs to be slaughtered as a sacrifice, or whether some herbs will do.

The witchdoctor also divines by watching how green houseflies attack cattle. People pay for his service with money, goats or cows. The payments vary according to the seriousness of the problem and the degree of his success.

4.4.2.3 The cutter, *mutin*, the *kawarokion* and the *liokin*

Peristany (1975:178) and Visser (1989:106) mention the *mutin*, the cutter, i.e. the cutter of life. He is a sorcerer, who can be hired to bewitch people. The same is true about the *kawarokion*. They use different techniques to obtain the same results as the sorcerer, *ponin*, and the witchdoctor, *kapolokion*. The *liokin* counteracts the effects of sorcery, *pan*. (cf. Peristany 1975:177; Kjartan Jónsson 1991:72-73) and performs the *liakat* cleansing ritual a few days after circumcision in the circumcision camp to make ineffective curses that may have followed the initiates and could endanger their lives. A short version of this ritual is described in 5.2.8 (The *liakat* clenching ritual) in connection with male circumcision.

4.4.2.4 Parparin

The *parparin* is a specialist who performs the *parpara* cleansing ritual for married couples when the wives have become pregnant with their first child (cf. 7.3 *Parpara*, a cleansing ritual for newlyweds). This is the only office among the Pokot people,

which is inherited, from father to the oldest son. The name of this office is derived from the verb *ke-par*, to kill (Peristany 1975:178-179).

4.4.3 Summary

The picture drawn of the Pokot religion in this chapter makes it clear that it has much in common with African traditional religion as described in chapter 3. In spite of that, some phenomena are also found among nations outside Africa, e.g. the principles of magic and the prominence of the ancestral spirits. Although the gods are remote in everyday life, *Tororot*, the creator of the Pokot society, has laid down the fundamental principles for the life of the society and watches over them, making sure that people live in accordance with them. He has not prepared eternal bliss for man after death, but punishes or blesses him here on earth according to his conduct. Various kinds of spirits are always near and play an important role in human life. The living-dead, the ancestral spirits who are still remembered and participate actively in the lives of their clans' people, are benevolent and supporting. They are also guardian spirits, living as a part of their progeny. They cooperate with *Tororot* in upholding the values and traditions of the society. They must be remembered and honoured and failure to do so may evoke their anger and even revenge, which may cause death among people. The objective of humans, *Tororot* and the ancestral spirits, is to create communities where people, animals, ancestral spirits and *Tororot* can live in unity, peace and, harmony, *pöghishyö*, where life prospers. This state must be preserved and restored at any cost if it is put out of balance. Prosperity is therefore a very important value in the Pokot society.

Evil spirits are unsatisfied with their situation to be excluded from the human society, and not remembered or honoured. They are constantly taking revenge and making trouble among humans, causing sickness, misfortune, and death. They can also be manipulated by evil people, sorcerers, who are antisocial, i.e. work against the welfare of the community and disrupt its peace and harmony, *pöghishyö*.

People have several tools to combat evil with and to maintain peace and harmony. They can live right, according to the rules of the society and in that way maintain a good relationship with *Tororot* and make him pleased with the offering meals during rituals. It is also important to keep the ancestral spirits content in order to have them as supporters. When problems arise, people can get help from the seers

to find out their causes, and ritual specialists can help them to perform the right rituals to combat them, although they can perform some of them themselves.

It is striking how prominent magic is in the Pokot religion and rituals. In it man uses his own skills to obtain his will and objectives, usually without the involvement of the gods. Men learn early to use magic, as will be explained further in the coming chapters, especially in 6.1 (*Poro*), and the community of elders has the knowledge and power to use black magic to curse people to death who do not follow their rules and the rules of the society. The fear of being cursed keeps young people subordinate, and is the glue that holds the society together. Curses and thus magic is the active power in all oaths and taboos and is activated when they are broken, which further make people follow the rules of the society.

We should now have a picture of the context of the rituals men go through from birth to death, as they are a part of the religion of the Pokot people. In the next three chapters I will describe these rituals, starting in the next with two of fundamental importance, to plant the spirit, *katkata oi*, performed in infancy in which a child gets a guardian spirit, and circumcision, *mutat*, through which a boy is changed into a mature man.

PART II: THE POKOT MAN

5. BECOMING A MAN

There was a faint singing of many voices in the distance approaching gradually. As it came nearer I heard the rattle of bells, voices of men and shouts of women mixed with a boys' choir. Going out of my house, I saw a group of 40-50 initiates who were already far into the initiation process approaching my compound, accompanied by elders, and women wearing traditional dresses and head decorations with ostrich feathers rising from the middle of their foreheads indicating that their sons were in the initiation process, running about dancing and singing loudly, waving cow horns with ghee. The initiates wore skin clothes to cover their bodies, and masks to make sure their mothers would not recognize them.



Picture 14. A trainer and initiates from the initiation camp I had close contact with, visiting me, wearing the cloths of the circumcision period.

They had reached the stage in the initiation process when they were allowed to leave the initiation camp during the day. To my surprise the whole group was coming

to visit me, to sing and show me some of their games as an appreciation for a few sacks of maize, beans and cooking oil I had given them. According to the custom, I was expected to contribute towards their sustenance when they visited me at this stage in the circumcision process, when they asked for a contribution. I gave them money to buy a goat.

In chapter four I described the most important parts of the Pokot religion to put the rituals men go through from birth to death into their right context. In this chapter and the two following I will describe the life of Pokot men specifically, starting with a description of how an ancestral spirit secures his continued existence in the human community by finding a child to be his host in which he can live as a guardian spirit. Then I continue to describe how a boy is transformed into a mature man in circumcision and is initiated into the group of elders.

As mentioned in 1.6.3 (Pokot masculinities) boys are not full members of the Pokot society. They and the girls have to be initiated into adulthood and transformed into mature persons by going through circumcision, *mutat*, and a long initiation process. Due to the ever imminent threat of raids from the neighboring ethnic groups, the pastoralists, about one fifth of the population of West Pokot, have an alternative initiation ritual for men called *sapana*. But a child starts life by receiving a guardian spirit, *onyöt*, of a closely related ancestor in the plant the ancestral spirit, *katkata oi*, ritual. During the circumcision process libations are offered to the ancestral spirits and they are asked, through songs, to stay near the initiates in their vulnerable state to protect them from evil. Both rituals, the planting of the ancestral spirit, and circumcision, represent the transmission and continuation of the tradition of the Pokot society from one generation to the next, and their intimacy with the ancestral spirits. These rituals contribute greatly to creating the identity of Pokot men, especially the circumcision.

5.1 To plant the ancestral spirit, *katkata oi*

Immediately, when a child is born it is given a name according to the time and situation of the birth or the surroundings if they are unusual. Often the name indicates where the cows were when the child was born (cf. footnote in 4.3.2.1 The herbalist, *chepsakityan*). These kinds of names are used until initiation.

As explained in 4.3.1.1 (Guardian and evil spirits), every Pokot has a guardian spirit, which enters a baby's life through the *katkata oy* ritual, to plant the ancestral

spirit. The name is derived from the verb *ke-katkat*, to plant, and *oi*, an ancestral spirit. The ritual takes place when a baby is just a few days old. An ancestral spirit makes his presence known by disturbing the child for some time, making it itch and giving it problems to suckle. It may even become sick without an apparent reason. From its crying, the parents know that these are the symptoms of an ancestor demanding that the child be named after him and become his host. They call an elderly man or a woman, who specialize in conducting this ritual, to come and perform it. He or she brings the necessary equipment for the ritual, a needle, a Sodom apple, and a patch of skin.⁶⁶ When the specialist is ready for the ritual, which takes place by the fireplace, the people of the home gather around him or her and the baby, and randomly mention the names of the ancestors of the family, both good and bad, that they believe might be interested in becoming a part of the child's life, while the specialist tries to balance the Sodom apple upon the tip of the needle. People believe that when the ancestor, who has made his presence known, is mentioned, the Sodom apple will balance upon the needle. Then they scatter some finger millet on the floor as well as pouring a little bit of milk down in order to appease him and make him understand that he has caused much pain to the child. They speak to him and ask him not to disturb the child in this way any more. Then the child is given the name of the ancestor. It will sneeze as a sign of confirmation that this particular ancestral spirit has become its guardian spirit, *onyöt*, who will not cause further problems because it has got what it wanted. If the child does not sneeze it is a sign, people say, that the spirit has rejected the child.

J. T. and C. A. Creider write about a similar phenomenon among the neighboring Nandi, but are of the view that the ancestral spirits are thought to be reincarnated in the host child as the child „assumes the network of kin relations that their ancestor had“ (1985:539). As mentioned in 4.3.1.1 (Guardian and evil spirits), it is my view that the person of the child and the ancestral spirit are distinct and do not join together and become one, even if their relationship is intimate, and thus the spirit is not reincarnated in the child but only stays in it as its host.

5.2 Circumcision

Everyone in the Pokot society must go through a long initiation process in order to become a fully-grown and responsible person. In Rappaport's view “[r]itual acts, such

⁶⁶ Some people in Cheptulel use a small guard instead of the Sodom apple.

as body mutilation, ... are, ..., "markers,"" that bring about observable changes which "bears or conveys the informational symbols from the ensemble" (1999:112), which are "ever-present" (1999:149). The changes are brought about through great pain (1999:262). In addition to the theorists of ritual discussed in 3.3 (Theories of rituals), some scholars have written specifically about initiation rituals in Africa. Droogers has a detailed and interesting description of male circumcision among the Wagenia of Kisangani in Congo. In the tradition of van Gennep and Turner, he refers to Cohen (1964) and summarizes the general characteristics of initiation in the following way:

[It is] conducted by elders ..., there is indoctrination of customs, ... the novice is subjected to trials, the rites are general, being designed for all the members of the relevant sex, ... directed at the group rather than the individuals, and members of the other sex are excluded" (Droogers 1980:20).

This description fits the Pokot society very well. After completing the initiation, Pokot men are regarded as mature men and are allowed to participate in the life of the society as full members. They can marry, take part in the decision making of the elders, and become a part of the army.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines initiation as „the process of being initiated: the rites, ceremonies, ordeals, or instructions with which one is made a member of a sect or society, or is invested with a particular function or status“ (www.m-w.com). According to this definition, initiation has two main components, the ritual act or ordeal and the instruction, which explains the meaning of the ritual and what is required of the initiate in his new status (Gitau 1994:12). Both are emphasized among the Pokot people. As mentioned in 3.3.6 (Ritual theory and Pokot), women among the Pokot people are initiated by undergoing cliterodectomy or female genital mutilation. Their initiation process has many of the same stages as the initiation process among men but usually only a few women are initiated together, four or even fewer. They do not stay in an initiation camp during the seclusion period but in an ordinary home, a house being put aside for this purpose. The girls are not allowed to see their fathers during the seclusion period because they are being changed from girls into mature women, ready to be married, establish a home and have children.

Although the pastoralists do not emphasize circumcision in the same way as the agriculturalists for fear of ever imminent raids from the Turkana and the Karamojong of Uganda, they circumcise big groups of men every 25-30 years to

make sure they become part of a circumcision age-set, *p̄in*, as other Pokot men. In the meantime they substitute circumcision with the *sapana* initiation ritual and use the *sapana* age-set system instead, both of which will be described in 6.4 (The *sapana* initiation ritual) and 6.4.1 (The *sapana* age-set system) (Bolling 1990a:79; 2000:345-346; Peristany 1951).

Male circumcision is much more than an operation, i.e. the removing of the foreskin of their penises. It is a long process of rituals, teaching and socializing with the elders, which can last up to three months during which time the boys are transformed from children into mature men, who assume responsibility as full members of the society, as elders, family fathers, and soldiers who protect the community when needed and go to the neighboring ethnic groups on cattle raids. People say that the initiation process took six months during the first half of the last century but due to compulsory primary education there has been pressure from the school authorities to shorten it. Nowadays the initiation process often takes less than three months but it seems as if the tradition does not prescribe a strict length of time for it, but I use a time frame of about three and a half months in this research, which is divided as follows:

1. *Mutat*, the circumcision operation.
2. *Lapan*, rejoicing in eating with the hands, is performed one month after the circumcision operation, after which the initiates may eat unassisted with their own hands.
3. *Pelisho*, burning of the initiates, is two weeks after *lapan*.
4. *Kis̄ir̄on p̄o or̄it̄in*, to cross the paths, is conducted one month after *pelisho*, after which the initiates may leave the initiation camp during the day without restrictions.
5. The coming of *Psekutio*, the strange and dangerous animal, takes place two days after *kis̄ir̄on p̄o or̄it̄in*.
6. *Kipuno*, the release of the initiates from the initiation camp, is held three weeks after *psekutio*.
7. *Wit̄it̄agh*, the final stage of the circumcision process, takes place four days after *kipuno*.

Turner's concept, „communitas,“ fits well as a description of the community of the young men during the initiation period where bonds between them are created that are to last the rest of their lives. Indeed the life in the initiation camp has the aim

to create and strengthen these bonds and the young men call each other brothers after the initiation has been completed and have mutual obligations, which will be explained in 5.2.19 (Teaching in the initiation camp). Here the fundamental values of the Pokot society, and specific male values, are transmitted to the young men through verbal teaching, songs, rituals, discipline and through the fellowship with the elders.

The way Turner developed van Gennep's three steps model and the concept of liminality, as explained in 3.3.3 (The three stage model), with the three steps, separation, transition and incorporation, fits very well as a frame for the circumcision process in the Pokot society. The initiates are separated from the rest of the society at the outset of the initiation process and stay in the initiation camp during the initiation period, but are incorporated back into the community when the whole process has been completed, then as mature men and full members of the society. During the initiation time they are in an intermediate state, vulnerable, not boys any more but not yet men, as various rules reflect, which put restrictions on their lives, e.g. a ban to leave the initiation camp and to eat with their own hands for the first four weeks.

Although the stages of the circumcision process are the same all over West-Pokot District, there are some local varieties in the way they are performed. As explained in 1.3 (Methodology), the description of circumcision in this chapter is how it is performed in the Cheptulel location, which the Pokot people consider the most original version of the ritual in Pokot land and is most faithful to the tradition. I mentioned also in 1.3 that the circumcision process described here, as well as the description of other rituals in this thesis, are not a reproduction of the ritual process or individual rituals as they occurred at one particular time or place, but is a general description based on the accounts of several informants who had participated in them and gone through the circumcision process themselves at different times. Two of my research assistants witnessed, however, the whole circumcision process again, in Kongelai and Cheptulel, as part of this research, as observants, but they had gone through the whole process as boys several years earlier. Their accounts constitute the foundation of my text. I witnessed a coming-out ritual, *kipuno*, myself and visited an initiation camp several times in the Kongelai area.

As with oral traditions in general, the main themes of the ritual process described here are the same as they have been for generations, and from one location to another. There is, however, always room for improvisation and actualization at the time of performance because the text and details in the way it is performed are not

fixed. Wording is flexible, e.g. the songs of the circumcision process, as discussed in 3.4 (Tradition) (cf. Gitau 1994:50-53). There are many songs sung during the initiation period and some of them are about the same themes, but new themes appear with new generations. In this way the circumcision contributes toward maintaining the social structure and the values of the tradition, but gives room for actualization.

3.2.1 Origin

The neighboring ethnic groups, Turkana and Karamojong, do not practice circumcision but the other Kalenjin groups do, and other groups they are in contact with, such as the Luyah, Maasai and Samburu. This custom is very common all over Africa and is so old that it is impossible to trace its origin with certainty. The Pokot people are not sure how this custom came about in their society but there is a saying stating that long time ago the foreskin of a boy was pushed up and he had a problem pushing it back into its normal position. To solve the problem the elders decided to circumcise him. From that time young men have been circumcised. *Akano* is said to have been the first man in the Pokot society to perform this ritual when he circumcised his sons. All of them became successful and brave men, but bravery is one of the most important values transmitted during the circumcision period. He belonged to the Tulin clan and lived in Kotut, the former homeland of the Kasikö or Chesikö sub-clan of the same clan in the land of Marakwet, and never moved to Pokot. This story is told during every circumcision process and functions as the most important myth told during that period.

5.2.2 Preparation

Because Pokot boys are circumcised in groups in every community, often 30-50 together, they approach elders, *poi*, in their neighborhood as a group and ask them to perform the circumcision ritual, *mutat*, for them. The name of the ritual means cut and is also an overall name of the circumcision process. Several months before the circumcision is performed the youth begin to prepare themselves. They visit men who specialize in tooth-drawing, *ghoti*,⁶⁷ and ask them to remove two teeth from their lower jaw because that is done with all grown-up Pokot as a sign of maturity. This custom is also practiced among other Kalenjin peoples. The reason for practicing it is

⁶⁷ *Ghotin*, sing., *ghoti*, pl.

said to be that it enables people to pour medicine into their mouth if they become seriously sick, e.g. if they get a tetanus attack, which makes them stiff and unable to open their mouth (cf. Nyamwaya 1982:79).

Initially the elders usually refuse the petition of the boys and make them beseech them. So the boys brew beer, *kumin*, for them, slaughter a bull, *eghin*, and make a feast, help them to build or repair their houses if needed, and slaughter goats and sheep to give them meals with meat in order to gain their favor. If the elders are still reluctant the boys may have to cultivate their fields and brew more beer before they agree to perform the ritual.

Individual fathers are usually also very reluctant to grant permission when their sons ask them to be allowed to be circumcised. Usually they answer that they do not believe they are ready yet because they find them still too weak to endure the pain of the circumcision and for that reason they do not want to be shamed by sons who quiver or wail during the operation. Often they test them by taking a glowing ember from the fireplace and put it on their thigh to see if they can endure the pain without quivering while their skin burns. The ember is left there until there is a smell of roasting meat before the fathers remove it. If the boys pass this test to their fathers' satisfaction they may be allowed to be circumcised. Many men have a round scar on their thighs as a sign of this incident.

The final decision, whether to perform the circumcision or not, is taken in the council of elders, *kokwo*, where the elders discuss which boys are mature enough to be allowed to go through the ritual and which are not. When the decision has been made the elders find an uninhabited place in the woods and tell the boys to build two houses there, one for the elders, *poi*, and the boys' trainers, *mököghöny*, and one for themselves, *sömöngör*, in which they will live during the initiation period. The young men who were circumcised the last time when circumcision was performed are now the trainers and do most of the work in the initiation camp, *mencho*, under the supervision of the older men. They function as the initiates', *tiyoi*, most immediate leaders and instruct the boys how to build the houses. Both of the houses are of very poor quality with flat roofs made of branches instead of grass, and are thus open should it rain, which it rarely does because the circumcision takes place during the dry period. There is still enough food in the community at this time. The boys sleep on grass during the night wearing their clothes made of skin.

The house of the elders has two doors, one for the elders and another for the boys. This is one of the big secrets of the circumcision period, which the boys are strictly forbidden to reveal to women, children and uncircumcised men when they return to normal life again. They should tell them that there is only one door to the house. The whole camp is fenced in order to keep women, children and uncircumcised men away, because a part of the men's power is to have exclusive knowledge and induce fear among the uninitiated and to keep them in a state of subordination. The boys are also told to fetch enough firewood for the whole initiation period although they never handle fire themselves during that time because it is believed that their wounds will not heal well if they approach heat or fire during the seclusion period.

Before the initiation process can start the elders consult the stars to find out if the time chosen is ominous. The Pokot men in general watch the stars and interpret their movements. Their position must be right before some rituals can be performed. The elders know all the biggest stars in the sky and their importance for the Pokot society. They make sure Mercury, Jupiter and the sun are not sleeping, *turu*, as it is called, which happens when Mercury, called Jupiter's wife, appears on the sky before Jupiter, her husband. If the stars are sleeping the initiation will be postponed for two weeks.

Mercury and Jupiter are very important stars among the Pokot people. Jupiter, the father, always rises in the east and sets in the west, usually before his wife, Mercury, who is also called the morning star, *tapogh*, and appears in the morning. Being the mother, Mercury brings her two children with her. It is a bad omen if Mercury, the wife, rises earlier than the husband, Jupiter, because people believe she will urinate on him. It is also bad if Mercury rises without her two children because it is believed to cause pregnant women to lose their fetuses and not be able to give birth to children, but be childless like Mercury. To make things right again women leave their homes and sleep in the bush at night during this time. At dawn they go to a flat rock, *ghat*, and sing a prayer to Mercury, called *Sole sol*, which means we pray to you, in which they beg her to gather her children to herself. This is repeated at dawn every day until the stars, said to be the children, change their positions and stay with their mother. The women never stay more than a week in the bush but go home during the day. The words of the song are in Appendix 4 (song no. 1).

The elders will not perform the ritual if the sun rises between the mountains Muko and Sikatkat, seen from the mountains of Cheptulel, because then it is said to be asleep. The ritual will be postponed until it starts to rise again from behind these mountains, which will take, at most, two weeks. If this rule is broken it is believed that the initiates will be cursed and not enjoy blessings nor reach old age, and some will even not live long enough to marry. Darkness, a symbol of evil and death, will be heavy, *nikīs*, and hover over them unceasingly.

The circumcision is not to be performed if the moon does not appear in the sky during the whole night because then it is said to be asleep, and generally speaking, rituals are not performed at night during that period but people wait until it starts appearing again in the sky during the night.

Elders of the Chesikö sub-clan of the Tulin clan have to meet and choose a name for a new age-set when an old one has been closed. They do it when they have received information from the Marakwet elders because the age-set system comes from Marakwet and they regulate it for themselves and the Pokot. I will say more about this matter in 5.3 (The circumcision age-set system). The circumcision cannot take place unless a name has been found for the age-set.

When the elders have made sure the positions of the stars are in order and a name has been chosen for a new age-set, a date is chosen for the circumcision.

5.2.3. Arrival at the circumcision camp

A boy who wishes to be circumcised is expected to arrive at the circumcision camp the day before the circumcision is to take place accompanied by his father, uncle, elder brother, or any other circumcised male relative, and bring a small goat of any color, called *ptikou*, which is his contribution for the provision of the elders in the coming weeks. This goat does not serve any ritual purposes. A he-goat is called *ptikou* in everyday life. The elders will consume the first on this day.

When all the *ptikou* goats have been consumed, after about four weeks, at the time the wounds are about healed, another big goat of any color, *psikam*, should be brought on behalf of every initiate. Only the elders consume them and they do not serve any ritual purposes either. Every circumcised man present in the camp, who has provided a *psikam* when he was circumcised, must be given his share of meat as a full member of the society, no matter where he comes from in the district or when he was circumcised, but the initiates are not given any meat during the whole initiation

period, only the marrow of the bones, which they use to smear their bodies and wounds. The *psikam* are brought one at a time to the camp according to the needs of the elders until the initiation process is over. The elders and trainers slaughter the goats and cook the meat. In Sok and Masol locations men who have more than two sons in the circumcision camp can provide a cow instead of many goats for the *ptikou* and the *psikam*. This is not practiced in Cheptulel. A man who must pay many goats can pay some of them the next time boys are circumcised.

The boys are not admitted immediately into the initiation camp when they arrive but are kept at some distance until the afternoon where the trainers beat them with sticks for more than an hour before they are allowed to appear before the elders in the camp.

When darkness descends, the boys gather in the house of the elders to be tested whether they are strong enough to be circumcised. The elders show them the circumcision knives and check their eyes to see if they reveal any signs of fear. They talk about the coming operation, *rotwo*, knife, and tell them that it is better to leave the camp now with dignity than to be unable to endure the pain of the operation the following day and thus bring shame upon themselves and their families. They also explain what lies ahead during the initiation period.

After this session of counseling the elders have a meal, goat meat with *pan*, a stiff maize or sorghum porridge,⁶⁸ which is the staple everyday food in most of Kenya, eaten with vegetables or meat, either cooked in the camp or at the initiates' homes. The elders also drink honey beer, *kumin*, but the boys eat mostly *pan* and vegetables during the initiation period, and sometimes maize mixed with kidney beans.

After the meal the boys gather again in the house of the elders where their fathers, brothers and other male relatives continue to test them to see if they are ready for the operation and talk sternly to them for a long time.

The trainers make a big fire in the camp and make sure it never goes out during the whole initiation period because it is believed to be very ominous for the boys if it does. They tell the initiates, however, that the purpose of the fire is to burn their foreskins before the operation the next day.

⁶⁸ *Pan* is the Pokot word for *ugali*, stiff maize or sorghum porridge. *Ugali* is a Swahili word and is widely used for this kind of food all over East Africa. *Ugali* is used as a staple food.

More elders enter the house to participate in a ceremony called *kiwitat*, turning, where the boys are ordered to take off their clothes, with the explanation that they belong to the childhood that they are about to discard, and put them by the middle pole of the house, *pchoru*, on which the roof rests. They will not see the clothes again because the elders confiscate them and divide them among themselves. During the *kiwitat* ceremony the elders and initiates sing so called *kiwitat*-songs, or *kiwitat tum*, during which they go round in circles.

Everyone in the house kneels and the elders of each age-set, *p̄in*, form a circle of their own and jump like frogs in circles, one circle at a time, while the others beat them with sticks on their backs while singing. Every age-set, i.e. every circle, jumps like that, four circles during every song, although they are allowed to rest a little between each round because it is physically difficult to jump in that way. The initiates are beaten severely while they jump. This goes on until about three o'clock in the morning, when the whole group sings several songs, such as *Chepocheptilak*, *Chepoyosonjo*, and *Mungo*. The old men are said to be well disciplined and therefore do not need to be beaten. The text of the song *Mungo*, which means bad smell of fox feces, refers to the impurity of the uncircumcised. Such a man is despised and told to stay with the cattle, away from other people. An uncircumcised person is regarded as a child.

I. Chepocheptilak

- 1) *Chepocheptilak minko konyo*
 Daughter of Cheptilak, who is in our house?
Ps̄ikau
*Ps̄ikau*⁶⁹
A Kopono, kano (x3)
 Is in the house (x3).

Chorus:

Konyo p̄ö seweta
 Our house of the elders
Konyo kopo wui aa

⁶⁹ *Ps̄ikau* is the name of a man.

Our house of the bush *aa*.

II. **Chepoyosonjo**

Ee Chepoyosonjo ohehe, hee oee

Daughter of Yosonyo *ohehe, hee, oee*

Ohehe hoheho x3

Chorus:

Minko konyo aa

Who is in our house *aa*?

Konyo kopo wui

Our house of the bush,

Konyo pö seweta

The house of hardship/discipline

III. **Mungo**

Ee Mungo, Mungo he haa Mungo (x2)

Ee a smelling place, a smelling place he haa a smelling place of fox feces (x2)

Eeh oye Mungo eeh oye Mungo haa Mungo (x2)

Eeh oye a smelling place eeh oye a smelling place haa a smelling place of fox feces (x2)

Chesortich

Run for the cows.

5.2.4 Confession of sins

The circumcision operation is very painful and the elders say that the wounds may bleed unceasingly, and possibly lead to the initiates' death, if they fail to confess any of their sins. The elders interrogate the boys and press them hard to confess every breach of the rules of the traditions of the society, i.e. all their sins, from childhood to the day of circumcision, the most serious of which are sexual sins, especially full sexual intercourse with women or if two men have had sexual intercourse with the same woman during the same menstrual period, which sin is called *kilomat*, as

uncircumcised men do not enjoy sexual freedom to the same extent as uncircumcised girls.

It is regarded a heinous offence among the agricultural Pokot if an uncircumcised man makes a girl or a woman pregnant and the elders must make sure an abortion is performed (Meyerhoff 1981:154). On the other hand, uncircumcised, mature men, especially from the pastoral part of Pokot, wish sometimes to be circumcised. They may already be married and have children, but may have gone through *sapana*, the alternative initiation ritual practiced on the lowland. A *tisö* cleansing ritual, which is much more elaborate than *liakat*, must be performed on their behalf before they can be circumcised (cf. Bolling 1990c, 2000). The *tisö* ritual is described in Appendix 2 (ritual no. 3).

Usually some of the boys have committed one or more sins so that a purification ceremony must be performed. Sometimes the *liakat* cleansing ritual is performed but often it is done later, especially if the wounds of some of the boys do not heal well.

The purification ceremony is simple. Sodom apples, *lopot*, are collected and put in one place, then all the initiates urinate on them promising that they will not repeat the sins again. Then they smear themselves with white clay, *munyan*, which has been brought into the camp in a trough, *otupö*, made from a calabash. The white color is expected to bring life and peace to the initiates in the camp (cf. 3.3.4 The meaning of rituals and symbols). Colored clay in general is called *munyan*.

It is a sign of unity that all the boys urinate at the same anthill in the initiation camp, during the initiation period, stressing the fact that their fate is intertwined, and the sins of one can affect the whole group. They must, therefore, stick together as a group.

As morning approaches the boys are allowed to sleep for about an hour.

5.2.5 Bathe in the river

The night before the circumcision operation, the initiates go to a nearby river before sunrise and bathe. There they are again asked if they are ready to go through the coming ordeal and told that they can still withdraw. The reason that they bathe in the cold water is to make their bodies numb. If no river nearby is suitable for bathing, as is some places in the Cheptulel Mountains, cold water is poured over them, but that is an exception. Before bathing the initiates remove all their clothes and ornaments.

Bathing in a river before circumcision is common among many other ethnic groups to make the bodies of the initiates numb before the operation, e.g. the Nandi (cf. Langley 1979:32), the Sebei (Goldschmidt 1976:278), and the Keyo (Welbourn 1968:219). The removal of all clothes and ornaments and a bath are symbolic acts denoting that the initiates are leaving their childhood behind and, washing it away. The Kikuyu of Kenya interpret this act in the same way (cf. Gitau 1994:194). All the hair is shaved off as well at this point among several ethnic groups (Droogers 1980:108), but is done later in Pokot, i.e. during the time of healing.

5.2.6 The circumcision operation, *mutat*

Early in the morning the trainers, *mököghöny*, arrange stones, one for each of the initiates, in a circle, on which the boys will sit during the circumcision operation, *mutat*. As mentioned above, the circumcision operation itself, i.e. the cut, is sometimes called *rotwo*, knife. The circumcisers, *muti*, are ready.⁷⁰ They have learned their profession from experienced circumcisers and, according to my informants, they come from several clans. The list is probably not complete, but they come from the *Chepochechento* sub-clan of the *Talöyin* clan, the *Moyoy* clan, the *Chesikö* sub-clan of the *Tulin* clan, the *Chepotiröm* sub-clan of the *Kösöm* clan, the *Chepogh* sub-clan of the *Ptingo* clan, the *Chepocheropoi* sub-clan of the *Ptuyin* clan, and the *Cheponyimur* sub-clan of the *Koghoghin* clan. It is a taboo for men of other clans to perform the operation and it is said that a curse will haunt them and their clans from one generation to the next if they do.

According to my research of the history of the Pokot clans, it shows that the circumcisers come from clans which originate among other Kalenjin groups. The *Talöyin* clan came most probably from Marakwet to Pokot, the *Moyoy* clan from *Rongin*, the home area of the Tugen group, the *Tulin* clan from the Cherangany mountains and probably partly from Marakwet and Moiben in the land of the Nandi, the *Kösöm*, and the *Ptuyin* clans come from Mt. Elgon, the home area of the Sebei, the *Ptinko* from the eastern side of the Kerio river, the home of the Keyo and Marakwet, and the *Koghoghin* clan comes from the western part of the Cherangany mountains, possibly the area of the Cherangany people.

⁷⁰ A circumciser is *mutin*, plural is *muti*. It is important not to mix the circumciser and the sorcerer, who are both called *mutin*.

When the boys return from the river, they enter their house and are not allowed to watch when their friends are operated on. Burning firewood and embers are taken from the camp fire and placed on a piece of tree bark at the place of the operation to make the boys in the house believe that their foreskin will be burned. They are called out one by one, and the boy, who is operated on first, called *poret*, must be the son of a man from the oldest age-set of the *Tulin* clan as Akano, who is said to have started the circumcision among the Pokot people. In general, people say that it is better to be the first than the last in the Pokot society. The *poret* will go first through all the rituals of the seclusion period. The elders believe that the whole group of initiates will be cursed and die young if this rule is not followed. They express this thought by saying that the young men will be heavy, *nikis*. The last boy to be circumcised is called *töwönyon*. A last-born child of a woman is also called *töwönyon*.

The father and other male relatives watch the operation carried out on their boy, carrying spears and sticks threatening to kill him if he cries or flinches in order to prevent him from bringing shame upon them that will last the rest of their lives. People say that if a boy cries during the operation a new gate will have to be made on the family kraal for his cattle because his animals cannot enter the same gate as the other animals, their bells will be removed and thrown as waste. He will have to wear inside out the clothes his mother will give him at the coming out ceremony, *kipuno*, at the end of the circumcision process (cf. 5.2.18 The coming-out ceremony, *kipuno*), and will never be allowed to make a speech in front of other men. Finally no girl will ever dare to marry him because he is a coward and has lost his dignity.

If an initiate who shows signs of weakness during the circumcision operation is already married, then his wife will lose her dignity among the other women and neither be allowed to make speeches in front of them nor their children and she will have to wear her clothes inside out. The initiate will be separated from the rest of the group in the circumcision camp and must provide the necessary ingredients for a *tisö* cleansing ritual, which must be performed in the camp. If he refuses to follow the orders of the elders, they will curse him because he has defiled the circumcision and failed to perform the *tisö*-ritual with the result that other age-sets will despise this age-set and call its members cowards. Because Cheptulel has a boundary with the Masol location on the plain of Kerio Valley, which inhabitants are pastoralists, men from there can go to Cheptulel to be circumcised.



Picture 15. Circumcisers.

There is a reason to believe that these threats are mostly empty words with the aim to harden the determination of the initiates to endure the coming ordeal. I have not heard of anyone who has been ostracized from society in accordance with these threats. When one of my research assistants was circumcised, himself, a boy in his group moaned when he was circumcised but there were not any consequences for him in the initiation camp because of this or after he had completed the circumcision process. It did not have any consequences for his family either.

It is a taboo for the initiates to touch each other's blood and is said to lead to death if they do. The remedy, if it happens, is to urinate on the termite hill in the camp where all the boys urinate, mix the urine with its soil and apply it on all the joints of the body because the soil of the ant hills is believed to be pure due to the fact that it comes from below, unlike the soil above, which may carry many curses from people who have walked on it.

Some scholars are of the view that the shedding of blood in circumcision contributes to establishing a covenant between the initiates and the land (cf. Kibor 1998:37-38; Mbiti 1975:93). This is not a prominent theme among the Pokot people but one of my research assistants agreed with this view, but others had unclear ideas about the matter. At least *Tororot* is not believed to consume the blood, but probably the ancestors do.

When the first initiate has been circumcised successfully the following song is sung in which his name is mentioned:

Korur weru

Succeeded this boy

Korur weru lö pyatich ee hohe

Succeeded this boy *Pyatich ee hohe*

Hohe hoo (x2)

Korur kopo wui ee

Succeeded in the house of the bush *ee*⁷¹

When all the boys have been circumcised they are called together to sing the song *Kukö*, ancestor:

Kukö

Oye kuko ohee (x2)

Oye ancestor ohee (x2)

Ohe, oye wayayo hoohe (x2)

Hohee oye wayaye oohe (x2)

Oyayo ee

Chorus:

Asal nee murulokot ee

I praise the mother *ee*

Asal nee Chepkur ee

I praise how she cared for me *ee*

Nyo kiwo masop ee

Who went to the highland *ee*

Kuwun lale ee

Who washed the horn

⁷¹ Barton, describing Pokot circumcision, says the people sing a song when the first boy has been successfully circumcised, „Now has been made a man in truth.“ He does not provide the words in the Pokot language (1921:92).

Laleto Chepomot ee
 The horn of the big headed cow *ee*
Nyo kiwo Marich ee
 Who went to Marich *ee*
Kuwun kupai
 Who washed the gold *ee*⁷²
Asal kuko ee, nyo kiwo mosop ee
 I praise the grandfather *ee*, who went to the highland *ee*
Kwip kumat ee
 Who brought the honey *ee*
*Asal nee tipö pich*⁷³ *ee*
 I praise the daughter of people *ee*
Tipiko kamama ee
 The daughters of the uncles
Nyo kiwer kachi sany ee
 Who passed outside people's compound.

This song assures the community, mothers, children and uncircumcised men who are staying outside the fence of the circumcision camp, that the circumcision has been completed successfully. *Kukö*, ancestor (sing.), represents the whole group of benevolent ancestral spirits, *oy cho karamach*. This song is often sung during the initiation period and emphasizes the importance that the ancestors stay near the initiates during that time to protect them in their vulnerable state and keep evil spirits away, provide good healing of the wounds and give them strength. The intimacy with the ancestors also emphasizes the willingness and determination of the initiates and the elders to learn and follow the tradition of the Pokot society, which has been handed down to them.

There are several versions of the song *Kukö* among the Pokot people, and the other songs of the initiation period (cf. Appendix 4, Songs from the circumcision process), but a recurring theme in all the versions is praise of the grandfather, Akano, the man who is said to have brought the circumcision to the Pokot, who went to the

⁷² People dig for gold around Marich-town.

⁷³ Here they praise their mothers.

highland and brought back the big headed club, i.e. the circumcised penis, representing circumcision.

After this song the initiates are allowed to rest under a tree where they are given thin porridge, *musar*, which their mothers have brought from home.

I do not have a description of the male circumcision operation itself among the Pokot people and did not watch it myself. Kiprono, a Keyo (one of the Kalenjin groups), has described his own circumcision, but the procedure of the Keyo circumcision process is similar to the way the Pokot do it.⁷⁴ I believe the circumcision operation among the Pokot is very similar.

Pulling back the foreskin almost to breaking point, he cuts it with *kibos* a few centimeters from the glands. This part of the operation takes only a second;... The next stage takes much longer; and there is an operator for each candidate. Razor blades are used; and candidates may writhe and, short of shouting at the top of their voices, may cry as much as they please. The skin is retracted almost to the base of the penis and the circumciser removes any bits of fascia which adhere to it. ... The operation may take ten minutes; the pain is excruciating; and some candidates collapse during the process. Eventually, the skin is replaced; a transverse cut is made a few centimetres from the front; and the glans is pushed through it. The penis assumes an almost vertical position and appears to shorten. When all is done, the blood is washed away with water (Welbourn 1968:219-220).

During the first part of the circumcision operation the initiates must not utter any sound, as I have already mentioned, but can shout freely when the operation is completed afterwards. In the first part the circumcizers use knives of some sort or the tip of arrows.

The circumcision process is a very important stage in defining the male gender and creating a Pokot male, during which the boys are not allowed to have any contact with their mothers because the ties between them as a mother and child are being cut. When the initiates enter the circumcision camp they go through the first stage in van Gennep's three stage theory, separation. The time in the initiation camp is the second step, the time of liminality, where all of the young men are equal and brotherhood and unity among them is emphasized. They are not children any more but are being changed into mature men. The young men emerge from liminality as mature men and thus take the third stage, which is reunion with the rest of society.

The initiates' mothers wear a head decoration during the whole circumcision period, made of skin, cowry shells, and beads, with a big, white ostrich feather sticking up into the air from the middle of the forehead, as an advertisement that their

⁷⁴ Peristany (1939:13) provides also a detailed description of the circumcision operation among the Kipsigis.

child is in the circumcision process (see pictures no. 18 and 19). They also carry bells around their knees which rattle when they walk, as a warning to give their sons a chance to escape, should they be walking on the same path as them without seeing them.

5.2.7 Time of healing

The following four weeks is a time of recuperation, which is normally the time it takes for the wounds to heal. During this period the initiates are in their most vulnerable state, which is reflected in a ban to leave the camp and to eat with their own hands. All hair is shaved off their heads and the trainers must feed them and attend to their wounds. These are symbolic acts indicating that they are in a state of infancy as after birth. Several scholars have pointed out that the shaving off of the hair is a symbol of life and death, the old hair representing the old life of the childhood, but that the new life emerges with the growth of the new hair (cf. Kibor 1998:35; Gitau 1994:176), or that it is an indication of a change in social status (Kibor 1998:44; Firth 1973:289; Langley 1979:116-117). Langley sees obvious similarity in shaving the hair off and the cutting of the sexual organs, and Droogers that both the hair and the skin, which is cut off belong to the life before initiation, which has now been put behind them (Droogers 1980:161).



Picture 16. From a circumcision camp in Kongelai.

The boys sleep in four rows in their house, according to age, the youngest, those who are less than 16 years old together, 16-17 years together, 18-19 years together, and 20 years and older together. The youngest boys need more attention than the others and the older boys assist the trainers to care for them.



Picture 17. Boys in a circumcision camp.

5.2.8 The *liakat* cleansing ritual

The *liakat* cleansing ritual is usually performed some days after the circumcision operation, if the wounds do not heal well, in order to make ineffective possible curses, which may endanger the lives of the whole group of the initiates, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. A *liokin*, an elder whose life is ritually clean, *kiltet*, is asked to perform it. He begins the ceremony by removing all his clothes and tells the initiates who are still bleeding and those who have confessed some sins to do the same and to pass between his legs in groups of four to ten at a time as he talks to the evil or angry ancestral spirits saying:

Ha-a-a-ha iriala itoson,

Ha-a-a-ha be away fail

Then the initiates smear themselves with white clay and the evil spirits, which may have caused the problems, are chased away when the witchdoctor blows a hollow bamboo stick. The ritual is believed to save many lives.⁷⁵

5.2.9 Morning *Osonö* songs

Every morning, before sunrise, the initiates assemble outside their house in the camp and sing the morning songs, called *Osonö*, preparation, to prepare for the tasks of the day. The word *osonö* is derived from the verb *ke-osön*, to prepare. They ask their mothers in some of them to bring food from home, but others have sexual allusions leading the thoughts to the fact that when they have completed the initiation process they will be allowed to marry and engage in sex without restrictions.

I. *Chepino*

- 1) *Chepino oho oho chepirir sei oho oho.* (x2)
The girl *oho oho* the red vagina *oho oho.* (x2)
Lenye kuporom oho oho
Like the eagle *oho oho*
Anor olut opoyong poyong.
The fat, I insert *opoyong poyong*

II. *Wala pö Chepino*

- 2) *Ohe wala, wala pö chepino*
Ohe seduce, seduce this girl
Kupsiriyol kuko oyo wala
Is for *Kupsiriyol* the grandfather *oyo seduce*
Oohe ohe ooh wis.
Oohe ohe ooh leap.

III. *Sei*

- 3) *Sei ya oho ooho kachepirir oo oho*
The vagina *ya oho ooho* menstruation *oo oho*
Oho owo neko ha oyo walew

⁷⁵ This version of the *liakat* ritual is different from the one described in Appendix 2, ritual no. 10. The use of white clay is common in both of them. This underlines the fact that no fixed version exists.

Oho look after goats *ha oyo* seducing
Owo tuka ha oyo wala cheptö
 Look after cows *ha oyo* seducing girl⁷⁶
Chepto kolut weri, weri kolut
 Girl, penis entered boy, boy entered
Chepto kolut weri, weri kolut
 Girl, penis entered boy, boy entered

When the boys have finished singing these songs, they sing *Kukö*, and *Olu cheko limo* and *Kuporoko*, which are composed of four songs. The songs I-III are not sung during the evening *Osonö*.

IV. Olu cheko limo

- 1) *Olu cheko limo ee*
 I drink the milk of *Limo*⁷⁷ *ee*
Hoye hoye oye he

Choir:

Olu cheko Kakupon ee
 I drink the milk of *Kakupon*⁷⁸
Olu cheko Psiruwoi yee
 I drink the milk of *Psiruwoi*⁷⁹

- 2) *Olu cheko lolongun nee x2*
 I drink the fresh milk *ee x2*

V. Kuporoko

- 1) *Kuporoko haa oyee chepkinton*
 The blessing *haa yes* sacrifice
Aha oyee chepkanyui *ahaa oye*
Aha yes the one who is weak during changes *ahaa yes*

⁷⁶ He follows the girl who herds the goats and cows.

⁷⁷ *Limo* is a cow name.

⁷⁸ *Kakupon* is a cow name.

⁷⁹ *Psiruwoi* is a cow name. It has red dots.

Opo Karimoi yaa oyee opo Karimosin
Son of Karimoi yaa yes son of *Karimosin*
Aha oye ooh ooho iye iye ooho hoho
Aha oye ooh ooho now now ooho hoho.

Choir: (After every line where it is written „choir,“ they sing:)

Iye ooh eeyo oh oh onyo
Yes *ooh eeyo oh oh* our house
Onyo haa aha onyo
Our house *haa aha* our house (choir)
Opo Karimoi
Son of *Karimoi* (choir)
Opo Karimosin
Son of *Karimosin* (choir)
Micha konyo
We are in our house (choir)
Konyo mocho kony
Our house for men not women (choir)
Konyo cho weri
Our house of men (choir)
Konyo kopo wui
Our house of the bush (choir).

2) Cheptokoltoi

Cheptokoltoi, oye haa oye ohee ohee
A woman wearing clothes of hard skin ⁸⁰ yes *haa yes ohee ohee*
Ohee Cheptokoltoi aa aa aa ohe
Ohee the woman wearing clothes of hard skin *aa aa aa ohe*

Choir: (After every line where it is written „choir,“ they sing:)

Ohee ohee cheptokoltoi ohee ohee

⁸⁰ This is due to the fact that she has been carrying her children on her back and the reason why her clothes are so hard and tough is from the childrens' waste. She does not soften her skin clothes with oil. Here motherhood is praised.

Ohee ohee the woman wearing clothes of hard skin *ohee ohee*

Opo Karimosin

Son of *Karimosin* (choir)

Asal nee papan

I praise the father (choir)

Asal nee maman

I praise the mother (choir)

Asal kuko

I praise the grandfather (choir)

3) **Songolo ripko**

Songolo ripko oo ripko (x2)

The feathers of the house of the hyrax *oo* the house of the hyrax (x2)

Choir: (After every line where it is written „choir,“ they sing:)

Oo ripko songolo oo ripko oo ripko

Oo the feathers of the house of the hyrax, *oo* the house of the hyrax, *oo* the house of the hyrax⁸¹

Opo Karimosin

Son of *Karimosin* (choir)

Opo Karimoi

Son of *Karimoi* (choir)

Asal nee papan

I praise the father (choir)

Asal nee maman

I praise the mother (choir)

4) **Liloye**

Ooh liloye ohe oo liloye ohe oo liloye (x2)

⁸¹ Rock hyraxes live in colonies, about 50 together, as the initiates do in the circumcision camp (cf. <http://www.awf.org/wildlives/142>).

Ooh problem solver *ohe oo* problem solver *ohe oo* problem solver (x2)

Choir: (After every line where it is written „choir,“ they sing:)

Oo ripko songolo oo ripko oo ripko

Oo the feathers of the house hyrax

Opo Karimosin

Son of *Karimosin* (choir)

Opo Karimoi

Son of *Karimoi* (choir)

Asal nee papan

I praise the father (choir)

Asal nee maman

I praise the mother (choir)

5.2.10 Feeding

One of the informants, describing the feeding at this stage, told that the initiates' mothers bring porridge, *pan*, to the camp early every morning from about half past six. The trainers collect all the food, cut it into slices and take it to the boys, who have been divided into rows of ten or more in such a way that they can catch a slice with their mouth when the food is brought to them, because they are not yet allowed to eat with their hands. It is better that the food falls to the ground and gets spoiled rather than if the boys catch it with their hands, in which case they are punished with a beating. The trainers continue to feed them until all the food is finished.

During the day the elders teach them about what it means to become a mature man in the Pokot society. A summary of the teaching is in 5.2.19 (Teaching in the circumcision camp).

5.2.11 The afternoon *Osonö* songs

In the afternoon the initiates sing the afternoon *Osonö*-songs, *Olu cheko limo*, *Kuproko*, *Kukö* and *Olu cheko kakapon*, in which they ask their mothers to bring food to the camp at the right time and praise motherhood.

I. Olu cheko kakapon

Kolu cheko kakapon nee oyo hee oyo oyo

I drink milk of a cow *nee oyo hee oyo oyo*

Hee olucheko lalangun noo (x2)

Hee I drink the warm milk noo (x2)

Choir: (After every line where it is written „choir,“ they sing)

Oyo oyo hee olu cheko lölöngu noo

Oyo oyo hee I drink warm milk noo

Olu cheko chelesta maron

I drink the milk of killer men (choir)⁸²

Olu cheko chemengany

I drink the milk of a cow (choir)

Olu cheko limo ee

I drink the milk of cows⁸³ *ee* (choir)

Olu cheko chewutoi

I drink the milk of the cow with the swinging tail (choir)

Olu cheko relmot

I drink the milk of a cow with a white spot on its head (choir).

The initiates sing most of the morning *Osonö* songs again during the afternoon *Osonö*, except the first three and go around their house naked singing while the trainers and elders beat them severely. After the *Osonö*-songs, a goat, *psikam*, is slaughtered, but as before the initiates are not given any meat. The *Osonö*-songs are sung for a month. Then other songs, such as *Chepocheptilak* and *Chepoyosonjo*, which were sung before

⁸² This indicates that the owner of the cow is a warrior who has participated in raiding the neighboring ethnic groups.

⁸³ After taking care of the cows for a short time in the morning he brings them back home before noon for milking.

the circumcision operation took place, and others, about the life in the camp and the hardship there, are sung instead (cf. 5.2.3 Arrival at the circumcision camp).

5.2.12 The Songs of the initiation period and their most important themes

The initiates sing many more songs during the seclusion period than are reported in this thesis and my assistants recorded over 40 in an initiation camp in Kongelai. They cover many themes. The initiates thank their forefather in several songs for the circumcision, and the new moon for appearing in the sky to make it possible to conduct the circumcision. In many songs they praise their mothers for not eating any forbidden or tabooed food when they were pregnant with them, mentioning animals such as kudu. They praise their mothers' skin belt, *lokotyö*,⁸⁴ which women use to support the weight of their womb during their pregnancy and after. They also praise the *parpara* cleansing ritual, which is performed on behalf of women pregnant with their first child, in order to protect them and avenge possible misfortune caused by curses or broken taboos of people's of the couples' clans (cf. 7.3 *Parpara*, a cleansing ritual). The boys ask their mothers in many songs to bring food quickly to the camp, and praise the cow milk, and their mothers' horn with the ghee they use to bless them with. They also ask the prophet to bring his sons to the camp and invite him to come himself, i.e. to bless them, but curse the evil minded and order them to go down with the sun, i.e. that they perish.

The initiates praise daughters, i.e. unmarried girls in general, and their fertility, which is understandable because when they have completed the initiation they will be allowed to marry, and they sing about their fields, which are ready. Cows are certainly an important theme in the initiation songs and because women are often identified with cattle the distinction between them is sometimes unclear. One song *Pelyon*, praises the elephant for its big size, for being brave, and for clearing the path for those who follow. He is said to bring blessings. That song is found in several versions and sung on many occasions other than initiation (cf. 7.1 Rituals of blessing, *kisoyonöt*).

⁸⁴ *Lokotyö* is a skin belt made of cowhide, decorated with cowry shells and colored beads, used by women to support the weight of their children while they are pregnant. They also wear it after delivery and it is a sign of the tie between a mother and her child. *Tororot* must bless it before a woman can wear it. Women of other Kalenjin groups also use *lokotyö*, and the Samburu and Maasai. The belt is mentioned in songs, curses, oaths, and in resolving warfare. It is decorated with the pattern of the totem of the husband's clan or something related to it (Bianco 1991; Hasthorpe 1983:107-110; Kipkorir 1973a:36, 43; Hollis 1909:84-85).

There are many songs about life in the initiation camp, the boys' house, and the hardship there. They praise their age-set and some songs urge them to make the members happy by slaughtering bulls and making feasts. Often some of these themes are mixed and woven together in one and the same song.

5.2.13 To eat with the hands, *kitoni yegh*

Four weeks after the circumcision operation, a cleansing ceremony, called *kitoni yegh*,⁸⁵ to eat with the hand, also called *pitinogh pö pögh*,⁸⁶ to drink water, is performed. A circumciser takes a root of the *lopotwo* tree,⁸⁷ chews it, and spits its liquid on the initiates, who then take thick leaves of the *pipi* plant, containing much liquid, and squeeze it over their hands to clean them. From now on they are allowed to eat with their own hands but may only wash them with the liquid from the leaves of this plant, and not with water until after the coming out ceremony, *kipuno*. The trainers make sure there are always enough *pipi* leaves in the camp.

After this ceremony the initiates can drink water again, but from the day of the circumcision operation till the day of this ceremony they have not been allowed to do that, which is very difficult in the hot, tropical climate. A ban to drink water also applies to women after childbirth, (cf. Meyerhoff 1981:102), indicating that there is similar thinking here, i.e. that the initiation is a kind of birth.

In the next stage, *lapan*, people celebrate that the initiates have reached this stage to be allowed to use their hands when they eat.

5.2.14 Rejoice for being allowed to eat with the hands, *lapan*

About four weeks after the circumcision operation, *lapan* is performed. The name *lapan* is derived from the noun *pan*, stiff porridge. This is a celebration, in which the whole community participates, and rejoices over the fact that the initiates have reached a new stage in the initiation process and are now allowed to use uncovered hands when they eat, not having to be assisted by the trainers. After the *lapan* the initiates may also be exposed to the world outside the initiation camp and are allowed

⁸⁵The name *kitoni yegh* comes from the verb *ke-tö*, to give and the noun *yegh*, hand, i.e. to give a hand, i.e. to allow the initiates to eat with their hands.

⁸⁶*Pitinogh* is derived from the verb *ke-pit*, to come, spring up. *Pögh* means water.

⁸⁷*Lopotwo* is a medical tree and its branches are used in rituals, e.g. the *kikatat* cleansing ritual, to chase evil spirits away from sick people and to break curses. Its fruits are used to heal wounds, its leaves to heal stomach ache (cf. Appendix 2, ritual no. 1 *Kikatat*).

to walk short distances, about two to four kilometers, about the size of their neighborhood, *korok* (cf. 2.1 West Pokot district).

The initiates' parents prepare the celebration by brewing a lot of honey beer and bring it to the initiation camp on the day of *lapan*. The women gather outside the fence of the camp in the morning to prepare the cooking places of stones in order to cook *pan* for the whole community from maize or millet meal they have brought from home. When people arrive, circumcised men enter the camp but the others stay outside the fence. The trainers and the elders wait for the he-goats, which some of the fathers donate for the occasion. When they have slaughtered them, the meat is divided equally between the men who stay inside the camp and the women, who stay outside the fence and cook. The beer is also divided equally between the sexes. The reason for dividing the food equally between the sexes is said to be that the initiates belong equally to both their fathers and mothers. Neither children nor uncircumcised persons are allowed to participate in this celebration and the initiates are not given any meat. No sacrifice or prayer is offered during this day but people consume much food and beer and dance a lot.

After the meal, men and women dance together in the type of dance called *nyolsyö*,⁸⁸ which is accompanied by appropriate songs. In this type of dance, which has sexual references (cf. Hasthorpe 1983:164, 259), men and women stand opposite each other in two lines holding each others' waists at times. There is a competition between the sexes in *lapan*, in which the women form one group and the men another, where the daily tensions between them surface openly. They boast about their own strengths and qualities and point out the weaknesses of the other sex and howl obscenities at each other. Under normal circumstances such a way of talking would be regarded very inappropriate but is allowed during this ceremony as a means of letting off steam.

Here is a short example of the boasting competition:

Men: You are just stores to carry people.

Women: If it were not for us, you would not be men.

Men: We are the owner of people.

Women: We are very strong.

Men: You are only helpers.

⁸⁸ *Nyolsyö* is derived from *nyalat*, dance.

Women: We shed blood every month, but do not die. If it were you, you would have died. Who suffers if it is not us?

The people also sing obscene songs.⁸⁹

Symbolic inversion as in *lapan*, which include „scatological activities and lewd conduct as well as gender and status reversals“ (Panadian 2001:557) is common in societies all over Africa, and indeed all over the world. According to Panadian, they help people understand and accept the way societies are structured as they are and acquire meaning for their own situation (2001:558).

When the whole celebration is over the women take the leftovers of food and give to their children at home.

5.2.15 The burning of the initiates, *pelisho*

Two weeks after *lapan*, and the wounds of the initiates have healed, a ceremony called the burning of the initiates, *pelisho*, is performed. The word *pelisho* is derived from the verb *ke-pel*, to burn. The specialist who performs this ceremony is called burner, *pelin*, but also hyena, *kawagh*, because he is said to be an enemy of the initiates and have the same character as that animal, i.e. to eat corpses as the hyena does. As I explained in 4.3.2 (Life after death), in many places in Pokot, especially on the lowland, people do not bury corpses but take them to the bushes for the hyenas to devour. The burner is also called enemy, *punyon*, because he wears a leopard skin over his shoulders with a leopard head on, without a skull, carrying a bow and arrows. He always comes from the Tinchon clan. The elders send strong men to escort him to the circumcision camp because he is said to be dangerous and therefore cannot be allowed to travel alone. The men who escort him prevent him from harming anyone on the way. If he meets women, he acts as if he is going to shoot them with his bow and arrows, so they run away quickly. On the way to the camp he shouts „*wuuui kowonguno monungo pichei*,“ „I am suffering because of the people’s children. “ He runs the whole day without resting, visiting many circumcision camps in order to perform the *pelisho* ceremony.

The men escorting him beat two sticks, *lukipi*, together to make a noise and to warn people who might be in their way, and uncircumcised people, preventing them

⁸⁹ Conant (1966) writing about the *sintagh* ritual, describes also a kind of behavior where males let off steam, they are too poor to pay bride wealth, and are allowed to capture women who have not succeeded in marrying and take them as their wives. He maintains that they are even allowed to rape them.

from entering the initiation camp and find out what really takes place there. The *lukipi*-sticks are from the *sitöt* tree, which is a symbol of life, and longevity⁹⁰ According to the elders, the burner is not a real human being, and they have long informed outsiders that this ritual is performed to burn off the initiates' foreskin in order to sharpen their penises and thus finish the circumcision operation. The reason for this is, they say, that during the circumcision operation the circumcisers pull forward the foreskin and nail it down with a sharp wooden peg, *wowon*.⁹¹ Then embers from the fire are placed on it before it is cut into many strips, which are left to dry for some weeks, until the ceremony of *pelisho* is conducted.

This is indeed not how circumcision is performed in reality, as should be clear from the description of the operation above, but this description has unfortunately found its way into the only published accounts of the male circumcision in the Pokot society, (Barton 1921:92; Visser 1989:175; de Wolf 1977:396). To be sure, the sexual organs of the boys are not touched with a hot iron rod, nor are any other parts of their bodies, neither during the circumcision operation, *pelisho*, nor the whole initiation process.

The elders tell the women and uncircumcised men that the burner applies leopard fat on the penises' dry foreskins, places an iron rod in the fire and leaves it there until it becomes glowing red. When he touches the dry skin with the glowing rod it burns up quickly, due to the leopard fat, after which the penises become as they are meant to be.

Before the burner enters the circumcision camp the trainers prepare the initiates. The boy, who was circumcised first, *poret*, prepares himself to confront the burner and carries a shield to protect himself against his arrows. When the burner enters the camp he cries out loud, aiming an arrow at the *poret* and shoots but the boy is ready and the shield takes the shot. Then the boy attacks the burner and throws him to the ground, releasing shouts of rejoicing from everyone in the camp. Then all of them congratulate him for defeating the enemy.

Now the real *pelisho* ceremony begins. A hot iron rod is required for it and half a beehive, which has usually been made specially for this occasion and split in

⁹⁰ The *lukipi* are from the *sitöt* tree, a very useful tree, used in rituals of blessing. It is big and gives cool shade. Medicines are made from the tree trunk, and it is used for many practical purposes, such as to make posts, poles, walking sticks, bows and arrows etc. It is used in the marriage ceremony, *kensyö* and is a symbol of fertility.

⁹¹ *Wowon* is a peg from a tree such as *yemüt* or *tilak*. The word is also used about dried meat, which has been cut raw in long, thin strips and dried, and has become as hard as tree pegs.

two halves along its length, on which holes have been made, as many as the number of initiates. The burner takes the hot iron rod and inserts it into the holes of the beehive, pretending to burn the dry foreskin of the initiates while the elders and trainers shout and try to calm him down. He starts with the hole of the *poret* and continues until he has burnt the holes of all the initiates, finishing with that of the *towonion*. During *pelisho* the initiates come one by one and sit on a stone placed in such a way that they face the beehive when the burner pierces their hole until all of them sit on their stone. Some smoke emerges when the iron rod is inserted into the holes and the boys cry *wuuii* once for every hole, loud enough so that the women and children can hear it and believe that *pelisho* is a serious ceremony.

When *pelisho* has been completed the initiates go to their house and sleep as if they were dead. Women and children are told that after the ceremony the boys die for some time and, for that reason, there is no evening *Osonö*-song this day, but the mothers are advised to bring porridge, *musar*, to feed their sons who are said to be in a critical condition. The purpose of *pelisho* is to induce fear among the women and children and to make them believe that the male circumcision is a great ordeal and those who are able to pass it are heroes who deserve respect. The next day all the initiates have been resurrected from the dead and *pelisho* is over.

5.2.16 To cross the paths, *kisirön pö oritìn*

This is the fourth major stage in the initiation process and is composed of six ceremonies, *Mungo*, *Tetirony*, 2nd and 3rd *Mungo*, *Chemarel Ngwan Asis* and *Kelany Moghen*, which are all performed on the same day. *Kisirön pö oritìn*, to cross the paths,⁹² is performed one month after *pelisho* and not until these ceremonies have been completed, are the initiates allowed to go short distances away from the initiation camp, two to four kilometers. When *Kisirön pö oritìn* is over, the initiates can move freely in the community during the day. They wander around asking for food or something for their sustenance. People usually try to give them something.

These ceremonies emphasize that as mature men, the initiates are going to have great responsibilities as soldiers when they have completed the initiation process, and that the community will depend on them for protection, which means

⁹² *Kisirön pö oritìn* comes from the verb *ke-sir*, to cross, and *oritìn*, paths, a plural form of *or*.

that war will be a part of their life. *Kisirön pö oritün* will also enhance their ability to endure pain, which is an inevitable part of war.

The *pelisho* begins when the fathers bring beer, goats and sheep to the camp. The trainers and elders slaughter the animals and cook the meat before they have a feast outside the camp. As before, the initiates are neither given meat nor beer, and there is no offering to *Tororot* or the ancestral spirits. When the elders are ready after the meal, the initiates are ordered to stand in a single row and sing *Mungo*, *Kukö* and *Kuproko* before they go to the mountain where the ceremonies take place. Women stay along the path and try to catch the boys when they pass, but the circumcised men protect them and make sure no one is caught. If the women manage to get hold of a boy they gain points but must be careful not to grab a relative.

This is a competition between the men and women where two armies fight, and the men must show that they can protect the initiates from the enemies and prevent them from intruding onto their realm. The initiates are supposed to learn from this game how to fight the enemy fearlessly. The game continues until the boys have walked about two kilometers from the camp, then all the people sing the song *Mungo*.

As they sing, the people go round in circles and beat each others' legs. After the song the women must depart, but the initiates run in a single row about two kilometers further up into the mountain while the men beat their legs up to the thighs with branches of trees such as *cheptuya*, *sitöt* and *tuwöt*, which are all used in rituals of blessings in other contexts and are symbols of life and fertility. Then all the men run, singing *Mungo* again four times while the initiates go around in circles four times every time the song is sung, while the trainers and elders form an outer circle and beat their legs. When this is over, the trainers form an inner circle to be beaten by the elders and the initiates in the same way. The aim of the beating is to train the boys to endure pain and hardship and become brave soldiers. When they have finished singing the second *Mungo*, the group goes further into the highland for the next ceremony *Tetiriany*.

5.2.16.1 Tetiriany

The name *Tetiriany* means to jump. The elders arrange themselves along the path according to the age-sets, the oldest in the highest position on the mountain and the others following the descension of the hill according to their age, the youngest in the lowest position. The initiates run, facing the highland, and jump while the elders and

trainers amuse themselves with beating their feet, as in *Mungo*, with whips, which are branches from the *sitöt* tree, but this time they do not run in a circle but in a single row towards the highland, singing the song *Tetiriany* in which the word *tetiriany*⁹³ is repeated until the song is finished. The objective of this ceremony is to make the initiates ready to go to war, but warriors also sing this song when they go on raids. The ceremony is painful, because the initiates must run uphill while they are being severely beaten, and jump in an attempt to avoid the whips.

After *tetiriany* the group sings *Mungo* for the third time.

5.2.16.2 The burning-hot sun, *chemarel ngwan asis*

The objective of this ceremony, *Chemarel ngwan asis*, the burning-hot sun,⁹⁴ is to increase the initiates' ability to endure pain and hardship. It takes place at noon when the sun is highest in the sky and the hottest. The initiates are ordered to lie down on a burning hot rock, and cover themselves completely from head to toe with their skin clothes and are not allowed to leave even a small gap for fresh air. They must lie there between thirty minutes and one hour and keep quiet. Before the ceremony can start every initiate must choose an elder who is ready to rescue them from the burning heat if it becomes unbearable but they are only allowed to speak in case of emergency. If they need help they are supposed to pay for it with a beehive, a goat, money, or anything else they agree upon with the elder, but if they do not keep their word they will be whipped during the next circumcision period. The elders stop this exercise of endurance if an initiate manages to lie quiet for an hour. When this is over, the boys may leave the rock and the final part of *kisirön pö oritän* takes place, which is *kelany möghen*.

5.2.16.3 To climb [a tree] for a beehive, *kelany möghen*

The objective of this ceremony, *kelany möghen*, to climb [a tree] for a beehive, is the same as the other ceremonies of *kisirön pö oritän*, i.e. to enhance the ability of the initiates to endure pain. The name *kelany möghen* is derived from the words *ke-lany*, to climb, and *möghen*, beehive. The group goes to a small house with a hole in the

⁹³ It is derived from the verb *ke-tir*, which means to disperse.

⁹⁴ *Chemarel* is derived from the noun *ma*, fire, *rel*, white, *ngwan*, bitter and *asis*, sun. The meaning is thus the sun, which is white by burning fire, i.e. hot like fire.

wall, big enough for a hand to pass through, and are told to harvest honey by inserting their hands through it. One of the elders is, however, inside the house and scratches their hands with a branch, which has many hook-like thorns, called *montor*, making them believe that bees, *sakam*, have attacked them. Nothing is said in this ceremony but the elder inside the house roars *mmmm* every time an initiate inserts his hand.

Kisirön pö oritän comes to an end with this ceremony and the initiates are told to go directly to the initiation camp.

5.2.17 The coming of *psekutio*

Psekutio is said to be a fierce animal living in the forest on the mountain. It has one horn, as long as the horns of the smaller kudu, *asarich*, and has as many offspring as the initiates in the initiation camp. The reason why the clothes of some of the initiates are torn at the end of the initiation process is said to be due to the horn of *psekutio*, which actually does not exist. This ceremony takes place two days after *kisirön pö oritän*. The boys are told to go into the forest in the highland in the morning to invite *psekutio* to the camp. They may stay there the whole day pretending to be looking for the animal in order to make women and children believe in its existence.

While the initiates are away from the camp, the elders bring a whole nest of red ants, *kontölö*, from the highest ecozone, *mosop*, a type, which bites badly. As soon as the elders are said to have brought *psekutio* into the camp in the evening, and the boys have returned from the mountain, the initiates are ordered to lie down naked on the floor in the house of the elders. Then men of the oldest age-set put ants over them, and the boys cry for help when they are bitten. The elders explain to those who are not allowed to enter the camp that *psekutio* is beating the boys.

On the following day the initiates are sent home to ask their mothers to make extra food because *psekutio* has so many offspring and, for that reason, more food than normally is needed in the camp, i.e. for the boys, elders, *psekutio*, and all its offspring. Not all the initiates go home because some of them are told to remain in the camp to take care of the offspring. When the boys approach their homes they stay in the forest at a distance and shake a bell, called *karikaren*, made of tops from soda bottles, and wait until their mothers send young children to them to take their request for food. When the food is ready the children bring it to the initiates, who are not allowed to have direct contact with their mothers until the day of *kipuno*, the final clearance.

Psekutio and its offspring stay for three days in the camp during which time some of the elders and the initiates do not leave pretending to feed them, and the initiates' mothers are told to bring extra food all these days to feed all the extra mouths.

When asked about the value of this ceremony, some of the informants said it had no value for the circumcision process itself, but that its aim was to deceive the women and create awe and fear of the men and to cheat them into making extra food for the elders. It seems, therefore, that its purpose is the same as *pelisho*, i.e. to induce fear among women towards men, which is also one of the aims of the *poro* ritual, which will be described in 6.1 (*Poro*). Animals, similar to *psekutio*, are also part of the initiation process among other ethnic groups, e.g. the Wagenia and several others in the Congo (Droogers 1982:237-251), apparently serving the same purpose, as among the Pokot.

When *psekutio* is over, only the coming-out ceremony, *kipuno*, remains before the initiates can leave the initiation camp for good.

5.2.18 The coming-out ceremony, *kipuno*

Kipuno, to release, is the coming-out ceremony of the circumcision process after which the initiates are released from the initiation camp to be on their own during the day but have to sleep there for four nights, i.e. until the final ceremony of the initiation process, *wititagh*. *Kipuno* takes place three weeks after the coming of *psekutio*.

The evening before *kipuno* the initiates sing songs in the house of the elders while going round in circles during which they are beaten severely. When this has been going on for a while they stop and sing *Mungo*, then a song of oath, the same as will be sung again during *wititagh*. The name *wititagh* means what has been completed.

A Song of oath

Atoipeng kupengan na hohe ee

If you disobey, be cursed *na hohe ee*

Atoimas kumasin

Be cursed if you do not obey

Ee hoho hohe ohe ohehe x2

Ee hoho hohe ohe ohehe x2

Choir:

Micha Konyo aa

We are in our house *aa*

Konyo kopo wui

Our house of the bush

Konyo pö sowet

Our house of the elders

Konyo mocho kwony

Our house where women do not come

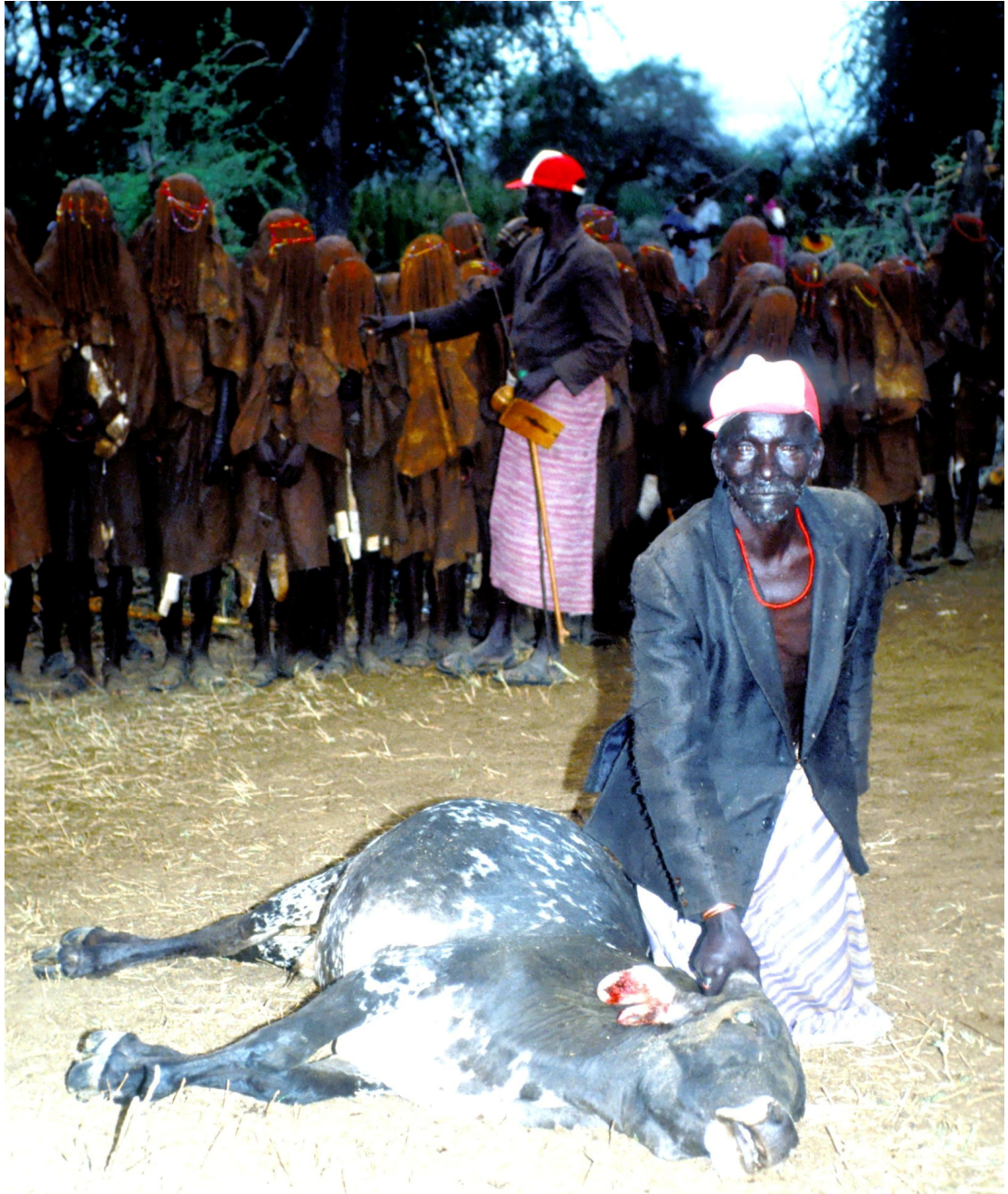
Konyo cho weri

Our house of the boys.

Early the next morning, before sunrise, the initiates sing *Kukö* (cf. 5.2.6 The circumcision operation, *mutat*) and *Kuproko* (cf. 5.2.9 Morning *Osonö* songs) before they leave the initiation camp and go to *Tiramoy*, the field where *kipuno* takes place. The whole community also gathers there. The ritual starts there as the initiates stand singing, forming a big circle around a bull. Gradually they approach the bull, decreasing the size of the circle, until eventually they reach it. Then they start striking it with their bare hands and continue until it drops down dead, but it may take some time. If it becomes too difficult to kill the bull with this method, an elder may help them and kill it by striking its head with a knobkerrie. Care must be taken not to shed the blood of the animal.

When the bull has been killed, a ceremony of blessing, takes place. It is called, *kiyil*, anointing, a word derived from the verb *ke-yil*, which means to anoint or smear. The initiates widen the circle again and move away from the bull forming a big circle again. Then they sing while their mothers apply milk and ghee in liquid form on their heads, which are still covered in order to prevent their mothers from recognizing them. It is important that the milk and ghee used in this ceremony are from a cow, which is *roryon*, i.e. her first calf is still alive. Milk from this kind of cow is believed to be pure and fresh, a sign of life. It is applied in the hope that misfortune will not visit the initiates in the same way as it has not visited the cow. The thinking behind this ceremony is clearly based on the principle of contagious magic, i.e. the law of

similarity, as was discussed in 3.2 (Magic). The ghee in the horn and this ceremony of anointing are the subjects of some of the songs of the initiation period as I explained in 5.2.12 (The songs of the initiation period and their most important themes).



Picture 18. A bull killed at *kipuno*.



Picture 19. Mothers with bull horns containing ghee used to anoint and bless the initiates. The head decoration and ostrich feathers indicate that their sons are undergoing initiation. The two women to the left have a *lokotyö* belt around their waists decorated with cowrie shells.



Picture 20. A mother anointing initiates with ghee from her bull horn.

Then a respected elder, e.g. a witchdoctor, *kapolokion*, or a prophet, *werkoyon*, leads the community of elders in a prayer of blessing for the initiates, standing in the middle of the field of the semi circled *kirket* where the men sit. He holds a spear in one hand, which stands beside him with the rear end on the ground and the blade clear, i.e. the skin lash removed. In the other hand he holds a branch of an evergreen tree, e.g. *cheptuya* or *simotwo*, which is a sign of life and prosperity. The branch has been smeared with chyme, *aghiyan*, from the slaughtered bull, on which the elders have spat to show that they all participate in blessing the initiates. Generally speaking, spitting is a sign of blessing in the Pokot community and women often spit on other women's babies to bless them as I explained in 4.4.1.5 (Sandal thrower, *chepsokoyon kwegh*). Chyme is used in cleansing rituals to chase evil spirits away. The leader of the community prayer waves the branch during the prayer, beginning by commanding all evil or angry ancestral spirits to leave the initiates because they have now been given their libations and food and should thus be satisfied. First he speaks in a low voice, facing Mt. Mtelo, asking *Tororot* to bless the initiates and to bestow blessings upon them and give them long life. Then he summons the heavenly bodies, moon and stars, hills, trees, lakes, rivers, rocks, and the ancestral spirits to allow this prayer to be heard and become true. All the elders utter a deep, guttural sound in agreement after every individual prayer. A similar prayer of blessing is found in various other contexts, e.g. in *sapana* and can be performed alone as will be described in 7.1 (Rituals of blessing, *kisoyonöt*).

When the dead bull is split open and its meat is prepared for consumption, care is taken not to pour down its blood. In a *kipuno* ritual I witnessed in Kongelai, men drank from the interior of the carcass, blood, and clear liquid, like water, from its rumen where the fresh grass was. They boasted that the Pokot people utilize literally every part of their cattle.

After the ritual of blessing some people drink beer, which has been brought to the venue, while men from the youngest age-sets roast the bull's meat and most of the people continue singing. The men, sitting in the *kirket* during *kipuno*, mock married women who have not given birth to children, and likewise the women mock circumcised men who are still unmarried, and married men who have not yet begotten children. Some obscene songs are sung as a contest between the sexes.

About noon the meat of the bull has been roasted and the meal is served. Because the meat is roasted it is shared with *Tororot* and is thus an offering meal.

After the meal the last part of *kipuno* takes place, in which the mothers try to identify their sons. All the initiates lie down and cover themselves completely with their skin clothes so that no part of their body is visible. When the mothers find their sons, they start to negotiate with them, promising them gifts, an animal or money, if they uncover their heads. If they refuse to accept it, the mothers have to offer bigger gifts until the boys are satisfied and unveil themselves. Most of the mothers succeed in finding their sons but there are always a few who do not, and some of the men mock them and offer their assistance if they promise to give them a goat or another gift. These promises are usually not fulfilled. On the other hand the boys are given their first animal on this day as confirmation that they have made the family proud (cf. Meyerhoff 1981:71) and from this time use a new „ox“ name, which indicates their new status as mature men.



Picture 21. Mothers have to identify their sons.

When all the initiates have been identified, they take off their skin clothes and their mothers, often assisted by their daughters, dress them in clothes similar to the clothes women wear and decorate them with necklaces of beads, *karin*, the same as women wear, smear them with ghee, which is a symbol of blessing, and make them in this way beautiful. The boys wear these clothes for the next four days and go about in

groups in the community carrying bows and arrows, the ends being covered with clay. They chase girls and shoot at them, pressing them to give them gifts, such as beads, money or anything else of value. The arrows are made from the evergreen *sitöt* tree. In the evening of the day of the coming-out there is a great dance to celebrate the event.

The initiates use their new names from this day and stop using their childhood name. During the seclusion period they have declared themselves to be ready to fight for their favorite oxen, even to death, an allusion to warfare and raiding, and their names are based on some of the qualities of the oxen, their color, the shape of the head, shape of the horns, colors of its feet etc. *Linganyang*, refers to a red bull with narrow stripes as on the zebras, *Lorekou*, refers to a bull with a black head with red stripes, *Ywala*, refers to a bull with horns, which are sharp and stand up, and *Merkelyon*, refers to a brown bull with white dots on its legs, etc.

Several explanations have been offered why the initiates are dressed like women after *kipuno*. According to Meyerhoff (1981), they are called *mrar* in Mwino, which means a young woman who has not yet been married. She is of the opinion that by decorating their sons, the women believe they have reclaimed them from the secret male world and regained power over them again, not as initiates, *tiyoi*, who are now dead, but as mature men, *mürön*, who are ritually clean and have obtained permission to marry. She adds that it is also possible to interpret the decoration as a symbol of male dominion over women (1981:158-161).

Gitau (1994:153) explains that initiates who use this kind of dressing among some Bantu societies are called „brides“ after the coming-out ceremonies. They are incorporated into the society as full members in the same way as brides are incorporated into the families of their bridegrooms (1994:153; cf. Bell 1997:56).

Among the Nandi, boyfriends of the female initiates dress them in their own and only clothes, men's clothes, at this stage in the female initiation process and, according to the Creiders (1997), there is a competition among them as to whose girl will be the most beautiful. The decoration is a token of affection and gratitude for their courageousness during the initiation process. Langley (1979:24-25, 118-120), on the other hand, who did research among the Nandi in the seventies, is of the opinion that the female initiates wear men's clothes during the women circumcision process is a trace of transvestism. The Creiders believe Langley misunderstood the meaning of the word *kariik*, which can mean a weapon, as Langley rightly understands, but as

they point out, she seems not to have been aware of the fact that the word also means a bell, the one the girls use during the initiation period. The word *kariik* does, therefore, not have any sexual or male connotation. It seems on the other hand as if Langley has read a meaning into the Nandi society of a topic, which was much debated in the West during the seventies.⁹⁵



Picture 22. Mothers dress their sons in women's clothes at the end of the coming-out ceremony, *kipuno*.

I agree with the Creiders (1997), that Langley's explanation is totally irrelevant, and believe that by dressing the boys in women's garments, decorating them with their ornaments and smearing them with ghee, the mothers are showing their affection to their sons and gratefulness for their ability to complete the whole initiation process successfully and have in that way made them proud. This is their way to honor them. The clothes, and especially the ornaments, are the most valuable properties of the women and they do not have anything more precious to give them. The anointing is a symbol of blessing, as explained above, and affection.

5.2.19 Teaching in the circumcision camp

There are teaching sessions most days in the initiation camp, when the elders instruct the initiates about what it means to become mature men and how circumcision will

⁹⁵ Other authors have been interested in exploring sexual behaviour of other peoples and deviation from what is regarded as normal, e.g. Edgerton who studied intersexuality in Pokot, people „possessing some degree of anatomical or physiological sexual ambiguity“ (1964b:1288).

change their position in the Pokot society. The instruction time is finished in the afternoon, usually about 5 o'clock. Then the boys sing the evening *Osonö* songs. The most important topics of the teaching will now be reviewed.

As mentioned in 1.6 (Sex, gender and masculinity), I believe that identity is socially created and this time of instruction and also the whole life in the circumcision camp contributes greatly towards creating the identity of Pokot men and defining their masculine gender. I will now go through the most important topics.

1. Childhood has been put behind

The ties with childhood are cut during the initiation period, as the young men are transformed from children into adults. This is also reflected in the new names they get.

2. To become members of an age-set, *pin*

Through the initiation the young men become members of an age-set, *pin*, and are supposed to regard its members as brothers and be ready to help them whenever they need it. They are said to be blood relatives and have the same social age. They must not marry each others' daughters.

Everyone who belongs to this youngest age-set must respect and obey the men of the more senior age-sets and serve them at feasts, e.g. by roasting meat and bringing it to them. They must respect and be subordinate to the men who belong to their fathers' age-set and the age mates of their mothers. Those who belong to the most junior age-set sit at the ends of the semi circled *kirket*.

3. The bonds with the ancestors are strengthened

The whole Pokot society, the living and the dead, is joined together during the initiation period. The bonds with the ancestors are strengthened by libations of beer and milk and a small share of all the food eaten in the camp. The ancestors are praised and asked in several songs to stay near the initiates, especially in the song *Kuko*.

During this time people communicate more with the ancestral spirits than they would normally do. When the elders watch the stars in order to decide when the circumcision should be performed, they try to please the ancestors by following all the regulations they have given about the initiation

process and all other rules of the tradition. Benevolent ancestral spirits, who are near their descendents, make sure the initiates recover quickly after the operation and men have often told me that because the ancestors are so close during the initiation period, they protect the initiates and give them strength, and that they had never heard of an initiate who had died during this time in spite of the severe hardship they have to endure.

4. To become mature men, *mirön*

When the boys have completed the initiation process, passed all the tests, and endured the beatings, and difficulties meant to enhance their ability to endure pain, they become mature men and warriors, *mirön*. They have showed that they can stay in difficult areas, such as forests and deserts, where water and food is limited, and endure the pain of trekking long distances during raids. The aim of the training is also to produce warriors who can stand torture at the hands of the enemies without revealing secrets about their fellow warriors. As circumcised men, they can now go on raids, *luk*, and the community depends on them for its defense when it is attacked.

Future leaders of the age-sets are selected during the initiation period, two to four from every sub-location.⁹⁶ The qualities elders look for are ability to endure pain and hardship, rhetoric skills, and popularity among the people of the community. Leaders must be able to talk wisely and endure pain, also people's bad words and threats because they are often abused. A future leader must show maturity in the initiation camp. Among the duties of a future leader of an age-set is to decide when circumcision is to be performed, make sure that everything is done according to the tradition during the whole initiation process without omitting anything. They lead the rituals of circumcision, *sapana*, *poro*, and *ngorĩĩ*, and are usually soloists in the songs. The three last mentioned rituals will be described in the next chapter.

⁹⁶ Previously, when the land was not as densely populated as now, leaders were chosen for an area as big as a location.



Picture 23. The Pokot men, *mirön*, should be fearless warriors.

When the initiation process has been completed the young men are allowed to attend the meetings of the councils of elders, *kokwo*, and speak their mind. As mature men, they are now allowed to eat several kinds of meat, which is forbidden to the uncircumcised, such as kidneys, lungs, heart, liver, tongue and fat. Uncircumcised men who eat such kind of meat are said to become cowards. From now on they are also allowed to acquire wealth.

5. Revelation of hidden secrets of the male world

Some of the hidden secrets of the male part of the society are revealed during the initiation period, among which is an introduction into the skills of the rain maker, *mompokaw* (cf. 4.4.1.2), and of the reader of intestine, *pkwanian*, (cf. 4.4.1.4) who can foresee future events, such as attacking enemies, coming diseases and rain. They get some introduction into cursing as will be explained further in 6.1 (*Poro*).

6. To marry and lead a home

The initiates are prepared during the initiation period in matters of sex life and how to rule a home, and are allowed to marry when the initiation process has

been completed. They are taught when it is appropriate to have sex with their wives and when not, and about the anatomy of both the male and female sexual organs. The young men are taught that they must not marry women who are defined as their blood relatives, i.e. from their parents' clans, and not marry daughters of cowards, lazy parents, or from cursed clans, e.g. clans where one member has killed someone from their clan. They must only marry circumcised girls because uncircumcised women and wives of uncircumcised husbands are not attended to during childbirth as they are regarded as dirty and believed to bring misfortune to the profession of midwives if they help them.

The young men are also taught how they are supposed to manage wives and children. As husbands, they should make sure that their families always have enough food, and that the pain of the initiation period should help them to defend them courageously. Husbands should be able to solve disputes between their mothers and their wives, and between co-wives, and try to find the root cause of every problem. The initiates are taught how to be husbands of two wives and to maintain peace between them. The most important measure is to have their homes far apart. They should discipline their family members when needed, i.e. to beat them.

As husbands they should make sure their wives do not cook food, milk the cows, or do other work during their menstrual period because they are regarded as unclean and should rest. They should not engage in sex either. People who eat food made by women in this condition are said to become stupid.

Husbands should, however, neither abuse their wives, slap them, nor hit them, but may beat them with sticks.

7. Relationship with other women

Mature men should not have sex with their blood relatives and never sit and talk in the company of women, because women should talk to each other and men with each other. Unmarried men should never sleep in the same house as other women. Superiority of men over women is emphasized during the whole circumcision period, so much so that many of the young men do not regard women as full persons when they come out, and believe that they only exist to

help them, or as they often say, “they are only to be seen, not to be heard.”

The word *chi*, a person, is only used about men.

8. **Parents of circumcised children enjoy respect**

People who have circumcised children enjoy more respect than other parents. The more circumcised children people have, the more respect they enjoy and their words and suggestions are listened to attentively in public meetings. They get titles among their clans’ people, such as „the ruler of many circumcised children.“

9. **How to behave among elders and their own mothers**

The initiates are taught how to behave among their parents and the elders of the community. They must make sure they alert their mothers properly when they approach their houses to give them time to adjust their clothes and cover their private parts if needed. They should always sit at the right hand side of a house (seen from inside towards the door) when they are in the same house as their mothers as it is improper and disrespectful to sit opposite them because of the design of their clothes, which, if not in place, may cause their private parts to be exposed. The men should never sleep in the same house as their parents.

The young men should generally address their mothers as *jo*, mother, greet them with both hands, and not use abusive words in their presence. They should show respect by obeying them by all means, e.g. clear and fence their fields, build houses for them, and look after their domestic animals. They must also show respect to everyone who is older than them, e.g. by giving them a place to sit at meetings.

5.2.20 What has been completed, *wiitagh*

Wiitagh, what has been completed, is the last stage of the initiation process and takes place four days after *kipuno*. Four is an important number in the Pokot culture. It represents the wholeness of creation, represented by the four main directions, north, south, east and west, which is the reason why people go in four circles during many songs and throw food into all four directions for the ancestors in some rituals. When a man dies his relatives are not allowed to work for four days. The fact that *wiitagh* is

performed four days after *kipuno*, symbolizes that the children, which the initiates were before going through the circumcision process have died, and that they have emerged as mature men, who will now be incorporated into society and shoulder their responsibility as full members.

Wititagh starts in the initiation camp and finishes in the forest of the highland. The initiates go early in the morning with bows and arrows, made of branches from the *sitöt* tree. There are no feathers on the rear end of the arrows as usual, but the other end is covered with fruits from the *kumution* tree and glued with sap from the *kirieswo*, cactus tree, which women and children are told is *Psekutyo*'s excrement. When the group has assembled, the elders review shortly the most essential teaching of the initiation period and emphasize strongly the importance of not revealing the secrets of the camp. They are told especially not to reveal:

1. That there are two doors to the house of the elders, i.e. they should say that there is only one door to the house.
2. The truth about how the foreskin of the penis is cut.
3. The truth about the burning of the beehive during *pelisho*. They should say that the initiates' foreskin is truly burned, not the beehive.
4. The truth about *psekutio*. They should say that it is an animal with a long horn, having as many offspring as the initiates in the camp.

After this review the boys curse everyone who reveals the secrets of the seclusion period. They sit down and sing the same song as the evening before *kipuno* (cf. 5.2.18 The coming-out ceremony, *kipuno*), which is a strong oath, in which they accept that it will affect anyone of them who reveals the secrets of circumcision.

Nothing further is said, and neither prayer nor a sacrifice is offered. Then the houses in the initiation camp are demolished before the group goes to the highland in total silence to a cave, called *Kaporo*, which means the house of *poro*, where the *poro* ritual is performed (cf. 6.1 *Poro*). When they arrive there, they shoot all their arrows into the cave, which has been used for this purpose from time immemorial, the *poret* first and finally the *towonion*. Then they give the bows to the elders of the oldest age-set who throw them into the cave where the arrows are.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ I have heard about other versions of this ceremony. In one of them there is a man in the cave who no one can see. He shoots an arrow from the bow of each initiate to a false banana tree. If he hits and the

When the *towonion*, the boy who performs everything last in the group of the initiates, shoots his arrows, the *poret* starts to descend from the highland to the field of *Tiramoi*, and is followed by the other boys. There they meet boys from the other initiation camps in the area who were initiated at the same time and belong to the same age-set. Young men have gathered at this place after completing their initiation from time immemorial. They sing together four songs while going in four circles during each of them. When they sing the last song, they run facing the land of the enemies, e.g. the Elkeyo and Marakwet in eastern Cheptulel, which are the ethnic groups living in closest proximity to them. In other parts of Pokot the initiates would face the land of other ethnic groups, such as the Karamojong, Turkana and Sebei.

This act has a clear symbolic reference to war, *luk*, and cattle raids, communicating to the young men the message that as they have now become mature men they should fetch wealth, i.e. animals, to the neighboring ethnic groups by raiding them.

After singing, the young men dance with the girls who have assembled there. Now they have formally become mature men and are allowed to marry and take responsibility for a family.

5.3 The circumcision age-set system

There are two age-set systems among the Pokot men to measure their social age based on the two initiation rituals of the society, circumcision and *sapana*, of which the circumcision age-set system is the most important. Every mature agriculturalist belongs to the circumcision age-set system but the pastoralists primarily to the *sapana* age-set system. Every 25-30 years, however, they conduct a mass circumcision to incorporate their men into the circumcision age-set system. There is no age-set system for women. Their position depends on the position of their fathers in the system, which influences greatly whom they can marry, because men from the same age-set are not allowed to marry each other's daughters nor women from the same age-set as their fathers.

Every age-set, *p'in*, lasts normally six to eight years but some are shorter and at least *Ngoletir* was longer, lasted 16 years. Informants seem, however, to have various ideas about how this system is composed and researchers have different opinions

tree gives a good resonance, it is a sign that the initiate concerned will be a brave soldier but if he misses the tree it is a sign that the initiate will not.

about how many age-sets there are in the system. Peristany (1951:189) assumed, before the middle of the last century, that the system was a cycle of seven to eight age-sets as among „their brother tribes,“ but did not study the matter further, Meyerhoff believed they were eight or nine but had heard that there might be twelve (1981:39).⁹⁸ Baroja (1998:109) records nine age sets.⁹⁹

The elders of Cheptulel informed me that the system was introduced about the middle of the 19th century, one research assistant estimated that it might have been around 1860, and believed there had been sixteen age-sets from the beginning, *Sumpai* being the oldest, and that the seventeenth was still open in 2003. As explained before, the system was copied from the Marakwet people and the Pokot elders have to acquire information from them about when to start and close age-sets. When information about when to close an age-set has been obtained, elders from the *Chesikö* sub-clan of the Tulin clan meet at *Ptirut* in Cheptulel, a place above Chesagon town, to decide which name to choose for a new age-set, that reflects the events that took place during the seclusion period. When a new age-set has been started everyone circumcised during the time it is open will belong to it. The age-set-names I acquired are: *Sumpai*, *Kipira*, *Topuluny*, *Murkutwo*, *Nyongu*, *Maina*, *Ngiruru*, *Merikinei*, *Kalumang*, *Ngoletir*, *Kapsakis*, *Kapkopow*, *Kapirikat*, *Kaplelach*, *Kapeluk*, and *Murkutwo*, which was used again and closed around 1990. *Nyongu* was also used again and was still open in 2003. Of these names only *Murkutwo*, *Maina*, *Kaplelach* and *Nyongu* can be used again because nothing bad happened when they were open but not until all their members have died. The reasons for using old age-set names or not, reflects how much magic permeates the thinking of the Pokot people as I will explain further below.

The name of the *Kalumang* age-set was originally *Chumwo*, which means something bad that was changed to good. The name *Kalumang* is from the *sapana* age-set system and can therefore not be used again. This age-set was also called *Kinou*, which means exceptionally great rain, and can be used again according to my

⁹⁸ The names of age-sets Meyerhoff mentions are: *Kaplelach* (open 1978), *Korongoro*, *Kakapanga*, *Kapsakis* (the latter two became one), *Sowo*, *Kolumong*, *Maina*, *Chumwo*, *Maragutwa* and *Nyongu* (Meyerhoff 1981:39).

⁹⁹ The age-sets Baroja mentions are *Murkutwö* (1873-1887), *Nyonki* (1886-1898), *Maina* (1899-1911), *Chumwö* (1912-1924), *Sowö* (1925-1937), *Körönkörö* (1938-1950), *Kapkoymöt* (1951-1963), *Kaplelach* (1964-1977) and *Murkutwo* (1978-1995). *Kapsakis* is the junior section of *Sowö* (Baroja 1998:109).

informants. The names *Chumwo* and *Kinou* could thus be added to the list of age-set names that could be used again.

Most of the age-sets names cannot, however, be used again due to hunger or misfortune that took place during their time span and people are afraid that it might be repeated if such bad names are chosen again, e.g. *Ngiruru*, *Ngoletir*, *Kapsakis* and *Kapeluk*, reflecting how the law of similarity affects the way of thinking of the Pokot people. Some names are so old that people do not know what they mean, such as *Sumpai*, *Kipira*, and *Topuluny*, or they are nicknames, such as *Merikenei*,¹⁰⁰ *Kapkopon*,¹⁰¹ and *Kapirikat*.¹⁰² It complicates the matter further that the age-sets do not always have the same names everywhere in the district so that there may be two or three names for each of them depending on the location.

The age-sets do not play an important role in military organization of the Pokot people, as among the Nandi, because generally speaking all circumcised Pokot men can go on raids. The age-sets play a role in the council of elders, *kokwo*, as the words of the old men carry much weight although good rhetoric skills is also important and does not necessarily follow age. The men of the oldest age-sets sit in the middle of the semi circled *kirket*. On the other hand the age-sets serve a big role in the Pokot chronology as important events are attached to them, said to have occurred when this or that age-set was open.

The age-set systems of the other Kalenjin groups are similar as of that the Pokot and some of the names are the same. As an example, the system among the Nandi is cyclical spanning totally about 105 years, and is composed of seven age-sets lasting about 15 years each. The names are repeated again and the men belong to them from birth, not circumcision. This system regulates people's position in the society. From birth children belong to an age-set of children, after circumcision they belong to an age-set of warriors who compose the military, then an age-set of elders who rule the society, and finally to an age-set of old men who do not have any formal power but mostly ritual functions. An elaborate handing-over ritual, *sagetab eito*, marks the transition of the age-sets to a new position (Huntingford 1953b, Langley 1979, Kjartan Jónsson 1991:110-113). There is no handing-over ceremony among the

¹⁰⁰ *Merikenei* is from the Turkana language and means a white goat with black dots, derived from *kinei*, a goat, and *meri*, white with black dots. Because this is a Turkana word it cannot be used again.

¹⁰¹ *Kapkopon* is derived from *kopon*, a cave, and means the people who lived in a cave.

¹⁰² *Kapirikat* are people who used red beads around their necks, derived from *ka*, house or the people living in a house, *pir*, red and *kat*, throat. The red beads are said to have come to Pokot during this age-set, 1956-1963.

Pokot. See Goldschmidt (1976:102-111) for a description of the age-set system of the Sebei.

I will describe the *sapana* age-set system in 6.4.1 when I have described the *sapana* initiation ritual.

5.4 Summary

The circumcision process among the Pokot people transforms boys into full members of the society and initiates them into the world and secrets of the elders. They become *mürön*, mature men, i.e. elders and warriors and assume responsibility as participants in the decision making body of the elders, *kokwo*.

The values transmitted through the circumcision process are communicated through songs, teaching, ceremonies and rituals, and the behavior of the elders. Many of the values are general for all the Pokot people such as faithfulness towards the tradition, submission to the will of *Tororot*, and the importance of living in peace and harmony in the communities and with the ancestral spirits, i.e. to preserve *pöghishyö*. Of specific male values, there is the importance of preserving the social structure as reflected in all major rituals of the circumcision process, e.g. the way the elders sit in the council of elders, *kirket*, how they are grouped according to their age-sets, their obligation to serve older men, to respect them and give them gifts. Husbands should manage their homes and make sure their wives and children respect and obey them. The emphasis on marriage and fertility underlines the fact that the family is their power base and the foundation of the community in general.

There is great emphasis on creating tough soldiers who can endure pain and hardship without complaining and have the ability to encounter danger and enemies fearlessly. The intimacy with cattle is evident through the whole process as is reflected by the fact that the boys take a cattle name before completing the initiation process. Cattle are the source of their wealth, power and respect and it is emphasized that the young men must be willing to fight to protect them, even to death. Raids emphasize further the importance of cattle as a form of wealth and a way for men to prove their manhood as warriors. The unity and interconnectedness of the initiates is constantly stressed and their unity with all other circumcised men is reflected in the oath not to reveal the secrets of circumcision to women and the uninitiated.

Competition between the sexes in some of the ceremonies, such as the *lapan*, *kisürön pö oritìn*, even *psekutio* and the coming-out ceremony, *kipuno*, reflects the

antagonism between the sexes in Pokot. Their interests are not always the same as mentioned in 1.7.3 (Pokot masculinities).

The circumcision process is part of a group of rituals, which contribute toward changing the Pokot boys into mature, responsible men. Other rituals are Termites and porridge, *ngokoi nko musar*, *poro*, and marriage, *kensyö*. *Ngoriti* can be added to this group but it is optional.

6. MORE RITUALS TOWARDS MATURITY

The night watchman knocked on my bedroom window to wake me up. He told me to listen. In the silence of the tropical night I heard sounds of gunshots far away one after another. I dressed quickly, rushed out and found some of my anxious neighbors, who had gathered in my compound, discussing possible escape routes should the enemies come to our place. The raiders had visited this area several times before and taken livestock and even removed iron sheets from the few roofs with such a luxurious commodity, and some people had inevitably died in clashes between the Pokot and the neighboring Karamojong. When raids were common in the seventies and eighties, people slept in the bush during the full moon. Later, the Pokot men took revenge, following their cattle, as they say, and raided the enemy ruthlessly in order to regain their livestock. These mutual raids have taken place as long as people can remember and there are few signs that they will ever come to an end.

War is an integral part of the life of the Pokot people, especially those who live in close proximity to other ethnic groups. Every year they raid the neighbors in order to acquire cattle and are in turn raided in revenge. In spite of the fact that they sometimes suffer heavy casualties, and the material gains do usually not last, both, or all parties, continue raiding year after year. These futile raids reflect the all-pervasive importance of cattle in the life of the Pokot men and the Pokot culture as a whole as well as among many of the neighboring ethnic groups. They also put pressure on young men to prove their manhood as raiders.

Although circumcision is the most important ritual process in the life of Pokot men, there are other rituals as well, which, when completed, further strengthen their position in the community and boost their respect and authority. It is thus natural and in their interest to undergo them. In this chapter I will describe some of them. First is the *poro*, followed by *ngokoi nko musar*, which together complete the circumcision process. Of these two *poro* is the most important. Then there follows a description of the optional *ngoriii*-ritual, in which men learn to use witchcraft, and *sapana*, the alternative initiation ritual among the pastoralists and the accompanying *sapana* age-set system. This ritual is optional among the agriculturalists who conduct it in order to strengthen their marriages and have a ritual of blessings performed on their behalf. War and its role in the Pokot society is ingrown into the soul of the Pokot people and

is thus an important part of the life of men. Several rituals are connected with it, such as *tönus*, where young men are urged to go on raids, the *masyan* cleansing ritual, which is performed specially for warriors who have killed enemies in raids, and the *mis*-ritual, an oath made between the Pokot and their neighboring ethnic groups in order to make peace when raids have taken too high human toll on both sides. Finally I will describe the cattle sharing system, *tilya*, which, as well as all these rituals, reflects the importance of cattle in the life of Pokot men.

6.1 Poro

The secretive *poro*-ritual is performed in the highland of Cheptulel at a place called *Kaporo*, the house of *poro*, which is a cave into which the initiates of the circumcision ritual shot their arrows during *wititagh* as described in 5.2.20 (What has been completed, *wititagh*). The cave is in several acres large woodland that has been put aside for this purpose and must not be cleared for domestic needs. Women, children and uninitiated people are not allowed to enter it. I sometimes passed this place when I visited my congregations in the mountains and once had a guided tour around the area. The name *Kaporo* denotes first and foremost the cave, but also includes the land surrounding it. The objectives of the *poro* ritual are to teach the newly circumcised young men how to use witchcraft in order to gain power over their wives and to maintain law and order in the society. It is performed in February, during the years circumcision is conducted, before the *simar* ritual, which is conducted at the beginning of March every year. It is thus an important date in the Pokot calendar. Its main part consists in lighting a fire from branches of medicinal trees yielding heavy smoke, said to bring blessings to the land and prevent diseases. The behavior of the smoke is a very important sign, predicting how the coming cultivating season will be. If it goes straight up, people believe there will be rain all over the land, if it bends down there will be rain in the areas it points to, and if it bends down and becomes like a cloud without pointing in any particular direction or place there is no hope of any rain that year.

The *poro* is performed before the rain season starts, when the moon does not appear in the sky during the night and it is as dark as it gets. During the years there is neither circumcision nor *poro* in the society, the elders meet at *Kaporo* to light a fire and discuss matters for the current year and to decide where to cultivate in the coming

rain period, because the land in Cheptulel is owned by the clans and not individuals.¹⁰³

When the *poro*-ritual is conducted, the men who have already undergone it meet the night before it starts and clear the *Kaporo*-area of weed and shrub, make arrangements for meals, prepare sitting places, collect firewood and make sure there are enough *wero kuköt*, the son of the ancestor, an instrument used in the ritual process to make a loud sound, a bull-roarer, said to be the voices of the ancestral spirits, *oy*. It is composed of a piece of wood, shaped like a machete with a hole on the end through which a rope of goatskin is tied. The men hold the other end of the rope when they swing it above their heads in order to create the intended sound. It is a part of the preparation to apply oil to the rope and light the fire.

The men who went through the ritual the last time it was conducted and did not pay the required goats then, and there are always some who do not, bring them this evening. Others bring flour of maize or finger millet. When the elders cook food from these ingredients, people say they are preparing it for the evil spirits, *oy cho ghach*. When they assemble, they discuss if some of their wives have behaved badly, or if there is beer in some of their homes, as many women brew beer and sell it. They also try to find out if elders, who have died recently, liked to use snuff or smoke tobacco so that they can use it as an excuse to visit their homes and ask for some.

When this discussion is over, at about 10 p.m., they disperse and visit the homes of the supposedly badly behaving wives, and the homes where they believe there is beer and tobacco in the hope that they may acquire some. Before the elders left home to go to *Kaporo*, they instructed their wives and children to stay awake this evening, and not to go to sleep at the same time as usual, but keep the fire burning in the house until visitors have come. The ancestral spirits are said to accompany the men on this trip. This dark night is chosen so that the men can hide in the cover of darkness. When they arrive at a home they throw stones at the house and make loud sounds: „Mmm, mmmmmmm, mmmmmmm.“ When they arrive at the home of a supposedly badly behaving wife, they throw stones at the house for a long time saying: „*Tilin kokonou*,¹⁰⁴ this bad behaving woman.“ Then the leaders of the group

¹⁰³ This description fits areas where land has not yet been demarcated. The government officials have been demarcating land in Pokot but have not reached Cheptulel yet.

¹⁰⁴ *Tilin*, bad behavior, complain, *Kokonou*, this woman.

say: “Sorry, sorry, sorry, son of Pkukot,”¹⁰⁵ addressing the wife of the home with the name of an ancestor, who has gone a long time ago, and continue: „We always told you to quit this kind of behavior and be like the other women.“

When the men have found a house with beer they stay there for a long time before the leader of the group asks: „What is in this house, is there some beer?“ If the answer is positive and they are given some, they pour a little around the fireplace before drinking it. If an old man who liked to snuff tobacco has died in the community they ask the people of his home to give them some and hand it to them through holes in the walls so that they can give it to his spirit and go. The truth is, however, that they take the tobacco and use it themselves.

When the men travel during this night they swing the *wero kuköt* to frighten the women, as they believe that the sounds are the voices of evil spirits.

Early in the morning the next day, before the initiates, *tiyoi*, arrive, the men who went through the ritual last time take a bag of goatskin to the woodland to look for a monitor lizard, *kapsolkoch*, which will be used in the ritual. When they have found it they encircle it so that it cannot escape and move closer and closer until it is forced to enter the bag. Then they swing the *wero kukot* to inform the others that they have caught it.

When the other men receive the news, they send two men from *Kaporo* to the nearest ridge to bring in the first group of initiates, who have covered themselves from head to ankles with their animal skin clothes in the same way as they did during the circumcision process, only leaving a small gap so they can see. They walk slowly and in a bent position. When they arrive at *Kaporo* they assemble at a place far from the cave where some elders ask them several questions such as: Why did you come here? Where is your goat? Is your father here? Did he allow you to go? An initiate should bring his father or someone else to the ritual to assist him and be his guardian. He should also bring a goat and if he does not, his father or the guardian should verify that he promises to bring it later, most probably at the next *poro*.

When the initiates enter *Kaporo*, they are beaten with bags of sandstone and a lot of noise is created as some men say *porokok* or *ara*, which are curses they will learn to use during *poro*. Others wave the *wero kukot* and still others make other kinds of noises, all of which are said to be the noises of the ancestral spirits. When the

¹⁰⁵ Pkukot is the name of a very old ancestor.

initiates have passed through the open area the beating ceases but they must continue to walk slowly in the direction of the sun. When everyone has gone through the open area the initiates are ordered to lie down, cover themselves completely and stay in the sun for about three quarters of an hour, in a similar way as in the *chemarel ngwan asis* ceremony in the circumcision process (5.2.16.2 The burning-hot sun, *chemarel ngwan asis*), and have to endure the extreme heat of the tropical sun. When they are soaked with sweat and some are near death due to the heat, they are ordered to stand up and remove all their clothes, before they are whipped with thin branches from any kind of tree from the hips down, getting bruises and even bleeding wounds, as they go in circles in the open field.

Those who went through the last *poro* throw mud at the initiates, which creates a burning feeling in the fresh wounds, and rub their sexual organs thoroughly with nettles. Those who show signs of pain or utter any sounds are given an extra round with the nettles and are beaten as well. When this is over, the initiates are ordered to sit down and to put on their animal skin clothes again. Now, an elder cuts three cuts on the middle of their foreheads with his big thumb nail and rubs the wounds with a mixture of goat fat and chyme. The fat is a symbol of blessing but the chyme is used in cleansing rituals to chase evil spirits away.

This session is said to be a time of training but the elders ridicule the initiates during this test of endurance. When it is over, the elders tell the young men to cover their heads before they lead them to the cave of *Kaporo*. Some elders, hiding along the way, throw a mixture of sand and stones at them when they pass. Inside the cave the initiates are ordered to sit tight together in a row on the floor with straight legs, in order to make a kind of a wall in their sitting position, only sticking their heads out of their animal skin clothes. An elder walks around them with the two feet long, non-poisonous monitor lizard, *kapsolkoch*, which was captured in the morning, as the other elders ask every initiate what it is. No one answers for fear of being beaten because it is supposed to be a part of the men's secrets how it is used in *poro*.

Kapsolkoch is also the name of the spirit of the oldest ancestor at *Kaporo* who is said to have started the ritual of *poro*. The elders use this kind of reptile because it is not poisonous.

Then the lizard is allowed to walk on the laps of the initiates from the first to the last, and an elder makes sure it does not leave the intended path. It is said to be a bad omen for an initiate if the lizard leaves its path and walks down to the floor of the

cave from his lap. It is said to be a sign that the ancestors, *oy*, have disavowed him and that he may die young or suffer a bad fate in the future. No remedy is said to exist to neutralize its effects. If the lizard walks as intended to the end of the path without leaving it, the elder gives it goat fat as a reward and then freedom. It is believed that this age-set will become fortunate. I have not heard of any example where the monitor lizard left the intended path on the laps of the initiates thus the misfortune said to be the consequence is to create awe among the initiates in the ceremony.

While the initiates are still sitting in the cave a man throws the wooden part of the *wero kukot* from the top of the cave opening into it, to the floor in front of the initiates. An elder picks it up, inspect it as if he has never seen such a thing before, and asks the young men one by one what it is called. All of them pretend not to know it because the elders are testing if their secrets have leaked out of their circles to the uninitiated. Then as many *wero kukot* as the initiates are thrown onto the floor of the cave, and the elders order the young men to pick them up, tie them together, practice to use them with the elders, and to say the cursing word *porokok* as they wave it. This word is composed of the words *poro*, denoting the ritual, and *kok*, which is a curse. The young men are instructed to use this cursing word to eliminate evil from the community, e.g. alleged sorcerers, *poni*, or thieves who refuse to confess their guilt, in which case they should say: *Porokok, porokok angwan, porokok sewet*. These words are not easily translated. *Porokok angwan* could be translated *porokok* four times, because *angwan* means four, which is the number that symbolizes completeness as has already been explained (5.2.20 What has been completed, *wititagh*). This is a strong curse. *Sewet* denotes a very old age-set which is said to have gone through circumcision, before the oldest age-set *Sumpai*. When the elders have said all this, they blow a piece of a bamboo tree, *ses*, and instruct the initiates not to expose these secrets to any woman, no matter what the consequences are.

Here we see a trace of a myth as the elders refer to an old age-set people do not know anything about. The blowing of the bamboo tree is obviously magic, a way to blow a curse over the community.

It is considered bad if women use the cursing word *porokok*, which would certainly lessen the inequalities between the sexes and be a threat to the men.

A man who has completed *poro* can perform the *kaptara*-ritual used to heal a person who is believed to have been bewitched and to make the curse ineffective.

Everyone who goes through *poro* must make an oath not to reveal any of its secrets to women or uncircumcised men, breach of which will lead them to certain death. The elders rub sticks together in the same way as people do at home in order to make light at night, called *töpewö* or *tamnyan*, and use a white quartz stone, *söngwöt*, a traditional type of axe, *oywö*, machete as was used in the old times, *chok*, and fire, *ma*, when the oath is made.

Töpewö symbolizes light and openness, indicating that anyone who discloses the secrets of *poro* will be revealed and that this candle will light a fire, which will burn his house and destroy completely the place where the secrets are revealed. The white stone, *söngwöt*, has sharp edges and everyone is told that he who discloses the secrets of *poro* will be cut and wounded by the stone and that the wounds will develop into cancer, *kawitwit*, which will eventually lead him to death due to the curse attached to the stone. The axe and the machete are tools, which were used in every home in former times, but are now outdated and people use modern versions of them today. They are a reminder that they can be used everywhere, in the same way as the white stone, to cut anyone who discloses the secrets of *poro*, creating wounds that will develop into cancer and lead them to certain death due to the curse of the oath.

All the men in the camp assemble when the oath is taken, and the initiates and the other men present are told that anyone who discloses the secrets of *poro* will be punished severely as well as the whole community he lives in. They are told that when the secret of *poro* has been disclosed, a great fire will start to burn at *Kitö*, an unknown place, and that people of the *Tinchon* clan will burn many houses and rape women, irrespective of whether they are married or not, and continue until they have found the culprit with the help of people of the other clans. The people of the *Tinchon* clan, who start this punishment, are called *kamng'orion*, housebreakers, and are said to come from *Kitö*. Although the initiates are warned strongly that they will suffer dearly if they disclose the secrets of *poro*, they are also told that they do not have to worry if they keep the oath. Finally, everyone who intends not to disclose the teachings of *poro* jumps over these five things, i.e. the sticks, the white quartz stone, axe, machete, and fire, to confirm the terms of the oath and to seal it.

After this oath-taking, the initiates are given some more warnings. They should not throw a branch in such a way that it creates the same sound as the *wero kukot*, they should not curse a thief in such a way that the goat slaughtered at *poro* is mentioned when they deal with theft of any kind in the council of elders, because that

will cause the death of the man leading the cursing ritual. Finally they should not burn the field where the lizard was found.

After the meeting, the initiates are given a strong branch of the smelling *cheporön* tree¹⁰⁶ and are told to take it to the homes in the area around *Kaporo* in the coming evening to frighten the women by rubbing the doors of their houses with it, pretending that it is finger millet. They are not allowed to look at the breasts of unmarried girls on this visit to the homes in the area.

I did not find out the meaning of rubbing the doors with the *cheporön* branch nor the reason why the men should not look at the breasts of unmarried girls, but would think that it is in connection with the fact that they are soon going to marry.

On the third day the elders conduct a meeting to find out if someone, an initiate or an elder, has failed to follow the decisions of the elders in recent months. Every initiate and his father are interrogated and one elder serves as a judge. If someone is found guilty, young men are ordered to lay him on the ground face down, step on his hands, feet and throat and beat him repeatedly until he confesses his offence and promises never to commit that sin again. The others who have behaved properly are rubbed with a stick. If one of those, who went through the ritual last time it was performed, has not behaved according to the laws of the elders from that time, and only turns up on this third day of the ritual, he will also be beaten.

When *poro* comes to an end, all the initiates are given white walking sticks, called *cheporonion*, which means he who has finished *poro*, and are allowed to leave, but the elders stay behind and drink beer heavily. The white color of peace on the sticks is important (cf. 3.3.6 Ritual theory and Pokot; Turner 1967:74-92).

At *poro*, values important for an army are emphasized, such as the oneness of the group of men in warfare, the importance of enduring pain and hardship, and loyalty to the rules of the elders. Here, as in circumcision, the ancestral spirits participate in everything that happens, and are the guardians of the tradition and the male values. The conviction that husbands should rule their homes, and that their families should be subordinate to them is emphasized.

The *poro*-ritual creates a distance between the mature men and other members of the society, especially women and children, and surrounds them with mystery. The imploring, whimsical power of cursing, which can be used anytime if people oppose

¹⁰⁶ Medicines are made from the bark and roots of the *chepöron* tree, people use its branches to clean their teeth, its flowers are good for the bees and it gives good shade.

their rule, reveals once again that the ability to curse is the cornerstone of power of the community of elders and the glue that holds the society together. It preserves the tradition and maintains respect for it.

6.2 Termites and porridge, *ngokoi nko musar*

The name of the ceremony, *ngokoi nko musar*, means termites and porridge, and is derived from the words *ngokoi*, flying ants, *nko*, and, and *musar*, porridge. It is performed about four months after the final ceremony of circumcision, *wititagh*, after which the young men are told not to have sexual intercourse or get married until they have gone through this ceremony. The reason for the four months interval between these two rituals is that the termites do not fly from their anthills until the latter part of April. Some informants see a symbolic connection between the four days after a dead person has been buried during which his relatives must not work, and the four months between these two rituals. I doubt that it is the case because in most places there is a shorter period between these two rituals and even a whole year may pass. As will be explained below, this ritual seems to be disappearing and takes only one day.

Ngokoi nko musar starts when the young men arrive bringing the ingredients for the meal for this ceremony, dried termites and maize flour. Because the elders are interested in finding out if some of them have broken the ban on having sexual intercourse, the young men have to make an oath by the entrance of the house when they arrive, risking evoking a curse if they do not tell the truth. When they enter the house, some of the elders beat two pieces of tree branches together, some beat a piece of *lukipi* and a piece of bamboo-tree from the boys' house in the initiation camp, *sömöngör*, and others beat branches from the *kwarkwaryan*-tree. They also beat two white stones, *söngwöt*, at the threshold, saying: „*To ipeng kupeng, to ikur kukuin*,“ „Be free if you have not done anything and be cursed if you have engaged in sex.“

All these things have a symbolic meaning. As I mentioned in 5.2.15 (The burning of the initiates, *pelisho*), *lukipi* is a stick from the *sitöt* tree which is a symbol of life and fertility and is used in the rituals of blessing. I assume that the other tree types also have the same meaning, and the bamboo stick refers to the circumcision period and all the changes it brought to the lives of the initiates. The white stones *söngwöt* are also used in the oath of the *poro* ritual, as described above, 6.1 (*Poro*), representing judgment or punishment that will become active if the men reveal the secrets of the elders.

When the young men enter the house they say: “I have not touched any woman since I left the camp.” The ancestors living in the vicinity of the circumcision camp are said to curse those who have broken this law if they enter the house lying about their innocence. If someone has broken the law he must confess it and pay a goat as a fine. Meyerhoff (1981:154-155, 188) mentions that the initiates of male circumcision in Mwino were given instruction about sex life in connection with the flying of the ants from the anthills and that they were not allowed to have sexual intercourse until they had gone through this ritual. According to her, this ceremony is called *sukotion*, bamboo, referring to the bamboo poles in the house of the initiates in the initiation camp, which has been dismantled at this point, and in this way emphasizing the connection between these two rituals.

After the cursing ritual, the initiates give the food they brought from home to the cooks and if some of them have broken the ban on having sex, they pay their fine. The men eat the goats with ugali and dry ants, which are regarded a delicacy in Kenya.

After the meal the young men are called together for a short repetition of the main teaching of the initiation period and further sexual instruction. Then *ngokoi nko musar* is over. As the young men have now completed *poro* and *ngokoi nko musar*, they have become true adults and will be respected in the community. The secrets of the elders have been revealed to them and they have finished the whole initiation process. The elders tell them to go home and establish themselves as mature men.

It seems that the elders take advantage of the great probability that some of the young men may have fallen into the temptation of engaging in sex before this ceremony is performed in order to have a reason to feast on meat. Because the young men were given sexual instruction during the initiation period, this ritual is, strictly speaking, redundant, which is reflected in the fact that it seems to be fading away and is not practiced in other parts of West-Pokot. Sometimes elders seem to look for ways to give them the opportunity to eat meat. The *atorö* ritual described in Appendix 2 (ritual no. 12) seems to be an example of that and I remember an incident during a coming out ritual, *kipuno*, in Kongelai, when some elders demanded that a goat be slaughtered and a *tisö* cleansing ritual performed due to an alleged impurity that they said had occurred.

Although the young men have learned some cursing techniques in the circumcision and *poro* rituals, they can proceed and learn still more about that in the

ngoriiti ritual, which opens up possibilities for them to pursue the matter further and learn to become witchdoctors, *kapoloki*, which is a powerful and respected position. Power and respect are two fundamental male values.

6.3 The *ngoriiti* ritual

The *ngoriiti* ritual, which takes three days, is performed at several years' intervals at the end of the year, in November or December, when the millet and sorghum, have been harvested. It provides further teaching about cursing and is in some cases a prerequisite for being accepted for training to become a witchdoctor, *kapolokion*, or a sorcerer, *ponin*. Both circumcised and uncircumcised men can undergo it but they have to provide a bull with black and white stripes along the body, *samughe*, a big goat, *sotim*, honey beer, *kumpa keet*, millet, *matay*, and sorghum, *mosong*. The man, who takes the initiative to perform this ritual, organizes and hosts it, and provides the necessary food. Other men may join him and provide the required animals for the ritual as well, or some of them. They can also provide the animals later but have not completed the ritual until they have provided all of them. Although this ritual is not required for all Pokot men it increases their power and gives them further insight into the world of men.

When all the participants have arrived, the bull provided by the host is killed by striking it on its forehead with a club. The initiates and other men, who have previously gone through this ritual, eat the liver and the intestine on the first night with ugali, and the tongue with porridge the next day, when the meat is divided among the participants and sent to their homes. On that same day the goat is also slaughtered and eaten and the rest of it on the third and last day.

The ritual starts at about eight o'clock in the evening of the first day. All the trainees are told to stay in the middle of the house where the ritual is performed but the elders sit along the wall. Then the trainees are told to lie down, one at a time and all the men in the house beat them with sticks from the *sitöt* tree while songs of the ritual are sung. If a trainee has sinned by stealing or committed sexual sins he is given an extra beating. This goes on far into the night.

The specialists of this ritual in Cheptulel come from the *Chemoru* sub-clan of the *Toruk* clan, but an uncircumcised boy leads the trainees by doing everything first, before the others in the ritual and is thus called, *poret*, as the boy in the circumcision process who did everything first, and plays therefore an important role. First, he

sprinkles red soil, mixed with water, *munyan*, with a branch from a *cheptuya* tree on all the initiates who are naked. No word is uttered but the aim of this ceremony is to make the men merciless against those who stand against them in life. The red soil is called *katuwit*, which is derived from the verb *ke-wit*, to pursue, and symbolizes blood conveying the message that anyone who opposes them will lose their lives. According to Peristany (1975:173) „red both destroys the enemy and preserves the wearer“ (cf. 3.3.6 Ritual theory and Pokot; Turner 1967:74-92). The uncircumcised boy in this ceremony is called *chemworoi or*, from *worö*, male, lad, and *or*, path, i.e. the lad of the path.

Later the trainees are taught to put a hollow stick of a bamboo tree, *ses*, through a hole in the wall, called *kupunogh*, which is designed so that the goat urine passes out of the house, and blow it as a way of cursing in the same way as sorcerers do. Some signs are made on the bamboo stick with red soil. The host of the ritual is the first to learn this, then the others in turn. They bewitch, saying the following bewitching words some of which they learned at *poro*:

Porokok o ses

Poro, curse, o bamboo tree

Porokok angwan o ses,

Poro curse four times, o bamboo tree

Poro kitiam o ses,

Poro the trial, o bamboo tree

Chara kuchit o ses,

Knock unconcious, o bamboo tree

Kiiparan samugh o ses

I killed a big bull, o bamboo tree

When the initiates do this, the elders affirm what they are doing by saying:

Porokok porokutiam porosewet

Porokok kuwit akuwit

It is difficult to translate these words but the meaning of *porokok*, *porokok angwan* and *porokok sewet* have already been explained in connection with *poro*. They are especially used to curse unknown thieves. *Porokutiam* is used to curse wrongdoers. The ancestors of long ago are said to have used the word *porosewet* to curse. *Porokok kuwit akuwit* is used to curse people of the same generation or the same clan. One

informant said that the curse could go from one person to another of the same clan or to the men of the same age-set. The initiates are, furthermore, instructed to use these words against their wives when they abuse them, to curse evil spirits and chase them away.

The trainees are also taught the profession of a *liokin*, i.e. how to cleanse a person who has been bewitched by a sorcerer, *ponin*, but they need the assistance of two friends. First, they ask the patient if he has quarreled with someone and if so, to tell them why. When they have removed all their clothes they tell the patient to go between their spread legs four times and one of their friends to go outside the house. Then he blows the bamboo stick through the urine hole saying:

Porokok o ses

Porokok, o bamboo tree

Tiaka o ses

Make him free, o bamboo tree

Kuti kumne, o ses

The mouth of so and so, o bamboo tree

When he has uttered these words he passes the bamboo stick through the urine hole to his friends outside the house who run as if they are taking the problem away, saying:

Antö totina alot

The disease has gone away for good

Iroitö turkana ilut tapes koliong

Go to Turkana and enter *tapes koliong*

Tapes koliong means literally a place from where flies cannot return and is believed to be where evildoers dwell. Flies are a symbol of evil spirits and *Tapes koliong* is the place where only flies live. This phrase is also used in other rituals, when evil spirits are cursed, and told to go down with the descending sun to *Tapes koliong*, e.g. in the ritual of blessing in *sapana* (6.4 The *sapana* initiation ritual, see also the *liakat* ritual, in Appendix 2, ritual no. 10).

The initiates sing two or three songs as they crawl on all fours around the house where the ritual is conducted, but the elders have strewn small thorns from the *merkisha*-tree, in the grass where they pass to make this exercise difficult. Among the songs they sing is *Chepocheptilak*, the same as in the circumcision process (cf. 5.2.3

Arrival at the circumcision camp), which reveals the same male bias of this group as in the circumcision camp. The words of the songs are not exactly the same as then and are mixed freely with parts of several other songs, showing the freedom people have to improvise, while keeping the message within the scope of the teaching of the circumcision process:

Chepocheptilak

Chepocheptilak, mingo konyo,

The daughter of *Cheptilak*, who is in our house?

Psikau psikau, Kaponon kono (x 2)

Psikau Psikau, the cave of Kano (x2)

Choir:

Konyo mocho kwonay

Our house where no women come

Konyo chö weri

Our house where only young men come

Konyo kapö wuw

Our house of the bush

Pampa mayosoi yee

Where the baboons move.

The ritual comes to an end early in the morning on the fourth day when all the men go to the field of *Tiramoi*, where the *kipuno* ritual of the circumcision process was performed. All the trainees stand in a circle and sing the songs, which were sung during the *kipuno* ritual, with their heads covered with goatskin and go in four circles during every song. When they have finished singing, the *Ngoriti*-ritual is over and the trainees go home.

6.4 The *sapana* initiation ritual

Although circumcision is the main initiation ritual among the Pokot people, the men among the pastoralist have mostly substituted it with the *sapana*-initiation ritual and an accompanying *sapana* age-set system due to fear of ever imminent raids from the neighboring ethnic groups as they regard it a security risk to circumcise a big part of their young men together making them vulnerable and unable to fight during the time

of recuperation. As I mentioned in 5.3 (The circumcision age-set system), they do, however, circumcise a big group of boys and young men with 25-35 years' intervals who will then, as a result, all belong to the same circumcision age-set, *p̄in*, and thus become a part of the same circumcision age-set system as the rest of the men of the Pokot society (Bolling 1990c:79; 2000:345-246). As mentioned above, many young men among the agriculturalists also perform *sapana*, not as an initiation into adulthood, but as an optional ritual in order to have a ritual of blessing performed on their behalf, to strengthen the foundation of their marriages, and their status in the society. They undergo the ritual often between circumcision and marriage. Both the Karamojong and the Turkana¹⁰⁷ practice this ritual (Dyson-Hudson 1966:162-168; van der Jagt 1989:38-42). Although many among the Pokot say that they took the ritual from the Karamojong (Persitany 1951:190; Beech 1911:13) there is a reason to believe that they have learned it from both groups, Karamojong and Turkana.

The *sapana*-ritual is performed among the pastoralists towards the end of the rain period when there is plenty of food in the community, both for humans and animals, and normally there is peace and harmony, *pöghishyö*, in the community at that time and no raids. It is conducted at the end of the rain season or in the first half of the dry season among the agriculturalists, at new moon, because it is considered bad to perform it when the moon does not appear in the sky during the whole night, i.e. when it is sleeping, *туру*. As I explained in 5.2.2 (Preparation), no rituals are performed during this time.

The following description of the *sapana*-ritual is from the pastoralists but some details from the way it is performed among the agriculturalists are added when it sheds light on the procedure, which is very similar in both areas.

When a young man has reached the age of marriage among the pastoralists, he calls his parents and tries to persuade them to allow him to perform the *sapana*-ritual. They answer him when they have thought about the matter for some time. If the answer is negative because the young man's conduct has not been good, he must brew honey beer for his father to pacify him, who will, when he has consumed most of it and become sober again, spray some of it from his mouth on him as a sign of reconciliation saying: „*Katyakan mikulöghunyan*, I have untied my heart.“

¹⁰⁷ The Turkana and the Karamojong belong to the same branch of ethnic groups, said by some scholars to have, initially, been one and the same ethnic group (Gulliver 1955:1-15). The Karamojong call the initiation rituals collectively *asapan* (Dyson-Hudson 1966:163) and the Turkana refer to the mud head dress the men get as a result of undergoing this ritual process as *athapana* (Peristany 1951:283).

When it has been decided to perform the *sapana*-ritual, preparations start two or three months in advance. The father negotiates with a man of another clan to obtain a big, fat ox for the ritual and establishes, through this transaction, a joint cattle ownership, *tilya*, which will be described in 6.6 (Joint cattle ownership, *tilya*). Then he looks for an elder to lead the ritual, and the family prepares fitting clothes for the occasion. The date of the ritual can now be announced so that the people in the community can prepare themselves and also brew beer, which will be their contribution to the ritual as well as milk. The young man's family also brews a lot of beer, which takes two to four weeks to ferment. The father goes to the mens' resting place in the shadow of a big tree, and announces the ritual saying, „Wash your calabashes, *mikon*, and pour milk into them for seven days from now on.“ Because he has already tasted the fermenting beer, he knows exactly when it will be ready.

Other men can join the young man, who is officially preparing the *sapana*-ritual, and spear a bull, a he-goat, ram or even a camel as well so that two or more men can perform the ritual at the same time.

Preparations among the agriculturalists are similar except that the man going through the ritual sometimes takes responsibility for the preparations himself, especially if he is already married and has children. Young men who have already gone through the ritual bring the bull ceremonially to his home the day before the ritual, blowing a kind of horn, called *kurel*, on the way announcing that the ritual will take place the following day. The name of the horn, *kurel* is derived from the verb *ke-kur*, to call or invite. People, some from far, gather at the young man's home this night to celebrate, sing and dance all through the night. When they arrive they are given as much beer as they want, the men staying together in groups according to their age-sets in some of the houses of the home and the women in others. Before entering each house, an elder appeases the ancestral spirits by sprinkling some beer from a small calabash, called *kölöwö*, which has been filled for the occasion, first on the right hand side of the door, then moving slowly inside to the pole in the middle of the house carrying the roof if the house is big, called *pchöri*, calling the ancestral spirits of the young man's father, mentioning the names of elders who died a long time ago, mentioning them one at a time saying:

Achi kumä,

Here is beer,

Ato kemitö yi,

If you are here,
Ghegha aiwö arengu.
Drink and go.
Mesus pich,
Do not trouble people,
Atöpenö anta oriyö riwöntengwo aisisyö la söy,
Stay or remain in your sleeping places and be silent.

Then people drink some beer and an elder in every house leads a ceremony with the objective to provide protection and blessings to the owner of the household, the leader of the ritual, the initiate and the whole Pokot land. The following is an example how this ceremony can be. An elder speaks and the others approve what he says by uttering a deep guttural sound, “*mmm*” after every sentence:

Kalecha kayi pö wero kokwö,
We say this house belonging to a man in the community,
Ikirö,
Be protected
Kalecha werpö pinwo ikirö,
We, the sons of the age-sets say, be protected.
Imala, imala ne? Kibus?
Away, away what? What is disturbing?
Ato kemito pöröyus pö moning,
If you are in the children’s’ sleeping place,
Anta kweghis pö wara, anta kweghis pö ngaror,
Or the children’s’ enclosure, or the goats' enclosure,
Imala kalecha tingon amala,
Away we say, fly away.

People continue drinking and tobacco is given to those who smoke or use snuff. When they have become drunk, middle aged and elderly mothers bring ghee in ox horns, *laloy*,¹⁰⁸ and apply it to peoples’ chests as an act of blessing. This leads to *adongo* dance, which continues all through the night. The first part of it is called,

¹⁰⁸ *Lal*, sing., *laloy*, pl., horns used to keep oil.

kiripö, from the verb *ke-rip*, to come, and is led by a female soloist and women who sing and clap their hands according to the rhythm of the songs, in which they challenge young men to go through *sapana*, and young people to marry and lead good lives. The men jump, turning their right hand side towards the women.

The men lead the second part, in which there is another type of songs, *kiywarat*, tune. Women and men sing in rows facing each other, and the men jump as before turning their right hand side towards the women. In the third and last stage of the dancing, called *kitiakimat*, at least in Sok, a soloist leads and the others answer him. The first soloist is a man who has already gone through *sapana*. The singing continues more or less all through the night until dawn but people pause several times to rest and drink beer.

As dawn breaks, people leave the houses and the initiate's father gives him a spear, if he does not have one himself, and leads him to the kraal, *peny*, and all the people present follow and gather around to watch the coming event. All the animals, others than the bull chosen for the ritual, have been driven out of the kraal, but the real *sapana* ritual takes place there when the young man stabs the bull. He should do it with only one thrust directly at the bull's heart but the spear must not go so deep that it exits somewhere else, in which case another bull or a he-goat must be speared. When the bull is dead, the elders turn it so that it faces Mt. Mtelo. It is a form of prayer to *Tororot* asking him to help them to celebrate the occasion, making the young man strong and to give him wealth. In this way *Tororot* is part of the ritual from the beginning. Failure to kill the ox with one thrust may be an indication that the young man is guilty of *kilomat*, the kind of adultery when the semen of two men has been mixed in the womb of the same woman during the same menstrual period.

I once watched *sapana* in Chepareria where the young man, already married with several children, stabbed the bull many times with his spear and did not succeed in striking the heart at all. I had the feeling that the bull died eventually from the many wounds it had contracted and loss of blood. All the same, the ritual proceeded normally as if everything was in order and to my knowledge no cleansing ritual was performed.

When the bull is dead the elders cut a piece of meat from between the hind legs, near the anus, under the tail, called *alamachar*, in such a way that it leaves a round hole. This piece of meat is roasted in the *kirket* and eaten by the men who are so old that they have lost their parents. Exactly the same custom is practiced among

the Karamojong during public rituals when cattle are sacrificed. According to Dyson-Hudson, “[t]he sub-anal flesh, *elamacar* [Karamojong language], must be consumed by the senior men present” (1966:94). When the elders have had a taste of the *alamachar*, the rest of the ox is divided according to the rules of the ritual and roasted. The agriculturalists skin the carcass before roasting the meat but the pastoralists roast the meat with the skin on. When the bull has been dismembered, men, who have gone through the ritual before, carry the meat to the *kirket* where young men, who have recently performed the ritual, roast it and serve the older men, but men who have not yet gone through the ritual are not allowed to handle it, but are allowed to stay behind the *kirket* and watch.

Before the meat is roasted, however, the initiate carries the intestine to the *kirket* where a *pkwanian*, a reader of intestine, examines it to see if it shows good omen. According to one informant, the initiate’s mother hands the intestine to him, he is naked and takes it to the elders in the *kirket*. If the reading shows bad omen, i.e. if the intestine is said to be spoiled, *mörir nye kiwanyan*, then the elders seek ways to diagnose the problem, which may necessitate the slaughtering of another animal in order to examine its intestine. If the omens are still bad, a third animal may have to be slaughtered. If the result is also bad this time, the hosting father may have to move away and live in another place. I have never heard about such a case but about several instances in which a second animal had to be slaughtered but then the omen turned out to be good.

Men, who have not yet gone through the ritual, and women, are not allowed to eat the meat from under the tail, *alamachar*, the right front leg, *ngoryon*, the intestine, *kwan*, and the small fat around the kidneys, *kachelchel*. The lower part of the left hind leg, *apisikit*, below the knee is given to a brother-in-law, *pempö orö*, of the man going through *sapana*. The upper part of the same leg, the large intestines, e.g. the liver, *koghogh*, kidneys, *sörömoy*, and the chest, *takat*, are given to the old men, *poi*. Young circumcised men, *mürön*, get the testicles, *ködöngit*, and the ribs, *köros*. The right hind leg, *amuro*, is kept until the next morning, when it is roasted and eaten by the initiate and a few other young men after an elder from the oldest living *sapana* age-set has carved it with a spear, which is according to Peristany (1951:205) „one of the most precious privileges of elderhood“. The men consume the soup made from the tongue, *ngalyap*, in the evening of that day.

The tail and the meat around it, *owosin*, is given to those who have come from far to attend the ritual. The meat from the loins, *akimiml*, is given to the former owner of the bull, the meat of the right front limb is shared among the members of the initiate's family, the head and the rest of the intestine are given to the mothers who divide it between themselves and take home to feed their children.

The way the bull is divided reflects the connectedness of the people who receive each a part from the man going through the ritual. People have relationships on various levels, which strengthens the cohesion of the society. An individual belongs first and foremost to his family and clan, but there are also other ways to create relationships outside the clan. The joint cattle ownership, *tilya*, is the most important, but it is also important to have good relationships with the neighbors who help each other in many ways, and as I mentioned above, usually a *tilya* relationship is established when the bull for the *sapana* ritual is obtained. Through the distribution of individual parts of the bull, relationships with more people outside the clan are strengthened. The *alamachar*, liver and kidneys are always given to the old men. These parts are sought after, and the liver is believed to be the site of wisdom. The testicles are given to the young men as a wish that their fertility is increased.

As the elders eat meat in the *kirket*, a ritually clean, *tilil*, elder and a friend, who has recently gone through *sapana*, smear the whole body of the initiate, from head to toe, with chyme, *aghian*, from the slaughtered ox. As the young man stands on the bull's stomach, the elder says: "*Anyin, anyin, anyin.*" "Sweet, sweet, sweet." Visser adds: "Get your things (cattle, goats, wives, children) smear, smear, smear" (1989:180). The first part of these words, "*anyin, anyin, anyin*" are generally used in cleansing rituals when people are smeared with chyme in order to chase evil spirits away to be cleansed. In this way the man is cleansed of evil.

One of my informants saw important symbols in the way the intestine were handled. The fact that the young man was naked and received the intestine from his mother was an indication of a new beginning. Before going through the ritual he belonged to the realm of women but now he has entered a new stage and must be cleansed from all uncleanness before entering a new future, belonging to the community of elders. It is important to find out if there is anything that might prevent the young man from leading a harmonious and good life and thus the reading of the intestine is important. If there are any signs of misfortune it must be dealt with

appropriately. The ritual of blessing, performed later in the ritual process, strengthens him as he advances in his new state as a strong and vital man.

There is an open area near the *kirket* where people play various games, e.g. the so-called giraffe-game and the elephant-game, in which everyone is allowed to participate, women, children and men. While the elders eat the meat in the *kirket* a war game competition, *kinyakarat*, parading, takes place between several groups of men from different neighborhoods, to see which of them proves to be the best army. All the participants must already have gone through *sapana*. The groups run into the *kirket*, one at a time, carrying weapons, especially spears and shields, but nowadays sometimes guns as well, behaving as if they were fighting a battle. The winners are the group that acts like the fiercest army, but the elders in *kirket* choose the winners and give them the chest, *takat*, of the slaughtered bull as a prize.

This game clearly encourages young men to raid their neighboring ethnic groups and display warriorhood as an attractive part of the male identity, showing that the people of the community appreciate successful raiders. It emphasizes values, such as fearlessness, bravery, cunning and stamina.



Picture 24. War game competition, *kinyakarat*, at *sapana*.

After the competition there is a new stage, a blood and milk ceremony. The men who have already gone through *sapana* drink blood from the slaughtered bull,

which has been mixed with some of the milk people brought to the ritual from home and poured into a big wooden trough, *ateker*, which is normally used to give water and salt to the cattle. If there is not sufficient blood, another cow is bled with a special arrow, called *terema*, to obtain enough. The bleeding is called *chura*. When the blood and milk has been stirred well together, the leader of the ritual sips a little bit of the mixture and sprays it on both sides of the initiate, first on the right hand side and then on the left, symbolizing that the young man is beginning to eat and drink new food, which is a part of the new life. Visser has another version of this ceremony, from Orwa and describes how it start when the initiate's parents lead the women in a procession from the kraal to the *kirket* with the milk they brought. He continues, "[T]he age mate took a mouthful, spat it into his own armpits and between his thighs and also smeared it on his head and body, with the initiate following his example. ... This powerful combination is applied to the vital places of the body, and thus incorporates the initiate into the class of warriors" (Visser 1989:182).



Picture 25. The initiate drinks a mixture of milk and blood.

After this initial ceremony the leader lies down, leaning on his left arm and takes a sip from the mixture in the trough. The initiate follows his example, and then all the men in the *kirket*, who drink from the trough in a long sip, without breathing

between the sips. The men who have not yet gone through *sapana*, women and children are not allowed to drink from this mixture, but are given ordinary milk from the gourds people have brought to the ritual. It is only in the *sapana* and the *mis* rituals that a mixture of blood and milk is drunk like this. In this act the men consume the most powerful liquids they know of, cow milk, and blood from a bull, and it seems as if they believe their power will be transferred to them through the consumption. Similar ideas are found in totemism (Durkheim 1995:338-344 [1912]).

Only men who have gone through *sapana* are allowed to sit in the *kirket* on this occasion, the oldest men in the middle and the youngest at the ends of the semi circle. A group of young men, who have not performed the ritual, called *ngilemiy*, sit behind the elders as a sign of their inferior position.

The fire on which the meat is roasted is in the middle of the *kirket*. The most common firewood used is from evergreen trees, such as *cheptuya*, *simotwo*, *yemit*, and *torokwo*, a symbol of vitality and longevity as has already been explained, reflecting the magical way of thinking, the belief that the qualities of these trees may come true for the man undergoing the ritual. People believe that the smoke from these plants brings blessings to the land in the same way as in the *simar* ritual (cf. 6.1 *Poro*) and some of the plants are the same. The smoke is believed to be sweet smelling for *Tororot* and by roasting the meat the men share it with him hoping to gain his favor. The men in *kirket* sit on branches from the same trees as the firewood, and place the roasted meat on such branches as well.

When the elders have finished eating, an old man stands up in the middle of the open field of *kirket*, holding an unwrapped spear to lead the people who are present in a ritual of blessing, *kisoyonöt*. The initiate and his parents sit in the middle of the field. The leader of the ceremony speaks the following words and the men respond as before with a deep guttural sound, „*mmm*,“ after every sentence:

Kalecha ato kömi ponin

We say if there is a sorcerer

Anta chemoykut, anta chepkeghyan

Or a charm maker, or an egoist

Anta chepingormöasyon nyo

Or a short tempered person who

Köchirerchini kachichi

Is cleverly planning to harm the home of this man

Kalecha puryö, kalecha werpö Nyonki

We say no, we, the sons of Nyonki

Werpö Maina, werpö Chumngö nko

Sons of Maina, sons of Chumngö and

Werpö Köronkörö kalecha iwö lö

Sons of Köronkörö we say go like this:

Mis...s iwö iröytö tongi¹⁰⁹

Disappe...ar, go down to the unseen

Iröytö tapes kolyong

Go down to the place where flies cannot reach

Kalecha ato kömi kuti kapolökyon

We say if there is a curse by a *kapolokion*

Anta kayworön anta kömuntion, kalech imala

Or a hero or the one who uses different colors to bewitch with, we say away.

A kamwa ngo? A werpö

And who said? The sons of

Pinwö lö ne? Lö iwö lö ko...kö

What age-sets? Go with this sound, ko...kö

Ko...kö iwö iröytö nko asis

Ko...kö go descend with the sun.

Then the leader adds:

Kamwagheh pat sorö ompö kayi

We have said thank you to the people of this home.

Then he blesses the young man saying:

Kesoyoney yenyu kayi

From now on this family will be blessed

Nyakusoyono tuka nko moninge

All the cattle and children be blessed.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ *Tongi* is behind the horizon. This is a way of talking about the unseen world of the spirits.

¹¹⁰ Visser (1989:182) has the following blessing:

Get cattle, get a wife
Get goats, get all things
Tororot may bless

The leader continues to bless the young man for a while, asking the gods, heavenly bodies and the ancestors to grant him many animals, wives, children, long life, good health, peace, and protection from evil.

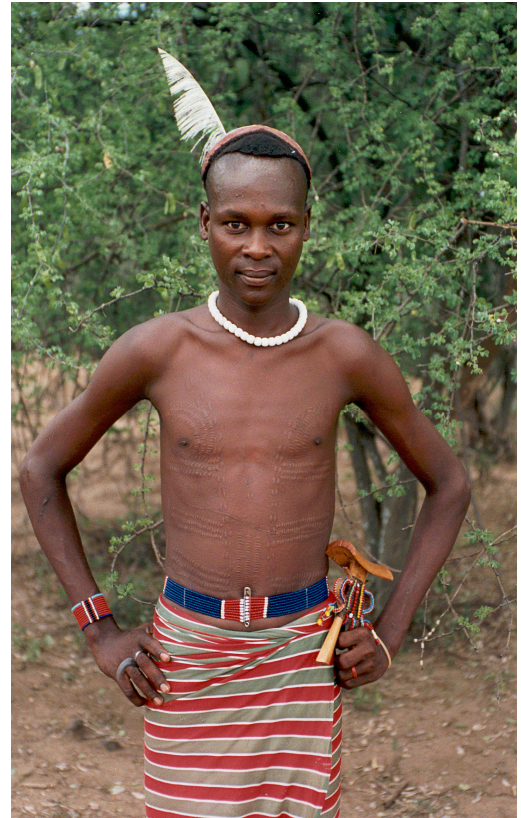
When this ritual is over the official part of *sapana* comes to an end and the celebration ebbs out as people play games, sing and dance.

On this day of *sapana* the beginning of a clay cap, *siolup*, is made on the head of the young man and is completed two weeks later and painted with blue, red and white clay. Red denotes the bull the young man killed in order to move to a new stage in life, white that he and his family will enjoy peace in the future, and, according to Peristany, blue (and green) has „symbolic affinities with white“ (1975:174). According to Peristany (1951:205), the initiate gives some beer to a friend who will in return and make the cap on his head from red mud, called *kapaghiat*, on which is applied white clay, *katapo*; both brought from Mt. Tiaty, and finally, dark blue clay, called *mornasikar*, which comes from Kasauria, a mountain area near Sigor. Two or three holes are left in the cap so that ostrich feathers or feathers of other birds can be fastened there as a decoration.

Those who have gone through *sapana* often refer to those who have not gone through the ritual as black headed baboons because they have not yet reached the stage of having such a cap.

The wife of a man who has gone through *sapana* gets a Pokot wedding ring, *ptirim*, on her forearm on the day of her wedding, made from a raw cow hide. It is believed to strengthen the stability of the marriage, but the husband does not get anything equivalent. I will describe a wedding in 7.2 (Marriage, *kensyö*) and the wedding ring in 7.2.1 (*Nayat*, to tie on the wedding ring, *ptirim*).

Thanks, thanks, thanks, thanks.
And all the men said,
Mmm mmm mmm.



Picture 26 and **picture 27**. A young man with a clay cap after completing *sapana*.

The *sapana*-ritual also strengthens the ties between neighbors and relatives, because everyone who attends the ritual contributes milk and beer to make it a successful event. Probably no other ritual in the Pokot society is attended by so many people. The initiate does not go through any ordeal during *sapana* and no secrets are revealed. The agriculturalists, which go through the ritual, do not become a part of the *sapana* age-set system (cf. Peristany 1951:206-207), only the pastoralists.

Among the pastoralists the men who have gone through *sapana* can go through the *atorö* ritual. Some agriculturalists in Cheptulel have gone through it as well, although it is primarily practiced among the pastoralists. Its objective is to cleanse the men of all evil and protect them from their enemies. When it has been completed a small clay cap, similar to the one they get at *sapana*, is made on the forehead, *atorö*, as a token that they have finished the ritual. This gives them increased respect and they enjoy privileges at other rituals. I describe the *atorö* ritual in details in Appendix 2 (ritual no. 12).



Picture 28. A man who has gone through both the *sapana* and *atorö* rituals.

6.4.1 The *sapana* age-set system

As the *sapana* ritual and the *sapana* age-set system come from the neighboring Karamojong (Peristany 1951:189) the pastoral Pokot consult them about when to open and close *sapana*-sets.

According to Bolling (2000), Peristany (1951) gives a good description of the system, maintaining that the *sapana* age-set system is composed of two major groups, *sapana*-sets, called *Tukoi*, zebras and *Nyimbur*, rocks. The Zebras wear brass-colored ornaments and the Rocks copper-colored. Each *sapana*-set is composed of two color sections, *munyan*, which are further subdivided into three sub-sets, each lasting two to five years. According to Peristany, a color section thus spans over approximately 12 years, which means that a *sapana*-set lasts about 24 years. This system is cyclical so that the Zebras take over when the period of the Rocks expires and the Rocks take over when the period of the Zebras expires. A father and a son must, however, not belong to the same *sapana*-set and the generation of grandsons takes the name of their grandfathers' age-set when most men of that group have died, but until then they use a nickname for their *sapana*-set but the same kind of decorations.

The *sapana* age-set system among the Pokot is similar to age-set system of the Karamojong, which is composed of about four generation-sets, each lasting 25-30 years, the whole cycle may therefore last up to 120 years (Dyson-Hudson 1966:155-

162). Two color sections are integrated into one *sapana*-set among the Pokot through the ritual of *amuro*. This ritual also serves as a handing over ceremony among the pastoralists in which the men belonging to the age-set, which is taking power, are initiated into the carving of the right hind leg of a bull, *amuro*. They are the age-set of elders who have obtained ritual power, and are also called the elders of *amuro*, *poi pö amuro*, in rituals (Peristany 1951:199).

There are allusions to war in many of the rituals in the circumcision process. In the following section I will discuss the position of war in the Pokot society, how it is prepared, and the *tönus* ritual in which young men are urged to go raiding to fetch wealth and prove their manhood. I will also describe the *masyan* cleansing ritual, which neutralizes curses from the families of the dead enemy soldiers, and finally the *mis* ritual, an oath which seals peace between the Pokot and a neighboring ethnic group.

6.5 War

As I have described in the above one of the objectives of the circumcision process is to create brave soldiers who can endure severe hardships and are willing to die defending their favorite oxen. A military spirit hovers over the initiation camp all through the initiation period, culminating in the *wititagh* ritual (5.2.20 What has been completed, *wititagh*) where the initiation process ends with a song during which the young men face the land of the neighboring ethnic groups, an act communicating that as they have now become mature men, they should go there and fetch wealth, i.e. animals. The young men are further urged to go raiding in the *tönus* ritual, which will be described in 6.5.3, and in the war game competition of *sapana*, called *kinyakarat*. This is also emphasized in the teaching in the initiation camp. They have to prove that they have become mature men, *miron*, by going raiding. It is thus important to understand the role of war in the life of Pokot men. In this section I will describe how men prepare for war, the *tönus* ritual, the *masyan* cleansing ritual, which is performed for soldiers who have killed enemies, and the *mis* ritual, which is conducted to stop raids between the Pokot and a neighboring ethnic group.

6.5.1 Raids

Raids, *luk*, on the neighboring ethnic groups are common among many Nilotic groups, which reveals the key role cattle play in their subsistence economy and value

system, that they are the highest form of wealth and aesthetics as has been mentioned before (cf. 1.2 My background; 2.3.1 The Nilotes). It can be profitable to acquire cattle in raids, especially for young unmarried men, because it boosts their wealth and helps them to accumulate enough animals for bride wealth, earlier than if they had had to rely only on their fathers and relatives. It is thus a strong incentive for them to go raiding. Individual warriors who participate in raids do not all acquire many animals each, as Bolling (1990a) has pointed out. War is, however, not only a means to acquire wealth; it is also a way for young men to prove their manhood, i.e. their courage, physical fitness, cunning and stamina. Success in raids strengthens their reputation and honor. When warriors return from a successful raid, women often welcome them with songs of praises, blessing them by anointing them with ghee, giving them fresh milk and stored fat from sheep and camels.

Of all ethnic groups the Pokot raid most frequently the non-Kalenjin Turkana in the north and Karamojong in the west, as they are their traditional enemies. These groups have raided each other regularly, every year in the last thirty or forty years. The intensity of the raids has varied greatly from one period to another, and clashes due to access to grazing and water, especially between the Pokot and the Karamojong, has been a consequence of making fixed boundary between Kenya and Uganda as I will explain further below. The Pokot have, however, also raided the neighboring Kalenjin groups, such as the Keyo, Marakwet and Sebei, although they do not regard them as enemies in the same sense as the other groups, because they are related by blood to them. Even if these ethnic groups raid each other, I have not sensed hatred between them, but on the contrary, respect, because all of them share basically the same values and raids are a part of their culture, a means to acquire wealth and to prove their manhood. Often raids, especially before the coming of guns, were regarded as a kind of sport and I have often heard men speak with respect and nostalgia about the old days when men fought one on one in honest battles where the winner earned deserved respect due to his own ability and bravery, not because he had superior weapons.

Although the Pokot have not raided the Kalenjin-groups with the same intensity as the Turkana and Karamojong, unprecedented enmities have flared up between the Pokot and the Marakwet in recent years with intense killings due to hatred between a few people.

When traditional weapons, bows, arrows and spears were used, few people were killed in raids. In the late sixties the Turkana acquired guns and raided the Pokot successfully but in the seventies the Pokot managed to obtain guns as well and launched massive counterattacks (Bolling 1990a). As a result of instability and wars in Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia since the 1960s, people have had easy access to weapons, and guns have become an integral part of the raids. This has changed dramatically the nature of war and the traditional laws about it are repeatedly violated, e.g. the ban on killing women and children under certain circumstances. This has resulted in a great increase of casualties, and has enabled thugs to rob and kill people by shooting them from a distance, and reduced greatly the importance of cunning and physical fitness of the warriors.

The urge to go on raids is much stronger among the pastoralists than the agriculturalists because the former depend much more on cattle and domestic animals for their subsistence, than the latter, and bride wealth is usually much higher among them. Surplus animals, those not needed for domestic use, are distributed through joint cattle ownership, *tilya*. They are about 15-20% of the animals among the pastoralists in Baringo district, according to Bolling (1993). The more *tilya*-relationships a man is engaged in, the broader his power base is in the society and the more respect he enjoys. I will describe the institution of joint cattle ownership, *tilya*, in 6.6.

6.5.2 Preparation for war

As has been mentioned before, war is an integral part of life in the Pokot society and of the Pokot culture. Before going on a raid preparations have to be made. Sometimes suggestions about going raiding emerge at community feasts when an elder slaughters an ox for his neighbors. Often a man, known for his ferocity and courage, *nyakan*,¹¹¹ and a certain emotional state, *sirumoi*, starts the discussion. He must convince the other men that they should go with him (cf. Bolling 1993). If it is decided to go, the warriors visit a prophet, *werkoyon*, in order to hear his opinion about the journey, i.e. if it will be ominous or not, whether they should carry out their plan or cancel it. A bull is slaughtered with a spear at his home and the prophet calls a *pkwanian*, a seer who examines intestines (cf. 4.4.1.4 The reader of intestine, *pkwanian*), that he may examine

¹¹¹ The word *nyakan* is derived from the verb *ke-nyak*, which means to smash or crush.

the bull's intestine and see if he sees bloodshed. If he does, the journey will be terminated, because it is an indication that danger is ahead. If the intestines are good and do not show any signs of bloodshed, he takes grass from the bull's rumen and mixes it with traditional red ochre and smears it on the warriors' bodies. Then everyone is motivated to face the challenge of war. Finally the meat is roasted and all the men present consume it.

Before a raid can start, spies are sent into the enemy territory. An informant described preparations for a raid to Turkana in such a way that while the warriors waited for the spies to return, a cleansing ritual was performed. A goat was slaughtered and the chyme smeared all over the body of those who were regarded unclean. The ritual takes several hours but is believed to be essential for the success of the raid. In it the ears, which hear evil, the eyes, which see evil, the hands, which touch evil and the feet, which go to do evil, are cleansed in advance. The warriors will also be cleansed of theft, *chorsyo*, adultery, *cheporesnan*, quarrelling with elderly people, *sigala*, and other sins, *ngoki*, which they may have committed.

Bolling (1993) discusses the concept *sirumoi*, and describes it as a feeling of anger and rage that men should feel before going on raids. Not all men get this feeling, but those who are in a stage of having it are said to have staring eyes, walk in a certain way, and speak in short sentences. They shout every now and then the names of their favorite oxen or those of their ancestors, and even their own deeds if they are successful raiders themselves. This may affect the other men and eventually bring them also into this state of *sirumoi*. There are two types of *sirumoi*. First it can lead to uncontrolled rage, *woyogh*, which can be dangerous and even lead to domestic murders. The other type is rage but the person remains calm, and gains strength to carry out difficult tasks, e.g. long trekking as in raids. This type of *sirumoi* is typical for a brave soldier, *nyakan*.

Although the war ideals are important among the Pokot men, and good warriors are highly respected, they will lose their respect in their home community if they attempt to settle disputes with fellow Pokot in the state of *sirumoi*. As good and useful as it is in war, it can be destructive in daily life. The elders emphasize the importance of finding peaceful solutions to disagreements because they believe other methods may unsettle the peace and harmony, *pöghishyö*, of the community, and create enmity and cursing. People's attitude to each other should be marked by mutual respect (Bolling 1993:180-183).

Morell and Swart (2005), referring to (Heald 1999), discuss a similar concept as *sirumoi* among the Kisii of Kenya, *lirima*, which is, according to them, “violent emotional energy,” which is “inherent in the nature of men” (Morell and Swart 2005:105-106; Heald 1999:16). Thus violence is regarded as a part of the masculine nature and a source of self-knowledge and responsibility, but it is of vital importance that men have it under control.

6.5.3 The *tönus*-ritual

The *tönus*-ritual, said to originate among the Marakwet people, encourages young men to go on raids. According to a saying, people from Cheptulel stole the *tönus*, which is a drum made from a large, hollow tree, covered with skin at one end but open on the other, and brought it to a cave at a place called *Ptirut* in Cheptulel where the ritual takes place in May every year when the termites have been harvested, i.e. after *ngokoi nko musar*. People of all age groups, irrespective of status or sex, participate in this ritual and challenge young men to go raiding.

Tönus is a gay event and everyone is wearing his or her best traditional costume. It starts at noon and lasts into the afternoon. It is composed of two major parts, singing and dancing, and teaching about warfare.

People arrange themselves in rows according to age and sex, when people sing and dance, men forming one row and women another, facing each other. A drum beater from an old age-set stays between the rows and beats the *tönus* and an old woman leads the singing as a soloist, while the people in the rows dance. Children are allowed to participate by staying between the rows. The songs are about raiding and warfare. When people rest between the songs and dances, experienced warriors teach the young men about raiding.

The following is an example of a *tönus* song:

Eyayo kapar onö? (x2)

Eyayo where have you raided?

Ae kiaparan Kikön

Ae I raided Tugen

Eyayo ee ae ronkunyine?

Eyayo ee ae what did you bring?

Ae rongwan kechir

Ae I brought sheep

Eyayo ee kungo kechir?

Eyayo ee where are the sheep?

Ae kisaran sowöt

*Ae sowöt*¹¹² snatched

Eyayo kilöne merir?

Eyayo why didn't you cry?

Ae mamucha arir

Ae I was not able to cry.

*Eyayo mukmukchinö; chiwichiwi,*¹¹³ *limaya ngat chirya chirya*

Try *chiwi chiwi*, try again *chirya chirya*.

When the singing, dancing and teaching is over the old men and women who are not able to have children any more stay on but the others leave.

6.5.4 The *masyan* cleansing ritual

It is believed to bring curses upon a murderer and his family to shed the blood of another human being, even if the person is from another ethnic group, because his or her people will certainly curse him one way or another. A warrior returning from war, who has killed an enemy, is not allowed to mix with women and children until he has performed one of the *tisö* cleansing rituals called *masyan*, which means skin strip, and must, therefore, stay in the bush near his home until it has been completed. Women and children are not allowed to contact him until the ritual has been completed; meanwhile men take care of him. According to Bolling (1990a), who conducted research in Baringo, the warrior must stay in hiding until the next new moon. Before that he must not mix with his cattle or fertile women because it might reduce their fertility. Children and men bring food to him (Bolling 1990a:87). The new moon symbolizes a new beginning. When it has emerged, the old has disappeared, and with

¹¹² *Sowöt* are enemies from Elkeyo. *Sowö* is a topographic name.

¹¹³ The meaning of *Chiwi chiwi* and *chiria chiria* is crying. There is a story saying that once upon a time there was a young man who lived far from other people. One day, early in the morning, the enemies attacked him and took his animals. Later he was asked why he did not cry for help. He answered that he did not know how to cry for help. He cried *chirya-chirya*, *chiwi-chiwi*, which means to cry.

it the curses also. This symbolism is similar to the rising and descending sun (cf. 3.3.6 Ritual theory and Pokot).

An elder, who has gone through the *masyan* ritual himself, performs the ritual. He slaughters a white goat, smears the whole body of the warrior with chyme from its rumen and speaks some words to make the curses ineffective and to chase all evil spirits away. The white color symbolizes peace and what is good, and is believed to change the curses into peace and blessings. The hide of the goat is cut into strips, *mastin*, and tied all over his body as a protection (cf. Visser 1989:200), then the men present drink honey beer, but only men who have killed an enemy themselves and gone through this ritual, may be present. The ritual takes place near the warrior's home and there is no singing.

The warrior gets a new name, which indicates what kind of enemy he has killed, to make him proud. If it ends by *-le* or *-tum* it indicates that he has killed a man, e.g. Litole, Lomerle, Amasile, Lotuliatum, Lorumotum, Remortum, but if it ends by *-moi*, it reveals that he has killed a woman, e.g. Aperumoi, Siliamoi, Lotukomoi.

When the *masyan* ritual is over, the warrior can mingle with the other people of the community without restrictions, and return home to resume his domestic duties. He can also go raiding again. The cleansing is, however, not complete until he has made a feast at his home for the people of his community, slaughtered a bull for them, called *dia*, and offered beer to celebrate the event. At such an event there is much dancing of both types of dances, *nyoslyö* and *adongo*. People sing songs praising warfare, but there are no specific songs for this occasion. *Dia* takes only one day and the word denotes the whole event, the killing of the bull, dancing and the feasting on its meat.

A warrior who has killed an enemy is scarified on his shoulder and upper arm. If he has killed two enemies, he may be scarified on the other side also and should he kill more enemies his oldest daughter may also be scarified on her shoulders. I saw several scarified men in the Kongelai area but never women. The Karamojong also scarify their warriors who kill enemies (Novelli 1988:87-89).¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Massam (1927:39-40) describes a similar custom among the Elkeyo. Women and children were not allowed to see the warrior and he had to stay in a cave for ten days after which old men who had themselves killed enemies slaughtered a white goat and smeared its chyme all over his body and cut concentric circles on his forearm.



Picture 29. A man who has killed an enemy is scarified.

In Bolling's (1990a) version of the ritual from Baringo, where it is called *kimokat*, a black goat is first slaughtered and a man who has himself gone through this ritual, called *kolin*,¹¹⁵ he who scratches, smears its chyme all over the warrior's body. The meat is roasted, and in that way shared with *Tororot* as he is included in the meal. Black is, according to Peristany, „a heavy color“, but can prevent evil and is used to chase evil spirits away (1975:174, 182; cf. 3.3.6 Ritual theory and Pokot). When the new moon appears a white goat is slaughtered and the same ritual is repeated as when the black goat was slaughtered, but another *kolin* washes the warrior with various kinds of liquids, such as water, honey beer, and milk and smears him with pure honey and ties skin strips all over his body. The warrior may not return to normal life and is not allowed to slaughter an animal in an official ritual until he has completed *dia*. Usually he performs a third and last ritual in this cleansing process two years later. This resembles the three *tisö* rituals, *moikut*, *kitunga*, and *riwoy*, which are performed if a woman becomes pregnant before completing four menstrual periods or has given

¹¹⁵ *Kolin*, sing, *koli*, plural.

birth to twins. The third and last ritual, *riwoy*, is performed several years after the second. These rituals are described in Appendix 2 (ritual no. 3).

The two *köli* finish the last ritual by smearing the man with red clay, early in the morning before the ritual takes place, and tie skin strips, *mastin*, on him as before. Finally he slaughters a bull, a camel or a he-goat and is washed with water, honey beer, milk and smeared with honey. Then he is given a new name, is scarified and allowed to add reddish ostrich feathers to his headdress. He has now become a *kolin* himself and will refer to his deeds in his ox songs.¹¹⁶

All the liquids used in these rituals are beneficial. Rain is sometimes called the oil of the world, *mwagh pö ngwiny*, honey is used for medical purposes and is believed to heal and cleanse, and the honey beer is drunk in many rituals and is the only appropriate type of beer given to prophets when people approach them for help. Milk and honey are symbols of the good life.

6.5.5 The *mis*-ritual

When raids have been extremely intense between the Pokot and their neighboring ethnic groups, resulting in a great number of casualties without apparent gain for either side, elders from the groups make an agreement to conduct a meeting at the border between their lands where all elders and warriors meet to perform the *mis*-ritual in order to make peace. The word *mis* is derived from the verb *ke-mis*, to erase.

The participants make a very strong oath in this ritual, breach of which is said to result in the death of the culprits. According to Sanders (2001:175), the elders calling for the ceremony order that a small boy be captured from the enemy ethnic group and sent home to his elders with the message that they wish to make peace.

On the day the elders have agreed upon, groups from both sides gather peacefully at about six o'clock in the evening. At the beginning of the meeting elders from both groups tell the warriors to collect all the weapons they brought to the meeting, spears, bows and arrows, tie them together and put them into a deep hole, which has been dug for the occasion. Then it is filled with soil, signifying that an end has been put to the fighting and anyone who resumes it again will die and be buried in the same way as the weapons. Then the warriors are told to close their eyes while the elders say an oath. One of them leads and the others confirm every phrase he says by

¹¹⁶ A *kolin* acts as ritual healer for pregnant women and small children. He is also consulted when a bad shadow, *rurwö*, is believed to be the cause of a disease (Bolling 1990a:87).

uttering a deep guttural sound as in rituals of blessing. Visser has the words from an oath when the ritual was performed between the Turkana and the Pokot at Longonot in 1975:

Be covered, die like this
Die if Pokot, die if Turkana
Be finished, completely
Why cannot we leave?
Why to kill one another?
We are all black
Thanks, thanks, thanks (Visser 1989:145).¹¹⁷

Each party selects at least one white bull for the occasion, which is speared, and the meat is roasted and eaten in the *kirket*. The blood from both bulls is poured into a container and mixed with cow milk, which both parties brought to the ritual, and everyone present drinks of the mixture, as in *sapana*, to show that he intends not to fight again and that both groups have now become united. During the meal each party eats the meat of the bull the other group provided. Visser adds that the elders exchanged white ostrich feathers as a sign of peace.¹¹⁸

As on other occasions, white is the color of peace and the roasting of the meat is a way to share it with *Tororot* and include him in the meal. During the meal the elders from both groups address the meeting and explain the losses they have had during the war and the advantages of peace and the reasons for performing the *mis-ritual*.

Next morning the men paint themselves with two colors, red and white, red symbolizing the past when blood was shed in fighting and white symbolizing that they have now been reconciled and will live in peace. Finally the men sing songs of peace facing the rising sun in order to receive life and prosperity from it.

6.6 Joint cattle ownership, *tilya*

Drought, animal diseases and raids have regularly decimated the herds of the Pokot people who have developed the so-called *tilya* stock exchange system in an attempt to reduce the number of animals they lose. The literal meaning of the word *tilya* is joint cattle ownership (Nangulu 2001:167). This is a kind of an insurance system in which

¹¹⁷ This text is a summary of the actual words. The Pokot text is not available (Visser 1989:277).

¹¹⁸ Massam (1927) describes a similar ceremony among the Keyo and their neighbors, but it was not as elaborate and only goats were slaughtered.

a man distributes his animals over a big area with the aim of avoiding the danger of complete loss when disaster comes.¹¹⁹

Bolling (1993:178) found out that 15-20% of surplus livestock among the pastoralists in Baringo District was invested in this system. In the *tilya* cattle system a man gives a steer or an ox to another man and expects to be given a female cow later in return with the provision that the milk belongs to him but not the calves, which the owner will fetch as they are born. Such *tilya*-relationships can be established in many ways, with people of the same clan but also with people outside the clan and is probably done more often that way. It is economically ideal if siblings marry into different clans, other than the clans of existing relationships, in order to establish new *tilya*-relationships through the exchange of dowry. According to Bolling, the fathers of 36 brides in Baringo District retained only 19% of the cows and 32.6% of the goats of the bride wealth they received but distributed the rest of the animals to their relatives, friends, and brothers of the brides resulting, in many cases, in the creation of new *tilya*-relationships. Indeed, it is considered unethical for a father to retain all the animals of the bride wealth for himself and there is a strong social obligation and pressure to distribute surplus animals in this system. Due to the economic foundation of marriage, the *tilya* system encourages polygamy.

Tilya-relationships can be established in several other ways. The bull slaughtered in the *sapana* initiation ritual must come from a man outside the family of the man undergoing the ritual so that a relationship of this kind can be established. It can also be initiated during feasts held for the people in the community, or, as is more common, at feasts held for the men in the neighborhood, *kor*, when a man slaughters an ox, which he has obtained from a friend.

Only an ox can be exchanged for a female cow, not an ox for another ox, or a female cow for another female cow. These animals must always be of the best quality and in good health (Schneider 1953:265).

¹¹⁹ Both the Nandi, the Kipsigis, and the Sebei have cattle exchange systems that resemble the *tilya*-system of the Pokot but are not identical to it. It is called *kaptich* among the Nandi in which the owner of a cow places it with another man as a way to avoid disasters without receiving an ox in return but only gives up the milking rights (Huntingford 1950:38). Among the Kipsigis the system is called *kimangan* and resembles the Pokot system (Peristany 1939:150-152). Among the Sebei, two men make a *kamanakan* contract, which is similar to *tilya*, and become *tilyet* to each other and address each other *tilyenyu* (Goldsmith 1976:99, 128-136). Other neighboring ethnic groups, which rely heavily on cattle, also have a cattle exchange system, e.g. the Turkana (Gulliver 1955:196-222) and the Karamojong (Dyson-Hudson 1966:85-87).

As many agriculturalists have few cattle, they can establish *tilya*-relationships by exchanging goats or sheep (Schneider 1957:285). Sometimes people borrow a milking cow from a neighbor who can later request grain, sheep or goats in exchange and establish, in that way, a *tilya*-relationship. When the cow dies, the *tilya*-relationship based on the cow comes to an end (Schneider 1959:152). Visits to stock friends, to see if there are calves ready to be taken home, occupies a big part of the men's time. Sometimes such journeys take several days. Men are advised by other men not to inform their wives about their network of stock friends and thus do not, normally, tell them where they are going when they go to visit stock friends.

There are mutual obligations between stock friends and they can ask each other for help in times of need, e.g. borrow food, as there is mutual trust, friendship and general solidarity between them in many ways.

The *tilya* system increases the respect and power of a man, and the more *tilya*-relationships he is engaged in, the broader his social network is. He invests „economic capital in order to gain social symbolic capital“ (Bolling 1996:69). A man who has many stock-friends is preferred as a husband and a son-in-law and as a stock friend in new *tilya*-relationships (Bolling 1993:178). This system strengthens the cohesiveness of the Pokot society and binds people together across clan lines (Nangulu 2001:168; Schneider 1953:265; 1957:285). Bolling has pointed out that „in an economy in which material goods ... are constantly prone to crisis, accumulating social and symbolic capital may be a more reliable way of ensuring survival“ (1996:69). He is further of the view that this system of distributing and collecting livestock is the cornerstone of the Pokot male identity (:68). Although this is generally true of the Pokot men, the agriculturalists also view ownership of land as important.

A son inherits his father's stock friendships but as he and his family do not have sufficient overview over his stock friends, he is often unable to pursue them and fetch newborn calves when he is dead. Sometimes men visit his family demanding calves from his father's family herd after his death without his family being able to verify the validity of their claims. It is therefore, of no surprise that disputes over cattle ownership were the most common cases in Pokot courts in the 20th century.

6.7 Summary

The rituals described in this chapter contribute toward establishing circumcised men further as mature men in the Pokot society. In *poro* and *ngoriti* they acquire knowledge to curse and gain respect from women, children, and uninitiated men based on fear. Through these rituals the power of the young men is reinforced, both in their homes and in the society. The rituals also reveal the magical worldview of the Pokot people as reflected in the use of sacrificial animals and clay of various colors and the belief that smoke from the fire of evergreen trees can bring blessings over the land, and that curses can also be blown over the community in the same way. Male values transmitted through the circumcision are reemphasized in *poro*, such as the importance of showing courage, fearlessness, bravery, cunning, stamina, and ability to endure pain and hardship and willingness to follow and guard the Pokot tradition. Men's position in the society is further strengthened by becoming members of an age-set, and the older they get, the more respect they enjoy as individuals and age-sets.

The aggressive spirit of war is ingrown in the Pokot culture and young men are urged to prove their manhood by raiding the neighboring ethnic groups. This is especially clear in the *tönus* ritual, which urges young men to go and bring wealth home. People fear curses from people of the neighboring ethnic groups and find it very important that soldiers who have killed enemies undergo a series of cleansing rituals to avenge misfortune from them and the community. Through the *mis* ritual elders from Pokot and neighboring ethnic groups make peace and seal it with an oath that will kill those who break it.

The centrality of cattle is emphasized in the rituals of this chapter and war, even more so than in the circumcision process, as the young men have now become cattle owners themselves. It is also emphasized in allusion to raiding the neighboring ethnic groups in many of the rituals in this chapter, and in the importance for men to strengthen their social position and respect through joint cattle ownerships. The more cattle a man has, the richer he is and has therefore a stronger social position. Both the age-sets and the *tilya*-system weave the Pokot society together across clan and family lines.

If the men live according to the laws of the tradition and in harmony with the gods and ancestors, they will in return enjoy their favor, i.e. wealth, many wives and children, health and long life, all of which increase their influence and respect.

In the next chapter I will describe three more rituals that establish a young man as an elder in the Pokot society, the wedding ritual, *kensyö*, the knitting, *nayat*, of the wedding ring, *ptirim* and explain its importance, and the *parpara* cleansing ritual that is conducted for a young couple when the wife becomes pregnant with their first child as a means to chase evil spirits away and to neutralize possible curses. Lastly I will describe the burial ritual, *kinto* or *so*.

7. THE MATURE MAN

My wife and I were enjoying the company of our guests late one night when neighbors knocked at our door asking me to take them to a hospital with a critically ill baby. As the hospital was far away and it was late, I asked our missionary neighbor, a nurse, to examine the child to evaluate the seriousness of the problem, but before she had reached so far, the child vomited and the mother did not understand that she should turn it facedown. Seeing what was happening the nurse ran to the mother, grabbed the child and turned it upside-down, wiped its face, sucked the respiratory channels free but the child had stopped breathing. Then she tried to revive it by giving it mouth-to-mouth emergency help. I ran to fetch my car and we went on my life's greatest roller coaster drive to the hospital. All the 35 km long way my colleague continued the reviving attempts. Reaching the hospital we rushed the child to the doctor on duty who, after examining it, declared it dead. We were shattered.

Life of the Pokot people is fragile and death ever imminent. The official health care system in the West Pokot district is underdeveloped and many patients never reach clinics or hospitals due to long distances, lack of roads, cars or money. Often they consult diviners and witchdoctors first to find the cause of the sickness. Some people decide too late to go to a hospital because they believe these institutions are unable to deal with the cause of their problems, which they believe are evil spirits, and thus perform cleansing rituals first and try their traditional medicine. It is not until they realize that all this has failed that they visit a clinic or a hospital, often as a last resort, which is unfortunately sometimes too late.

Having one of the few cars in the community, I took very many patients to clinics and hospitals during the years I lived in Pokot. One of them was a neighbor, a very likable young man, who had often worked for me as a manual worker. One morning he was brought to my home in a serious condition after taking too strong dose of herbal medicine people use against malaria and several other diseases, which healing effect is to cause serious vomiting. He was rushed to the hospital but his life could unfortunately not be saved. At a family meeting after the funeral it was decided that one of his brothers would inherit his wife and children, in accordance with the Pokot tradition, in order to provide them with social and material security.

As I have described in the previous chapters, people are constantly taking measures to secure their existence by trying to follow the prescriptions of the tradition and not to anger the gods and ancestral spirits. Thus, rituals of blessings are much sought after by men and are, as has already been described, an important part of both the circumcision and the *sapana* rituals. There are various versions of it, performed in different settings in an attempt to solve many kinds of problems and strengthening the lives of its beneficiaries.

This chapter begins with a description of different versions of this ritual used in various settings, followed by marriage rituals and matters connected to them, and a description of the cleansing ritual *parpara*, which is performed for young couples when the wives have become pregnant with their first child, in order to protect them and the baby from curses and the consequences of sins of the couples' clan members that may complicate childbirth. Bride wealth is also an important means to transact wealth and establish joined cattle ownership, *tilya*. Finally there is an account of the burial rituals, *tisö*, *ndip* and *kinto* or *so*.

7.1 Rituals of blessing, *kisoyonöt*

As pointed out earlier, the most important purpose of the African traditional religions in general, and the Pokot religion in particular, is to strengthen and sustain life and hold evil at bay. It is an integral part of all spheres of life (Mbiti 1969:1; Ray 1976:17). There are specific rituals of blessing in the Pokot religion and several versions of the *kisoyonöt* ritual, which is, as we have already seen, a part of both the circumcision process (2.5.18 The coming out ceremony, *kipuno*), and the *sapana* initiation ritual (6.4 The *sapana* initiation ritual). I will now describe different versions of this ritual, which are used to put an end to misfortune in various forms, such as poverty of domestic animals and inability to have children. All the versions of the ritual are, however, prayers to the gods, the ancestral spirits and the creation as a whole for success according to the Pokot standard.

A man who has been sick for many years can summon the elders of the community to his home to spear a bull and perform a ritual of blessing, but other people may attend it as well. People believe that *Tororot*, who may have been angered and as a result punished the man, will be glad to participate in a meal and consume his share of the slaughtered animal in the form of the sweet smelling smoke when the meat is roasted and forgive him. This ritual can also be performed on behalf of a man

whose wife has not been able to give birth to sons or if he wants to have many children and domestic animals. The ritual is believed to bring the best results if a witchdoctor, *kapolokion*, performs it because he has power both to bless and curse but the prophet, *werkoyon*, is also good because he is believed to have access to the power of *Ilat*.

Newly circumcised boys, *tiyoi*, still in the circumcision process, sometimes perform one version of this ritual during the seclusion period, when they have reached the stage of being allowed to leave the initiation camp during the day, because their prayers are believed to be especially powerful. A man may ask the elders to bring them to his home at night if he has had problems for a long time, such as prolonged poverty, a barren wife, or has lost many children or domestic animals. He slaughters a bull and the boys sing songs of blessings, among them *Pelyon*, from the initiation period, which is also sung in many other rituals and contexts (cf. 5.2.12 The songs of the initiation period and their most important themes). The following phrases are from that song:

***Pelyon*, elephant**

Soloist: *Ooh, ooh, ooh, yata orenyo pelyon*

Ooh, ooh, ooh, open our path, elephant

All: *Ooh, oo, yata orenyo pelyon, yata kirotu tuka (x 2)*

Ooh, oo, open the path elephant, open it so that the cows may enter (x 2)

This song can be sung in long versions and the soloist improvises the text a lot. It is a prayer to *Tororot* that he may open the gate of the cattle kraal in order to enlarge the cattle herd. According to an informant, people believe that *Tororot*, who is big, is more inclined to answer the prayers of an elephant, the largest animal on dry land, than the prayers of smaller creatures such as the humans.

The initiates sing most of the night.

In another version of the ritual, all the people, men, women and children are asked to fetch stones and bring them to the home where the problem is, singing this song, *Pelyon*, as they go around the main house and the elders bless the man who asked for the ritual, believing that he will now become rich, i.e. the stones denote the animals he will acquire. I witnessed this ritual when initiates sang for one of my neighbors in Kongelai, a man who was said to be rich but wanted to become richer

and enjoy success in politics, but also good health, fertility and the favor of *Tororot*. He slaughtered a camel, a much more valuable animal than a bull.

A version of the ritual, similar to that performed during *sapana*, can also be used against sicknesses. An elder leading the men in the prayer holds the spear, which was used to slaughter the bull for this ritual, with an open blade, indicating that the elders have a weapon to spear the problem, or evil forces threatening life. The color of the sacrificial animal does not matter. The elder also holds a branch of the evergreen *cheptuya* tree, smeared with chyme, *aghian*, from the stomach of the slaughtered bull. As before, the *cheptuya* tree is a symbol of life, strength and fertility, but the chyme is believed to cleanse all evil away. He spits on the branch as in *sapana*, takes it to all the elders in the *kirket* who spit on it in turn and do in that way bless the man for whom the ritual is conducted. The leader waves the branch as he leads the elders in a prayer, facing Mt. Mtelo, thanking *Tororot* for creating the cows and summons the creation, and the ancestral spirits to give them opportunity to pray this prayer.

The leader:

*Kutishot nko tikwın lowır cho sopchot, kaparı ye chich
tetany nyo tuwu, wolo nyu kuyoki anta kwighan pich lapay lo mukisyot.*

The whole creation and bald elders, we know that this man has speared his black bull and we believe that this problem will finish.

The elders:

Mukisyot, mukisyot, mukisyot, owoy, owoy

It will be possible, possible, possible, yes, yes

The leader:

Tany ompö paraku porı nyo yee kighonecha lowır lokosop nyinte yee

A bull without blemish has now been killed because of this problem and we all believe this man has recovered.

The elders:

Kisop, kisop, kisop

Recover, recover, recover.

The leader:

*Nyo tokonyoteghi chete kesus chichete, kemwo ghecho lö kamwata yee kisön pö
tany.*

If evil spirits or sins have caused this sickness, we believe we have washed it

with the blood of the cow.

The elders:

Kamwata kisön, kamwata kisön, kamwata kisön

Washed in the blood, washed in the blood, washed in the blood

The leader:

Wolo tökisuusut anta syolut, anta pönut, keponecha yee ompö owesyo poyi lö imeyi yee.

If the problem is caused by quarrelling, or sorcery, we curse it by the power of the elders so that he may die.

The elders:

Ye, ye, kima, kima, kima lö pur, pur, pur

Now, now, die, die, die, bend, bend, bend.

(They stress their point by lying down as if they were dead, symbolizing that if the man has been bewitched, the witchdoctor will die.)

The leader:

Ompö lowir kemwoghocha lö kosop ye chich ompö ye nyoman

After everything we have said we strongly believe that this man has now recovered.

The elders:

Kisop, kisop, kisop

Recover, recover, recover.

The leader:

Somewononi keet towonyenyu kukwonto chane akiyon kutagh okumpo tagh wala reyitoy asis.

The trees and the wind have now carried the problem away from this man and let us curse it so that it will go down with the sun.

Then all the elders stand up and run a short distance, as if chasing the problem physically away from the sick person, and return. Finally, before the sick man can go home, all the elders bless him by spitting on the open palms of his hands and sprinkle him with blood and chyme. As explained before, the spittle is a sign of blessing and the man will not wash himself for two days in order not to wash away the blessing. When he comes home he attaches the branch of the *cheptuya* tree, which the leader used in

the ritual, to the top of the main pillar of his house, under the roof, and leaves it there as long as he lives to make sure the blessings remain in the house.

This ritual can also be performed with beer only if a bull is not available but that version is believed not to be as powerful.

The various versions of the ritual of blessing reveal clearly many fundamental male values, such as their longing for long life, health, wealth in the form of many domestic animals, and wives who will give birth to many children, that will carry on their life as well as their names, and give birth to grandchildren to whom they can attach themselves as guardian spirits, *onyötoy*. All this will give them respect in the community.

7.2 Marriage, *kensyö*

Young men have not established themselves as mature men until they have married. Marriage among the Pokot people is a covenant between two clans and through it their blood is mixed in the union of the couple. It is therefore a serious matter. It is believed that the consequences of past sins, especially enmities between members of the two clans, all kinds of curses, e.g. broken taboos, may affect the couple's health and fertility. Excessive bleeding during circumcision or female sexual mutilation is said to be an indication of that (cf. Visser 1989:185). It is very important that people maintain a good relationship with members of the other Pokot clans, as most of them are exogamous and men cannot marry into a clan if some of their clans' people have committed serious crimes against people of the clan they intend to establish a marriage relationship with.

The marriage covenant is based on an economic transaction, the bride-wealth, which is a payment for the use of the reproductive powers of the bride, and is not fully sealed until a child has been born (cf. Comaroff 1980). A childless marriage is not complete and the wife may be returned to her parents and the bride-wealth reclaimed, if she is barren. Some husbands decide, however, not to claim this right. On the other hand, the more children a woman has, especially sons, the better wife she is. If a wife's first three children are girls her husband can take another wife, hoping she will give him sons, because, as I described in 4.3.1.1 (Guardian and evil spirits) his life continues in his sons, and without a son he has no hope of becoming a part of the group of the living-dead ancestral spirits as a guardian spirit, *onyöt*. A man who has

sons can continue to participate actively in the life of his family as an ancestral spirit (cf. 4.3 Spirits).

A woman is regarded an economic asset, producer of wealth, in a similar way as the female, domestic animals. This economic nature of the Pokot marriage reflects one of the fundamental male values, which is to acquire as many domestic animals as possible. The *tilya*-system encourages polygamy because it enables a man to acquire many cattle and to establish new *tilya*-relationships through every new marriage. When men marry their daughters they redistribute the bride wealth through the *tilya* system and strengthen in that way their powerbase in the society. A married woman is addressed, *pö tich*, of cows, which reflects how her identity is related to cattle, as the name is derived from her bride wealth. Through the marriage agreement and the bride-wealth, the economies of the two families and clans become entwined.

According to the tradition, young women used to be married when they had finished the initiation process, so that when a girl had completed the coming out ceremony, *kipuno*, she went directly to her new husband's home as his wife, often without any prior knowledge of the arrangement their parents had made. This has changed in many places in West Pokot in recent years due to the introduction of modern education system and pressure from the government to allow girls to complete primary school before marrying. As a result, marriages of many girls have been postponed, but the traditional way of arranging marriage around the time of circumcision is still widely practiced, especially in remote areas as in some places in Cheptulel. I witnessed this when a neighboring girl in Kongelai was given away as a bride when she completed the circumcision process.

Young men are allowed to marry when they have completed the circumcision initiation process, *ngokoi nko musar* and the *poro* rituals. It is, however, regarded highly preferable, although it is optional among the agriculturalists, that they complete *sapana* first because it allows them to knit the Pokot wedding ring, *ptirim*, on the brides' forearm, which is believed to strengthen the foundation of their marriages considerably.

All young people are expected to marry and those who delay it longer than normal are regarded as unproductive and wasting their lives. They do not follow the norms of the Pokot tradition and economy, and are mocked and even despised on several occasions, such as at the coming out ceremony, *kipuno*, of circumcision (cf. 5.2.18 The coming-out ceremony, *kipuno*). People who have not given birth to

children are usually not buried properly but dragged to the forest with a liana plant, which is tied around their feet. They will be unable to participate in the life of their families after death as good ancestral spirits *oy cho karamach*, because they have no progeny to attach themselves to as *onyötoy* (cf. 4.3.1.1 Guardian and evil spirits).

When a young man wants to marry, he and his family take the initiative to contact the family of a suitable girl. A young woman cannot take such an initiative. There are three ways to acquire a wife. Through negotiations, *keter*, between the families of the young couple, which is the ordinary way, by taking the young woman by force, *kisitit*, and finally through elopement, *kipunot*, when the young couple decide to run away. The two latter methods are normally used when marriage negotiations have failed. The capturing is sometimes done with the consent of the girl and elopement is often caused by the poverty of the young man, when his parents refuse to give him a dowry, or when the girl's parents refuse to give him their daughter, sometimes expressing it by demanding an unfairly high bride-wealth. Often the couple go to a far away place to live with one of the young man's relatives until the girl becomes pregnant, then they return to his home. In both cases the young man is obliged to start negotiations with the girl's family when she has reached his home, whether he has captured her or they have eloped (see Meyerhoff 1981:41-42). Sometimes the bride wealth is considerably higher after elopement as a form of punishment. This method to acquire a wife is not recommended by the society because it prevents the parents from choosing a suitable clan and family for their children to make sure their relationship is harmonious, *kuyogh*.

A man can acquire a wife in the fourth way, through inheritance, *mila*, when a brother or a close relative dies prematurely. Because the widow is regarded as the property of the clan, which has been paid for by the dowry, it is the responsibility of the family to provide for her and her children and give them security, because a woman can not live on her own in the Pokot society. She does not own property herself, as both land and almost all domestic animals belong to the men and the wives only have the right to utilize them for their families, not to own them nor sell them (cf. Meyerhoff 1981:75). A fat bull is speared before they start living together in order to perform a ritual of blessing for them and to cleanse them from evil and curses.

Before a young man can propose to the family of a girl, he brews beer and summons some of the elders of his clan to ask them into which clans he should marry. When a suitable one has been chosen, he approaches the parents of the girl he sees

fitting and gives them some beer. If they accept it, the parents of the young couple will set a day to meet and start marriage negotiations.

The background, *kapkoyo*, of the couple must be checked before marriage can be established. They must not be too closely related, it must be made certain that previous marriages between these clans have been harmonious and prosperous, and that there are no taboos resulting from a murder or other serious crimes preventing these two clans from establishing a new marriage relationship. When no hindrances of that sort are found, the clans are said to be *kuyogh*. Several meetings may be required before people reach an agreement about the size of the bride-wealth.

There are many kinds of taboos and rules to be aware of during the negotiation process itself. The suitor's people bring beer to the meetings. If a calabash with beer falls down and cracks during the negotiations they should be stopped, because people believe that the girl will die young or all her children if the couple marries. If the suitor still insists on marrying her he will not be able to beget children during his lifetime and will be unsuccessful in everything he does, live in poverty and his animals will die when the young woman moves to his home as his wife. A child should not sneeze in the house where the marriage negotiations take place, in which case they should be aborted. The negotiations will also be aborted if a woodpecker, *tiltil*, sings in the presence of the negotiators, because it is believed to result in abortions, complications during childbirth, or the death of their babies. Normally marriage negotiations do, for these reasons, take place at night when children are sleeping and no birds flying.

The bride-wealth can vary from three to more than ten cows among the agriculturalists but is considerably higher among the pastoralists, even up to 60. Goats can be paid for some of them. In addition to the parents, paternal uncles usually contribute cattle for the first wife and even paternal aunts, mother's brothers, and both grandmothers. The relatives do normally not contribute cattle for additional wives. Many *tilya*-relationships, and cattle acquired through raids, help a man to gather enough cattle to take a new wife, especially among the pastoralists, but a bumper harvest often helps to boost a man's wealth among the agriculturalists. Usually an agriculturalist acquires new land before he adds a wife because men try to keep a good distance between their wives in order to maintain peace. The bride-wealth for a divorced woman is lower than for one who has not been married before and the price diminishes with each child a woman has from former relationships (see Schneider

1953:240; Visser 1989:67; Håkansson 1990). When the size of the bride-wealth has been agreed upon the marriage can take place. As explained in 6.6 (Joined cattle ownership, *tilya*) the father of the bride retains only a fraction of the bride wealth. The rest goes to his brothers, relatives and friends and become a part of his *tilya* relationships.

If a divorce occurs the family of the bridegroom can reclaim the bride wealth but the men who have received their share of it are very reluctant to return their animals and thus there is a very strong resistance against it in the family of the bride.

Young men from the bridegroom's age-set bring honey beer, *kumpa moghen*, to the girl's home every evening for three days from the time marriage negotiations have been completed until she is given to her new husband, as a reminder of the coming event. The leader of the group carries honey beer in a calabash, called *kumpa mwatutagh*, the beer of information or proclamation, but the others in the group carry beer in 20-liter jerry cans. When the group reaches the young woman's home the man with the calabash enters the house first and removes the bundle of leaves closing it and puts it by the fireplace. The leaves are said to symbolize the young woman's future children. Then an elder takes the calabash and pours a little bit of beer from it around the fireplace for the ancestral spirits, saying:

Aman atighech poyich

Eat and guide us

Nyengwa manta nyinte akonu kison cho karamach

This is your child, therefore, give us good health

Ama montangwo poyich atighech ompö oi cho ghach

Eat your child¹²⁰ you elders and guide us from evil spirits.

Then the beer in the jerry cans, called *saritin*, share, is distributed between the people present, first to those whose daughters have already been married, then to the people of the girl's clan and others who are present.

There is hardly any wedding ceremony the night when the bridegroom fetches his bride, but he must make sure to bring the first installment of the dowry agreed upon for this occasion, so that she will be given to him. The animals must be without

¹²⁰ Eat your child means, you, the ancestral spirits, get this food (i.e. the beer) because of your child, i.e. the girl.

any blemish, not be blind in one eye, stunted, lack teeth etc., because it is believed that it may affect the bride's future children, who might have the same blemishes.

According to Meyerhoff, the bridegroom should bring a bull to his father-in-law and a milking cow with a calf for his mother-in-law. The next installment should be after the first child is born and before the wife becomes pregnant with her second child. The rest of the bride wealth will be paid in the coming years but payments come to an end when two-thirds of the agreed dowry has been paid (Meyerhoff 1981:54). I knew of a few examples where the father of a young wife returned her home because her husband had delayed unduly to pay the installments the families had agreed upon. Usually this made him pay quickly what was due.

When the girl's family has checked the animals and made sure they are without a blemish, the girl is released to go with the bridegroom. When she is ready her parents come out of their house and the father calls her by name indicating that she is to come out. When she has emerged out of the house, he pours cow or goat milk on her head from a *roryon* animal, i.e. whose firstborn calf is still alive, saying: „My dear daughter, I have given you to these people, go and if you see that they walk when they eat, do as they do.“¹²¹ These words stress the importance of adapting to the habits of her bridegroom's family so that she can live with them in peace and harmony. The reason for using milk from a *roryon* animal is the belief that the animal has not been cursed, because it has not lost any progeny. This is a way of blessing the girl, wishing that she will live without curses in the same way as the animal and not lose any of her children. The white color of the milk is important, as the color of life and peace. If the bride does not follow her father's advice, it is said that her life will not be blessed with many children and she will be poor, especially of cattle. The goal of the bride's life is to live up to the male ideal, to have many children, adapt to the way of life of the bridegroom's family, and be subordinate to him. Such a wife is considered a good wife and enjoys respect.

The people, accompanying the bridegroom on this occasion, mostly young people, have applied white clay to their faces. They dance and drink beer at the girl's home before departing to escort the couple to the bridegroom's home. The group does not walk on the way, but runs slowly all the way shouting *hukuk! hukuk! hukuk!* When the group crosses rivers, brooks or rifts in the landscape, the bride is anointed

¹²¹ In another version of the ritual from Sok the father says: „Go and live in peace. If the people eat standing, then you do as they do.“

with ram's oil and milk in order to keep angry ancestral spirits away from her, because they might not like it that she is leaving her home area. As the journey continues and she enters new territories, other spirits might affect her as well, thus the escort continues to anoint her as they pass new landmarks in order to appease them, because the oil and milk is good food, pacifying the spirits and thus preventing them from doing her any harm.

Several times the bride stops and refuses to go any further until she has been promised an animal. Before reaching the destination she may have been promised several animals most of which or none will ever be given to her. When the group reaches the groom's home, the young people continue to drink beer and they will sleep there until the next morning. If the beer is finished they slaughter a goat and eat it with ugali, *pan*. The couple sleep in their own house.

This is a fully valuable wedding, but as mentioned above, the men who have gone through *sapana* can tie a wedding ring, *ptirim*, on the right forearm of their wives when they bring them home, but that is considered to strengthen their marriages considerably, as already mentioned. I will now describe how it is done.

7.2.1 *Nayat*, to tie on the wedding ring, *ptirim*¹²²

The people of the bridegroom's family welcome the bride warmly and introduce her to the people of the home and even to the animals, and the neighbors.

Three days later the groom's family invite the neighbors to come early in the morning when the sun is still low in the sky and the cows are still in the kraal, *pen*, to be present when the wedding ring or bracelet, *ptirim*, is tied on the bride's right wrist. According to one informant, the word *ptirim* means to prevent. A bull is slaughtered for the occasion to provide a hide, *angwa*, for the ring. It must be from a bull, not a female cow, representing the husband and his maleness, which is the over-bull of the family, the generator of its life. The hide must not be from an animal that has died from a disease, only from a slaughtered animal. People believe the bride will not die from any disease until old age, if this rule is followed.

All hair is shaved off the hide. The bride sits on the ground with a boy on her right hand side and a girl to her left, symbolizing the hope that she will have both sons

¹²² The following description of *nayat* is from the mountainous Sok as one of my research assistants acquired a good description of this ritual from that area but I did not succeed in obtaining it from Cheptulel. I believe the way *nayat* is performed in Cheptulel does not differ very much from this version.

and daughters. All of them face Mt. Mtelo, which is a form of prayer to *Tororot* that he may bless the bride. In Visser's version of the tying on of the wedding ring in Orwa, the bride sits on the bull's hide (1989:174).

An old woman who ties the wedding bracelet on the bride's arm must have such a ring herself, all her children must be alive and she must not have given birth to twins, which is an expression of the wish that the bride may not lose her future children and that they may be healthy. This woman should also be a good peacemaker, not quarrelsome because such people arouse other people's anger and are sometimes cursed, which can lead to great misfortune for their family, as a result.

The people present knit knots on the wedding ring in turns. The bridegroom's father is first and when he has finished he promises to give the bride a cow. From now on her parents-in-law will start calling her *pö tich*, of cows, a respectful address, which means that she now belongs to her husband due to the cattle from the dowry, as previously mentioned. The mother-in-law ties the next knot promising to give her a cow, which has calved recently and is thus milking. As more of the groom's relatives tie their knots on the ring, the bride stops them, preventing them from continuing until they have promised to give her animals, goats or sheep. The husband finalizes the knitting to emphasize that the wife belongs only to him. It is declared in this ceremony that should the wife break the marriage covenant by committing adultery the result will be *alomi*, a curse, which may lead her and her children to death, one after the other, and her husband and co-wives. It is believed that the curse can even spread to the domestic animals unless she discloses the culprit and what has happened between them, so that the elders can find a proper remedy, which is the *mwata* cleansing ritual. The word *mwata* means wash and is derived from the verb *ke-mwa*, to wash. There is a description of this ritual in Appendix 2 (Various rituals, no. 13).

The bride should mark the animals of the family herd, which people promise her during the knitting ceremony, with cow dung. She smears their right hand side with her right hand, because right is a symbol of peace and blessing. When the knitting has been completed the neighbors give gifts to her, such as bracelets, earrings and gourds. Then they bring symbolic gifts expressing their good wishes for the couple, such as milk, millet, honey, honey beer, and cow dung and advise them about married life. This act of giving is a kind of a blessing ceremony. It is very difficult to remove the wedding ring when the hide has dried, symbolizing that the marriage is supposed to last the rest of her life.



Picture 30. The wedding ring, *ptirim*.

Milk from clean, *roryon*, animals, which is an expression of good wishes for the bride, is poured over the *ptirim* and the head and chest of the groom. It is an anointing of blessing, a wish that the couple may have many children and animals and drink milk regularly. The white color of the milk symbolizes, as before, life and peace. The milk is in a calabash, which symbolizes the milking of the future cows and feeding of the future children. The calabash should be in good condition, not having cracks or been repaired; because people believe any faults might affect the wife and her children. A repaired calabash is a symbol of abuse. Honey is smeared around the wedding ring and the bride is given a little bit to taste. It is used in other contexts to bless people, e.g. in the *masyan* (cf. 6.5.4 The *masyan cleansing ritual*) and *mwata* (Appendix 2, ritual no. 13) cleansing rituals. Honey is always used with positive purposes. As the sweetest food the Pokot people know of, it is an expression of the wish that the couple's life might be as sweet as honey. Cow dung, *sikön*, is rubbed on

the bride's forearm above the *ptirim* symbolizing life's difficulties because problems will come and it is important that the couple overcome them with patience. It symbolizes also the wife's daily duty to clean the kraal, *pigh*. Some honey beer, *kumpa keet*, is spit at the armpits of the young couple and in the direction of the sun as a wish that they may enjoy its blessing and as a prayer that they be spared calamities. This libation does also pacify the ancestral spirits, which in this way get their share of the food. From now on the young couple is permitted to brew and serve beer to the elders in their home. Some millet, *matay*, is strewn over the ring, and the bride and the children beside her are also given some to chew as a wish that she may always have plenty of food. This type of corn does not easily spoil and is a symbol of strength and endurance, and people hope that she will also be strong, especially after childbirth and enjoy a long life. Net grass, which grows above the surface of the ground and spreads very fast, is tied around the *ptirim* as a wish that the bride will have a family, which will grow and spread as the net grass. This type of grass is also a symbol of peace, because of the color green.

The people attending the ritual consume the meat of the bull slaughtered for this occasion. It is roasted to include *Tororot* into the meal and to make him pleased so that he may bless the newlywed couple.

In the evening the couple sleep in the house of the bridegroom's mother, who sleeps somewhere else, because the mother and mothers in general are believed to be the foundation of life. Some people believe that the new wife must also live in the same house as the animals, because they are a blessing. This way of living has been changing in recent years as new and improved houses are being built and the animals live in separate houses in many places, but the old way of living is still followed in remote areas in the Cheptulel Mountains.

All the symbolic gifts and acts that have been described in connection with the tying on of the wedding ring, reveal once again how thoroughly magic permeates all thinking of the Pokot people.

The word *ptirim*, which could be translated hindrance, indicates the thinking behind the ceremony of *nayat*, i.e. to prevent marriage divorce, *kitiakat*. Divorce, among people where the wife has been given a *ptirim* is not common and is usually due to barrenness or accusations of witchcraft, *ponu*. As the animals of the dowry have been widely distributed among relatives, there is a great reluctance to return them at divorce. The word *kitiakat*, divorce, means literally to open or break, denoting

the removal of the *ptirim* from the hand of a woman and it must be approved in *kokwo* (see Meyerhoff 1981:64).

According to the magical worldview of the Pokot people evil spirits and broken taboos are a constant threat, especially to vulnerable people, pregnant women and babies. For that reason the *parpara* ritual is performed to protect a wife who has become pregnant with her first child.

7.3 *Parpara*, a cleansing ritual for newlyweds

The *parpara* ritual is conducted to cleanse a newlywed couple from possible misfortune that might be caused by past sins of their clans' people, when the wife has become pregnant with her first child in order to protect her and the baby during the delivery. It lasts for two days and takes place at the couple's home. The name is derived from the verb *ke-parpar*, to stir or rub and describes an important part of the ritual as will be described below.

In the morning of the first day the father of the young husband requesting the ritual, takes honey beer to his father's grave (the young man's grandfather) in the cattle kraal and pours it down, asking the spirit of the old man to bless the couple and the whole family, to help them and to keep calamities away. If the young husband's father is dead, an uncle or an older brother can do it.

At noon, two long branches, one from a *törokwö* tree and another from a *yemöt* tree, are placed inside the couple's house. They are drawn from the outside, through a hole which has been made in the wall above the entrance, down to the floor on the inside but are long enough so they stand out of the hole on the outside. Then people sing songs, praising the couple's forefathers. A branch of the *sinönyion* climbing plant, which has white milk-like zap, and a branch of the *tuwöt* tree are also inserted from outside into the hole above the door.

All these plants are symbols of life. As already noted in many rituals the *törokwö*, *yemöt* and *tuwöt* are evergreen trees symbolic of life and longevity. They are strong and become very old, and by using those people express their wish that the young couple may stand firm in all conditions of life as they have. The *törokwö* tree has a very pleasant smell, but new leaves grow on the *tuwöt* tree when others wither and fall off and by using it people wish the young couple will be fertile and ever fresh as the tree. The *yemöt* tree endures drought and cold very well and by using it people wish that the couple may also endure in times of difficulties. The *sinönyion* climbing

plant has white sap, which is a clear allusion to milk, the healthiest drink in the world in the minds of the Pokot people, a wish that they may always have enough of it. White tree zap is usually called milk, *chö*, in the Pokot language. The white color symbolizes life and peace.

At this point, i.e. at noon, the first guests arrive, mothers breastfeeding their children bringing gifts, maize, millet or sorghum symbolizing abundant life where food is not lacking. They are served beer before they return home.

The guests who participate in the main ritual will arrive in the afternoon. They are greeted with beer outside the home's compound and the people from the young wife's clan, *kapikoi*, are given white clay mixed with water, *munyan*, to apply to their faces to identify them but the symbolic meaning of the color is also very important, denoting that they come with peace and wish that the young couple may also enjoy peace. They are given more beer in the main house when they enter the couple's home. The people from the young man's clan, *kamama*, are given beer in another house of the home, called *kumpa möt*, which means literally the beer of the head.¹²³ Women bring the same kind of gifts as earlier that day. Ordinary people are also given beer when they arrive and they gather outside the house.

The young wife's mother slaughters a big he-goat for the occasion, cooks it at her home and brings the meat to the couple's home, keeping it in the grain store or in the loft of the couple's main house, if there is a loft there, making sure no one takes it, because she is going to serve it to the young couple and the husband's best friends of his age-set. After the meal, the young husband leads his parents-in-law where he has hidden beer for them, e.g. in the forest, so that they can drink it or save some of it until later.

When they return the real *parpara* ritual can start. It takes place in the main house of the young couple's home. The guests sit on the floor surrounding the leader, *parparin*, a ritually clean elder, who has undergone this ritual himself and knows the history of the two clans represented at this occasion. He stirs water in a wooden trough, *otupö*, into which clay from an anthill has been poured, as it is believed to be clean of curses, as I explained in 5.2.6 (The circumcision operation, *mutat*). The people spit every now and then into the trough to bless the couple, as the leader continues to stir the mixture, using a branch with three or four thorns, leading the

¹²³ The reason the beer is called *kumpa möt* is that in a certain *tisö* ritual these people are given the head of the goat slaughtered for that occasion (cf. Appendix 2, ritual no. 3).

people in songs about the history of the couple's clans, mentioning their members' and the couple's actual and plausible sins as well. This confession of sins takes place in the presence of the ancestors of the founders of both clans, who are believed to be present. The leader also chews a *moikut* plant and spits its juice into the mixture and the husband throws glowing charcoal into it as well.

Roots of the *moikut* plant are chewed in one of the three *tisö* rituals performed on behalf of women who have given birth to twins; who have become pregnant before completing four menstrual periods, or have had abnormal deliveries. The ritual is called *moikut* and the sap of its root is spit all over the women's bodies in the ritual. Spitting is an act of blessing. Women chew *moikut* leaves when girls have completed the *punyon* ritual and spit the juice on the girls' chests saying, „*Anyin, anyin, anyin*, sweet, sweet, sweet,“ but these words are used in most cleansing rituals when people are being cleansed from curses in order to chase evil spirits away. *Moikut* is the most common plant among the Pokot people used as preventive medicine against diseases (Nyamwaya 1982:68-69).¹²⁴ The glowing charcoal thrown into the trough has the purpose to strengthen the effects of the mixture. Slowly a strong cleansing mixture is being created.

It is very important in this session of confession, that the wife reveals the names of all her lovers to make sure her delivery will be smooth, otherwise, people believe it may be difficult. Between the songs of confession an elder, called a blesser, *kisoyonin*, blesses the couple every now and then and the wife's mother takes clay from the trough and smears her daughter's breasts.

I know several women who have been asked by the elders of their husband's families to reveal the names of their secret lovers during difficult deliveries. It was hard for people to believe that their problems were only physical.

As the *parparin* stirs the trough, scum forms on the surface and several bubbles. One big bubble, staying in the middle, is regarded very important, because it is believed that it is an auspicious sign if it stays without bursting, indicating that the couple will not have problems with childbirth nor need any help during deliveries. The bubble seems to symbolize the pregnancy and the amnion of the child. Visser (1989:186, 280) has recorded the words of the following songs sung at *parpara*:

¹²⁴ According to Nyamwaya, the Pokot people believe that the body needs to be strengthened in order to prevent sickness. The head of a household prepares a mixture of over ten different plants in a session called *ighat* during which people drink a lot of goats' soup also believed to strengthen the body (Nyamwaya 1982:68-69).

Tomö sïwaw, ay
If not a wasp,¹²⁵ yes
Ay, ay parpar kikïparpar
Yes, yes, rubbing, were rubbed
Pich lapay, tomö sïwawin
All people, if not the wasp
Alany saina wey
I climb at the *saina*¹²⁶
Alany kitökony
I climb the basin
Ay, ay
Yes, yes

*Sïwena ye morïn ye chopö oyu konyisyök*¹²⁷
See, friend, the hand of the past
Kapörchï. Kapörchï, asis
It was killed. It was killed, oh sun
Morïn nyo Kapeytuy nyo Kachepkay
The hand of Kapeytuy and Kachepkay
Chokïgh ne lelut
Committed sin
Kilikwine ye? Kilikwi
What happens now? Happens
Kakenyoro Kamuket nko Kamoytyony
We have united Kamuket and Kamoytiony
Kakeghomitö ye chopö konyisyök
They of the past are put together.

Kelenchinö parpara, pat ikaramiti
We tell *parpara*, just be good

¹²⁵ The wasp, *sïwaw*, symbolizes the seeds that made the woman sleepy as stinging wasps can do. This is a clear allusion to the sexual act when she became pregnant.

¹²⁶ *Saina*. According to Visser, some clans have a restricted area in their house for pregnant women (1989:186).

¹²⁷ Meyers originally recorded the words of this song (cf. Visser 1989:186). I have slightly modified the translation, corrected the spelling and the orthography.

Kelenchinö, pat itiliti, kelenchinö
We tell, be just pure, we tell
Pat ne karam, tilil, wow
Just be good, pure, great
Söpon pat wow
Healthy, just great
Wow söpon pat wow karam pat kokay
Abundant life, great goodness forever

Ye ompö poy, ye ompö kokony
Ye from old men, ye from old women
Ye söpon, ye nyo kiyöröy
Ye life, ye we look for
Ye kiyöronyo ye Tororot
Ye we look for Tororot
Ye nyoni ye nyo kiyiyech ye könyisyok ye
Ye he is the one who gave birth to us long time ago ye
Akikonech ye kokay ye akikonech
And gave us *ye* forever *ye* and gave us
Ye nekö ye moning ye lapay ye aya o
Ye goats ye children ye everything ye o
Kalenchinö, pat ikaramiti, itiliti
We tell, just be good, be pure.
Sörö, sörö, sörö
Thanks, thanks, thanks.

The singing of confession continues until the next morning when the *parparin* smears the entire bodies of the couple with the mixture from the trough in order to cleanse them from all consequences of the sins confessed during the night. Then the people form two circles in the house around the young couple, who sit in the middle, covered with goatskin from the shoulders down. The women form the inner circle but the men the outer. Both groups sing two songs from their circumcision time, each singing different songs but simultaneously, the women's circle rotating four times during every song but the men stand still. When the songs come to an end the big

wooden trough is placed between the legs of the young wife who pours the content to the floor, symbolizing the outpouring of embryol fluid, *ptaimöt*, and the birth of a child. After that, all the people in the house start crying like babies, the women saying, „a girl“ and the men, „a boy.“ Then the blesser, *kisoynin*, blesses the couple and the ritual comes to an end when the people leave the house singing the song *Pelyon*, spitting towards the sun an act of blessing (see Visser 1989:188), receiving blessings from the rising sun.¹²⁸ People believe that the child will now be born without complications.

After *parpara* there are no obligatory rituals in the life of Pokot men unless they go through the wedding rituals, *nayat*, and *parpara* again if they add more wives. There are cleansing rituals every now and then, and they may decide to go through some optional ones, e.g. if they want to become witchdoctors, *kapoloki*, but no other obligatory rituals mark their way towards becoming mature men. I will, therefore, end my description of rituals with the burial rituals, *kinto* or *so*, which are performed on behalf of men who have raised children.

7.4 The burial ritual, *kinto* or *so*

The Pokot people abhor death and believe evil spirits, *oy cho ghach*, or angry guardian spirits, *onyötoy cho ghach*, most often cause it, as I explained in 4.3.1.1 (Guardian and evil spirits). The burial rituals reveal people's fear that evil spirits may possibly affect them and draw them to death also. There is, however, room for death from „natural“ causes as well among the Pokot people although the reason behind the natural cause may be spiritual or social, as Nyamwaya (1982 and 1987) has explained.

As explained in 4.3.2 (Life after death), no mourning ritual is performed when children or people who have not given birth to children die. In some areas, especially on the plains, their corpses, *müntirich*, are just left in the forest for the hyenas and vultures to devour. When people die who have children, especially old people, there is a four-day mourning period and at least three rituals, *tisö*, *ndip*, and *kinto*, must be performed in order to follow the prescriptions of the tradition. It is important that old people are properly buried as they may turn against their descendents as angry ancestral spirits and harm them if they are dissatisfied with their burial. If people have

¹²⁸ It is interesting to see the similarities between this ritual and the *tisö*-ritual called *kitunga*, which is the second of the three *tisö*-rituals, performed on behalf of women who have become pregnant before completing four menstrual periods, had abnormal deliveries, or have given birth to twins (cf. Appendix 2, ritual no. 3).

had prolonged problems, e.g. their children and animals have died and it is feared that the misfortune may spread to the relatives of the husband of a home, sometimes seers recommend that graves be opened a long time, even years, after a burial has taken place in order to bury the dead person again in a proper way. Wealth and status do affect how elaborate the rituals are.

Only a few people, i.e. the closest family, conduct the burial of the dead. Because West Pokot district is in the tropics, corpses are buried the same day as death occurs if it happens before noon but the next day if it occurs in the afternoon, because a burial always takes place in the afternoon in order to send curses and evil down with the setting sun. It cannot take place in the morning.

If an old man dies in his house, people make a hole in the wall, take the corpse out and close it afterwards to prevent the spirit of the diseased from returning to the house. According to the Pokot tradition, people must be buried naked as they were when they were born, and without any ornaments. It is important not to break this rule. The corpse is laid down on its right side in the grave with the feet folded up in the position of a fetus, and the head pointing towards Mt. Mtelo, resting on a stone. It is the duties of the youngest son, if the dead man had only one wife, to dig the grave in the kraal, lower the corpse into it, put it in the right position, and fill the grave with soil. Otherwise it is the duty of the oldest son of the second wife to do it if the man had more than one wife. The relatives present at the funeral throw soil on the corpse in the grave in order to cut the ties between them and the evil spirits believed to have caused the death. It is my experience that other sons often help with the digging and burying of the corpse. When the grave is filled with soil, the oldest son says:

Do good to us

Do not harm us

Make children to stand firm (Visser 1989:190).

It is a way of showing respect to old men to bury them in their cattle kraal so that they can continue to stay with their cattle and families.

After the burial, the path from the house to the grave is purified with ash, then a respected elder performs a *tīsō* cleansing ritual when a goat or a bull has been slaughtered, saying, as he smears some chyme on those who have touched the corpse: „*Anyin, anyin, anyin, sweet, sweet, sweet.*“ It seems to differ from one place to another how extensively chyme is applied to people. I witnessed in Chepareria that only a little bit was applied to the cheeks, forehead, hands and legs. When the

cleansing ritual is over, the meat of the slaughtered animal is boiled and eaten by the people who are present.

A man whose wife is pregnant cannot participate in the burying, because it is feared that the evil spirits that may have caused the death may also affect her and the baby. His shadow, and generally a shadow from a man who has touched a corpse, must not fall on her because it may harm her and the fetus. The first wife shaves her hair completely off but other close relatives shave a little bit.

After the funeral, there is a period of mourning for four days, during which the family of the deceased person stays at home mourning, and does not mix with other people in the community or work. They remove all their ornaments and the bells from their animals during that time. At the end of the third day, all of them shave their hair completely off, a symbolic act, showing that the former life has come to an end, but the growth of new hair symbolizes that new life is now starting. As explained in 5.2.20 (What has been completed, *wititagh*), four is a symbol of wholeness.

According to Visser, the cleansing ritual performed on behalf of the people who have been in contact with the corpse, is performed on the third day of the mourning period, not the first, when a black, red or brown goat is strangled and people smear its bone marrow on their bodies. Chyme is smeared all over the body of the youngest son who conducted the burial and all others who touched the corpse.¹²⁹ The meat is roasted and the bones burned to ashes (Visser 1989:190).

The *ndip*-ritual also takes place during the evening of the third day, which is a cleansing ritual that is performed when the belongings of the dead person are divided between the people of his family. People slaughter an ox by crushing his skull with a knobkerrie and cut its hide into many small strips, which they use to wrap or tie around the personal belongings of the deceased. If another brother inherits the dead man's wife or wives, a *ptirim* is tied on their forearms with strips from the ox hide. The belongings of the dead man are spread on the skin of a blameless cow or an ox and washed with cow or goat milk from animals, which have recently had their first offspring, and are said to be clean, *keltet*. Juice from the *moikut* plant may be added to the milk to increase the purifying effects. The animals join the family herds, usually of the sons (Visser 1989:191-192). The use of skin strips is similar as in the *masyan* cleansing ritual, which is performed on behalf of warriors who have killed enemies, as

¹²⁹ According to Visser (1989) the youngest son conducted the burial in Orwa. Usually it is the oldest son who does it, but the youngest son often buries his mother.

I described in 6.5.4 (The *masyan* cleansing ritual), and in the *putyon* ritual, which is performed when a prophet has received a divine prompting that famine or other misfortune may be coming (cf. Appendix 2, ritual no. 4).

The mourning period comes to an end with the *kinto*-ritual, also called *so*. The name *kinto* denotes the bull killed in the remembrance of the man, and *so*, which means a buffalo, emphasizes that the bull killed in the ritual is big. In the afternoon the dead man's oldest son stabs the bull with a spear of his father friend's. The carcass is divided between the people present in such a way that the paternal uncles get the three front ribs from one side of the bull, and the family of the deceased three from the other side. These ribs are considered important, not the others, maybe because they are biggest. When people have eaten the ribs the rest of the meat is divided between the women, brothers of the dead man and his family in such a way that widows get the intestines, the uncles and the mature men of the family get the liver, kidneys and the heart. The head and the back go to the uncles, and the family of the deceased gets all the four legs.

According to Visser, one of his paternal uncles, *kamama*, officiates in a cleansing ritual and "takes the right hind leg, [*amuro*, my addition] beats the soil saying: "If you [the dead one] died because of somebody, let him follow"" (1989:191). These words refer to a curse as a possible cause of death. After the ritual, the meat is roasted in the *kirket*, which this time faces west, the direction of the sunset. The hide and the bones are burned.

Then the paternal uncles gather all the people who are present and one of them conducts a ritual of blessing for the people and animals of the home, saying:

Sorö, sorö, anyin, anyin

Thanks, thanks, sweet, sweet

Tilil, tilil, kata, kata

Clean, clean, home, home [of the dead man]

Soyonote kata

Be blessed home

Apul, apul tuka kiaki

Multiply, multiply cows, animals

Tuka, nekö, kechire

Cows, goats, sheep.

With this, the *kinto* ritual comes to an end, and the people leave.

7.5 Summary

In this chapter I have described the last rituals that most men go through during their life span. Again, men use the rituals to combat evil forces.

Life is fragile and is threatened from many directions. The religion, and especially the rituals, is a means to combat the evil forces and strengthen life, as I have pointed out several times before. The so-called rituals of blessings is a group of rituals that are conducted with the purpose to bring an end to poverty, barrenness and other misfortune. Such a ritual is a part of the burial ritual *kinto* or *so* in order to summon all good forces to help the family of a deceased man to continue with its life when evil forces have been chased away. *Parpara* is another ritual used to combat evil forces and misfortune in the lives of newly wed couples, when the wives have become pregnant with their first child. The ritual and the accompanying confession is an attempt to eliminate bad consequences for the wives' inappropriate behavior with other men, but not the least past sins of other clans' people that may affect them, especially the mother and her child during the delivery. All these rituals reveal the unceasing struggle to maintain peace and harmony, *pöghishyö*, in the society and of humans and animals.

The importance, that men have a superior position towards women, especially their wives, and enjoy respect among the women and uncircumcised men, is emphasized in the *poro* ritual, during which they learn to curse in order to evoke fear, which results in submission. This is also an important part of *nayat*, the knitting ceremony when a husband finalizes the tying of the wedding ring, *ptirim*, emphasizing his ruling position over his wife. Respect is without doubt one of the most important male values among the Pokot people.

The central position of cattle in the life of Pokot men is again stressed in the burial. It is important to bury a man, who has given birth to children, in the cattle kraal, so that he may continue to stay near his animals and family, and is in line with the general Pokot and African view, stressing the importance of the family, clan and society, and of being in a good relationship with one's people. Its importance is also emphasized when marriage is established, which is a covenant between two families and clans based on the economic foundation of the bride wealth, and is not complete until the wife has given birth to a child, which stresses it further. In the Pokot tradition

a son should not come later than the third child of a woman, otherwise the husband should take another wife in the hope that she might give him sons, because life continues through them and they provide him with progenies to which he can attach himself as a guardian spirit, *onyöt*. The economic value of the wife is also expressed in the way she is addressed by her groom's people, *pö tich*, of cows. Marriage is an opportunity to establish new *tilya* relationships and thus expand material and social riches. The *tilya* system encourages polygamy. Marriage is often compared with *tilya*-relationships, as a man gives a bull to a friend who gives him a female cow in return. The dowry is like the bull and the wife like the female cow. Her value depends totally on her ability to fulfil the demands of the society to give birth to children, preferably some sons, and to live according to the standards of the tradition, on the husband's terms, i.e. to be humble to him and to increase his wealth and respect.

The fact that many men in a man's extended family usually contribute to the bride wealth of his first wife, and that the family of the groom participates in the tying of the wedding ring, *ptirim*, emphasizes, that a wife not only belongs to her husband but to the whole family and the clan, which becomes clear in the inheritance if the husband dies prematurely.

8. CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I have described the West Pokot district and the Cheptulel sub-location, the venue of the fieldwork of this research. I tried to find out how the Pokot people have come about and found their way to their present land. I explained also the main themes of their religion and described the most important rituals men go through from birth to death, which create and mould them as men and their values as well as the male institutions, age-sets, war, and the cattle exchange system, *tilya*. All this I have tried to put into a wider perspective of scholarship, which is inevitably colored by western epistemology as explained in 1.3.1 (Western epistemology).

Among my findings I found, as Mwanzi (1977), that many of the Kalenjin groups of peoples did not exist as individual ethnic groups in the same way as we know them today before the coming of the British colonial power (cf. 1.5 Ethnicity and boundaries, and 2.4.1 Fluid boundaries). They did not move as entities from an alleged place of origin to the areas they live in today as many scholars, such as Ehret (1971) have maintained. I believe they did not move from a place of origin outside the the land they live in at present but are the result of a fusion as I will explain below, and I argue that before the colonial time most of them existed as loosely connected clans each with its own leadership. This is supported by the fact that some clans are found in two or more present day Kalenjin groups and that they function as independent entities on some occasions, e.g. when murders occur and the leadership of the clans meet to discuss the consequences. The fate of the people of the same clan is also often interconnected in curses and misfortune. The people of some of the individual clans may not have identified themselves as belonging to one Kalenjin group more than another before they were lumped together. Some groups may, however, have been in more intimate contact than others due to geographical proximity and the fact that the boundaries between them were fuzzy and often unclear. As most clans were and are exogamous, men have had to look for wives in other clans and thus it has been of great importance to maintain a good relationship with them. Some clans may thus have composed some kind of an alliance or loosely knit ethnic groups.

With the coming of the colonial power, groups in certain geographical areas were often lumped together to form definite ethnic groups to make the administration

easier. This seems to have been the case with most of the Kalenjin groups and the Pokot to a certain extent. I believe, however, that the unification process among the Pokot people started earlier, i.e. when they adopted circumcision in the latter half of the 19th century but the colonial power accelerated it. This explains partly the great population growth in West Pokot in the 20th century, which was less than 25.000 before the middle of the 20th century and more than 308.000 in 1999.

The proximity of all these groups led to much cultural borrowing between them. Through my research of the history of the Pokot clans I have found that the Pokot people is composed of many clans, most of which originate in areas that are now the home area of the individual Kalenjin groups, but also of a few that are of non-Kalenjin origin. The meaning of the name of the Pokot people, refugees, supports these findings. The Pokot people are thus the outcome of a mixture of many groups of people of various origins, which brought their religion and rituals with them when they moved to Pokot land. This is reflected by the fact that some rituals are only performed by people of certain clans who claim ownership over them and demand that no one else but their representatives perform them, e.g. *sīmar*, *kīrongon* and *sintagh*, and demand in some instances payment for performing them. Because the majority of the Pokot clans are of Kalenjin origin, their religion and culture was similar in many ways.

It is my opinion that the Cherangany people, or the Sengwer as the Pokot call them, are most probably the key to the unification of the Pokot people. They are a small, aboriginal Okiek people group living in close proximity with the Pokot people in the Cherangany Mountains, especially near Kapenguria town. The Cherangany have contributed with their language and thus played an important role in unifying people of various origins, Kalenjin and non-Kalenjin, to form one ethnic group with a common identity, i.e. the same language, religion and rituals. There is a common value system in which cattle play a central role, but there is room for local specialties. Cattle also play a central role in the life of the neighboring ethnic groups of non-Kalenjin origin such as the Turkana and the Karamojong, which thus share their fundamental value system that is based on them. For that reason the Pokot did not have any problem adopting cultural values attached to cattle from them such as the *sapana* alternative initiation ritual and at least parts of the cattle name system from the Turkana. Indeed they admire these neighbors and enemies in many ways.

In my view the foundation of the African epistemology is found in the religion of the African peoples and it is very difficult to differentiate between African philosophy and religion on one hand and daily life and religion on the other. The Pokot are no exception to that and for that reason it is impossible to understand the Pokot men properly without understanding their religion and therefore their basic conception and values.

Tororot created the world, seen from the Pokot point of view, and the Pokot society. He gave the animals that form the base of people's subsistence. He also gave the rules and guidance for blessed and prosperous living, i.e. the Pokot tradition. He punishes those who break his rules, e.g. with poverty, barrenness and death. People lead a good life by following his rules earnestly, and when they do that they can expect to live in peace and harmony, *poghisyo*. Evil spirits do, however, threaten this harmony with sicknesses and misfortune. Benevolent ancestral spirits, belonging to the group of the living-dead, are, therefore, of great importance to protect the living and fight evil spirits. Rituals are the most important tools in this constant war between life and death, good and evil, especially cleansing rituals and rituals of blessings. They can be conducted alone but are usually also a part of the bigger life crisis rituals, such as circumcision, *sapana*, the wedding process (*parpara*, *kensyo* and *nayat*, the tying on of the wedding ring, *ptirim*), and burial. This reality permeates all thinking of the Pokot people.

The objectives of the rituals are usually obtained magically, i.e. people conduct them in order to affect the course of life. They are means in their hands to obtain their goals. *Tororot* participates in the rituals that have an offering meal, which is a part of all the major life crisis rituals. The objective of sharing the offering animals with him through the sweet smelling smoke of the roasting meat is to please him so that he might bless his people and grant them his favor so that they can obtain the goals of the rituals, which make life stronger.

All the symbols used in the rituals also have important meanings that reflect the will of the people conducting them and the objectives of the rituals, conveying a message in accordance with the goals of the rituals. They reveal the values of the society and also contribute towards obtaining magically the objectives of the rituals of which they are a part. Common and important symbols are the colors white, black and red, branches of evergreen trees and milk from cows that are *roryon*, i.e. have not lost their first calf. White stands for life and keeps evil away, black for death and evil and

can both chase evil spirits away and protect the living, and red stands for blood and aggression against enemies and protects those wearing it against evil, e.g. soldiers. Branches of evergreen and strong trees are often used as symbols of life, prosperity and longevity, and milk from a *roryon* cow expresses the wish for many descendents. These symbols convey the message that a long and prosperous life is the ultimate goal of life and people fight for it.

In the research questions at the beginning of this thesis I asked how the rituals men go through from birth to death, the age-set system, war, and the *tilya* system shape the identity of Pokot men, what values they transmit and which are specific men values? The answer is, that the social situation of men changes through every life crisis ritual they go through. They are given new responsibilities and freedom to do something they were not allowed to do before and enjoy more respect from new groups of men. During the circumcision period, which time frame is three and a half months in this thesis, men's values are transmitted through songs, teaching, the behavior of the elders and all kinds of bans, ceremonies and rituals. The length of time in the circumcision camp, a long preparation period, and the circumcision itself, leaves unremovable marks on the initiates, both psychological and physical. The young men are forced into the form of the traditional, hegemonic masculinity of the Pokot society during this time.

Through the circumcision process boys are changed into men. According to the three stages ritual model of van Gennep and Turner, the *communitas* created during the initiation period is of fundamental importance in which solidarity in the group of the initiates is created and its importance emphasized as those who belong to the same age-set regard each other as brothers and have mutual obligations to support each other. An important goal of the process is to create brave and tough soldiers who can endure the hardship of war, trek long distances and endure severe torture without revealing secrets. When the initiation process has been completed the young men become a part of the community of elders and gradually learn its secrets. The elders teach young men that they are superior to women who should be subordinate to them. The secrets of the community of elders revealed to the initiates during the initiation period, contributes towards maintaining this kind of relationship between the sexes, because they have knowledge women do not have, which gives them power over them. Part of the *poro* ritual is also meant to strengthen their position against women. The ancestral spirits play an important part in the community of elders and can be

angered if they break severely the rules of the society, which can be defined as sin in English. The interests of the ancestral spirits are thus the same as *Tororot's*. These forces, the ancestral spirits, the will of *Tororot* as expressed in the Pokot tradition, and the power of the elders to curse, are the glue that holds the Pokot society together.

Cattle are traditionally the material foundation of the Pokot culture and most of its values. The colors of the Pokot society are derived from the colors of the cattle and they are the most important form of sacrifice, the bride wealth is paid with cattle, and they are the ultimate form of wealth and beauty. The cattle sharing system, *tilya*, helps a man to accumulate and distribute his wealth and thus to increase his power in the society across family and clan lines. The more cattle a man has the richer he is which enables him to take more wives and have many children and descendents. This urge to acquire as many cattle as possible is the most important reason why men engage in war. To have many cattle, wives and children makes it possible for a man to become an ancestral spirit that belongs to the group of the living-dead and a guardian spirit after death, and thus to continue to be a part of the community of the living for some generations to come. This goal of every man, to accumulate as many cattle as he can and to build his powerbase in the society, encourages polygamy, and the strong urge to live beyond the earthly life encourages him to beget many descendents. Thus cattle affect the position and self perception of men in the Pokot society. A man who has many cattle is considered successful and rich, but the one who has few is poor and powerless, and the one who has none is not a real man and can even be considered dead. The fate of man and cattle are thus in many ways the same which is stressed during the seclusion period of the circumcision, during which it is emphasized that the young men must be ready to fight and even die for their favorite ox, and they also get a new name during this period derived from him. All these values of the Pokot masculinity are transmitted through the rituals they go through and are thus socially created.

The ideal man is therefore a rich man, who has many wives and children and enjoys great respect in the society, which is the second most important male value after life and prosperity. He enjoys *Tororot's* favor and blessings, reflected in good health, and healthy wives, children and herds. I have often heard men say that respect is more important than wealth, if they had to choose between these two.

The Pokot culture is male centered and the value system has a materialistic and utilitarian base. Women live on mens' terms and a good wife is the one who

follows the Pokot tradition, is fruitful and gives birth to many sons, is subordinate to her husband and takes good care of her home. She does not quarrel with him and her life and conduct makes him proud.

The Pokot people love their culture and have not been happy with external interference into their affairs. They had, however, to bow to the British colonial authority and the Kenyan government after independence in 1963. Pokot has become a part of the Kenyan and global economy, and been affected by the globalization and structural adjustment programs whether they have liked it or not. All this has affected the Pokot society which is going through great changes. Education and money are key concepts in the modern society, which is slowly eroding some of the old values. The monetary economy of the modern world is changing the traditional way of life and creating new kinds of jobs that were unknown half a century ago in West Pokot and just a few decades ago in Cheptulel, government jobs and jobs created by all kinds of businesses, all of which provide the employees with money.

As I have argued before, gender and masculinity are socially created. As the Pokot society is undergoing changes and new roles for men are created there is pressure on the traditional, hegemonic masculinity of the Pokot people. Changes are occurring, especially in towns and the adjacent rural areas which affect the content of the gender concept in Pokot and the traditional value system. Young people receive an education and both men and women find employment outside the home area. The basic content of the traditional Pokot masculinity and the fundamental male values are still prevailing and are generally still the most important values of the men of the Pokot society, but they will undergo changes in the years to come with the accompanying conflicts in the society between old and young, educated and uneducated, those who acquire monetary wealth and those who base their value system only on cattle.

GLOSSARY

Pokot

The words in this glossary appear in the thesis. Names are omitted.

adongo – a dance consisting in jumping and singing praises of bulls

aghian – chyme

akimüml – meat from the loins

alamachar – a piece of meat near the anus of a bull

alepüt – a wooden milk container

alomi – a serious curse

am – to eat

amoross – a seer who examines the entrails of goats

amuro – right hind leg of a bull

angwa – skin, hide

angwan – four

anyin – sweet

apisikit – the lower part of the left hind leg

aran – a goat (*ngaror* pl.)

arawa – moon

Asis – sun, the name of a god

atat – a type of tree

ateker – a wooden trough used to water cattle and give them salt

atorö – the front part of the top of a human head, a small clay cap made there when
men have finished a ritual with this name

ay – yes

chemarel – burnining hot

chemerion – a girl who has undergone sexual genital mutilation during the the
seclusion period (*chemerï* pl.)

chemworoi – the lad of the path (< *worö* and *or*)

cheng – to take

chepkaram mu – a good stomach prophet

cheporesnan – adultery

cheporön – a type of tree, has medicinal qualities

chepsakityan – a herbalist (a woman)

chepsokoyon – seer (*chepsokoytin* pl.)
chepsokoyon kwegh – a sandal thrower
cheptaita – a cereal pest
cheptusongol – ostrich feathers
cheptuya – an evergreen tree type, used in many rituals as a symbol of life, strength
 and fertility
cheptuyumu – bad stomach prophet
cherelmu – clean somach prophet, a good stomach prophet
chi – a person (*pich* pl.), usually only used about men
cho – of
chö – milk
chok – an old type of machete
chorsyö – theft
chura – bleeding (of cattle, man made)
dia – a bull slaughtered at a mourning ritual which is also called *dia*
egh – a castrated bull (*eghin* pl.)
gha – bad
ghach – very bad
ghat – flat rock
ghegh – to drink
ghet – to protect
ghomitö – to unite
ghotin – a tooth-drawer (*ghoti* pl.)
igh – to do
ighat – a kind of a ceremony where people bring a mixture of over ten different plants
 to strengthen their health
Ilat – a Pokot rain or fertility god
istoindokwe – sandal thrower
ka – house, home, sub-clan
kachelchel – the small fat around the kidneys
kadukuyang – a tree type
kakorokion – a diviner who examines the entrails of cows
kalayan – a fly, (*kolyong* pl. flies)
kamama – paternal uncles

kamar – a favourite ox with modified horns
kamas – steep mountain slopes (an ecozone)
kamngorion – housebreakers, the word used in connection with a supposed
punishment if the secrets of *poro* are revealed
kapaghiat – a certain type of red clay used to make a cap on men's head after *sapana*
kapkoyo – background, relationship, of people who want to marry each other
kapolokion – witchdoctor (*kapoloki* pl.)
kapsolkoch – a monitor lizard
kaptara – a ritual to make a curse ineffective resulting in the healing of the cursed
person
karam – good
karamach – very good
karas – rib (*köros* pl.)
karikaren – a rattle made from the tops of soda bottles
karin – beads
kat – throat
katapao – white clay used to decorate the cap men get after *sapana*
katkat – to plant
katukuyang – a tree type
katuwit – red soil, used in the *ngoriti* ritual
kaw – home
kawagh – a hyena
kawarokion – a sorcerer who uses magic to kill
kawitwit – cancer
kech– a sheep (*kechir* pl.)
keet – tree
keltet – clean
kensyö – marriage
keter – negotiations
kew – parched dry-land (an ecozone)
kiarati – to train, teach
kigh – a thing (*tikwin* pl.)
kikatat – a cleansing ritual
kilapat – a practice women use to humiliate and punish bad husbands

kilokat – a ritual performed using an evergreen tree to heal a sick person

kilomat – a sin when two men have sexual intercourse with the same woman during the same menstrual period

kimokat – a version of the *masyan* cleansing ritual performed in Baringo.

kinto – a funeral ritual

kinyakarat – a war game at *sapana*

kipes – thigh

kipuno – the closing part of circumcision

kipunot – elopement

kir – to take care of

kiralat – a ritual to kill unknown thieves and murderers

kireswo – a cactus type

kiripö – a group of dances at *sapana*

kirket – council of elders where they sit in a semi circle

kiromwö – a tree type

kirongon – a ritual performed to find out how the coming planting season will be, only performed in Cheptulel

kiröyis – long straight sticks

kisitit – to take a woman by force as a wife

kisön – blood

kisoyonin – a blesser

kisoyonöt – ritual of blessing

kitiakat – divorce

kitiakimat – the last stage of dancing the night before *sapana*

kitorionon – a thorny and poisonous plant

kitunga – one of the *tisö* cleansing rituals

kiwarat – tune, a type of song

kiwitat – turning, a ceremony in the house of the elders at the beginning of the circumcision period

kiyil – anointing

ködöngit – testicles

kogh – a stone

koghogh – a liver

kokay – for ever

kokel – a star
kokwo – council of elders
kolin – a man who has gone through the *masyan* cleansing ritual (*koli* pl.)
kolölion – a man who has killed an enemy from another ethnic group
kolowö – a tree type
kölöwö – a small calabash
komigh – a tree type
kong – an eye
konï – to give
köny – long time ago
kontölö – red ants
kopon – a cave
kor – earth, land, division (in the Pokot district)
korka – a woman, wife
korok – neighborhood
kukö – ancestral spirits
kukot – a door, entry
kumïn – beer
kumpa – beer
kumpa keet – honey beer
kumpa moghen – honey beer
kumpa möt – beer of the head, given at one stage during the *parpara* cleansing ritual
kumpa mwatutagh – the beer of information or proclamation, during preparation for
marriage
kumution – a tree type
kupunogh – a hole in a house wall for goats urine to pass through
kur – to call
kurel – a horn used to give a sound
kut – mouth
kuyogh – right relationship between people who want to marry
kuwit, akuwit – a cursing formula
kwan – intestine
kweghion – a shoe (*kwegh* pl.)
kwirkwiris – jingles

lal – a horn to keep oil in (*laloy* pl.)
lany – to climb
lapan – a celebration during the seclusion period of circumcision during which people hold a feast when the initiates have reached the stage of being allowed to eat unassisted with their own hands
lapay – all, everything, a ritual performed to reconcile the clans of a murderer and the victim, there is also a severe fine for the murder
lelut – a mistake, accident, error, sin
lenchī – to tell
liakat – to untie, a ritual performed to counteract curses, is performed in various settings, e.g. in the circumcision camp
likī – to become, happen
lim – to hear
limöy – the one who hears
liokin – a witchdoctor who uses magic to counteract the effects of sorcery
lokotyö – an animal skin belt women use to support the weight of their womb during pregnancy and later
lopiyö – scandal, a name for a ritual people perform who want to become sorcerers
lopotwo – a medicinal tree whose branches are used in rituals
lowir – everything, all
luk – deceit, raid
lukip – stick from the *sitöt* tree (*lukipi* pl.)
ma – fire, v. to die, used as *kima* has died
maitmut – a cereal pest
manga kogh – soft lava stone
mastin – skin strips, used in connection with some rituals, e.g. *masyan*
masyan – a cleansing ritual for warriors who have killed enemies
matakar – a cactus type
matay – millet
matakea – a tree type
mayos – a baboon (*mayosoi* pl.)
megh – to die
mencho – an initiation camp
merkisha – a tree type

mikon – a grass type, a calabash
mikulkipes – people who die without a descendent
mül – to inherit
mila – inheritance
müntirch – a corpse
minyön – a cow hide
mürön – a man
mis – to erase, a ritual to make peace between the Pokot and their neighbors
möghen – beehive
moikut – a plant used in some rituals, e.g. one of the *tisö* cleansing rituals
mököghonyön – a trainer in the male circumcision camp (*mököghöny* pl.)
mokongwo – a fig tree
moning – a child
mompo kaw – rainmaker
morin – finger, hand
morion – a name of a curse that will be effective if people of clans not allowed to
intermarry break the taboo
mormorwo – a tree type
mornasikar – dark blue clay used to decorate the cap men get after *sapana*
mosong – sorghum
mosop – the highest ecozone, e.g. mountain tops
möt – head
moy – a cleansing ritual
moywon – an offering area
mu – stomach
muma – a very strong oath the elders may order a suspect to take who denies an
offence, in order to verify his guilt or innocence
munyan – colored clay
musar – porridge
muserion – color of a bull that is the same as water flowing on dust
mutat – cut, circumcision, a ritual to kill unknown thieves and murderers
mutin – cutter, a circumciser, a sorcerer who uses sorcery to kill people (*muti* pl.)
mwa – to wash
mwagh – oil, v. to say

mwat – to wash, purify
mwata – a cleansing ritual performed when a wife has committed adultery
nayat – a ceremony to tie the wedding ring, *ptirim*, on a woman's arm
ndip – a cleansing ritual performed when the belongings of a deceased person are
divided between the people of his family
ngalyap – a tongue
ngilemiy – a man who has not performed *sapana*
ngoki – sin
ngokoi – termites
ngorin – a teller
ngorion – the right front leg
ngoriti – a ritual in which men learn to use magic
ngwan – painful, bitter
ngwiny – the earth, world
nikis – heavy
nko – and
nyakan – a brave soldier
nyal – to dance
nyalat – dancing
nyikis – heavy
nyinte – he, she
nyolsyö – a dance type
nyoman – very
nyorpotwo – a milk tree
onyöt – a guardian spirit (*onyötoi* pl.), satan
or – path (*oritin* pl.), clan
oson – to prepare
osonö – a group of songs of the circumcision period
otupö – a trough made from a calabash or a tree
owesyö – strength, power, authority
owosin – the meat around the tail
owoy – yes
oy – an ancestral spirit
oywö – an ax

pan – stiff porridge of maize or millet, sorcery
papo – a father
par – to kill
parpar – to stir or rub
parpara – a cleansing ritual for couples when the wife is pregnant with her first child
parparin – a ritual specialist who leads the *parpara* ritual
pat – only, just
pchangeyi – the one who takes
pchörri – a pole on which the roof of a house rests
pel – to burn
pelisho – the initiates of the circumcision process are said to be burned
pelyon – an elephant
pemoy – a bell of a certain type
peny – a cattle kraal
pighon – two sticks to light a fire
pkwanyan – a seer, who reads intestine (*pikwani* pl.)
pīn – an age-set, generation
pipi – a plant whose leaves contain much liquid used to cleanse the hands during the
circumcision period
pir – red
pit – to come, spring up
piyatagh – to throw forward (when people share food with the ancestral spirits)
pö – of
Pochon – a Pokot (*Pokot* pl.)
pögh – water
pöghishyö – peace, harmony of life
pöghyotwö – a milk tree
ponin – sorcerer
ponu – sorcery
ponut – bewitching material
por – a body
poret – the initiate who always does things first. He is the first boy in the group to be
circumcised
poro – secretive ritual during which men are taught to use magic

porokok – a strong cursing word
porokutiam – a cursing word used against wrongdoers
poropchon – an obedient man
poyon – an elder (*poy* pl.)
pöytoghin – a king
Psekutio – an animal of the male initiation period
psikam – a big goat
ptaimöt – embryal fluid
ptakal – sin, associated with deviating sexual behavior
ptikou – a goat of any color
ptirim – a wedding ring for women, only given if the husband has completed *sapana*
pturei – the one who listens
ptuyo – a tree type
punyon – enemy, a name of a ritual
putyon – hair, a name of a ritual
rel – white, clean, new
rip – to come
rir – to cry
riwoy – one of the *tisö* cleansing rituals
roryon – an animal, usually a cow, whose first offspring is still alive
ros – to see
rotwo – knife, also a name for circumcision
rurwö – a shadow
sagh – to pray
saina – a restricted area in a house for pregnant women among some clans, a name
 for the trough used in the *parpara* cleansing ritual
sal – to praise
samughe – a bull with black and white stripes
sapana – an alternative initiation ritual for men
sapit – a ritual that will lead a person suspected of sorcery to death if guilty
sapul – hairy
saritin – share
sarokit – a certain kind of a sisal rope
sei – vagina

ses – a bamboo tree
sewet – the name of an old and unknown age-set. The word is used as a part of a cursing formula
sigala – quarrelling with elderly people
simar – a ritual to find out how the coming planting season will be, only performed in Cheptulel
simotwo – a milk tree, prominent in many rituals, a symbol of life, strength, longevity, and fertility
sintagh – ritual performed at solistice, only in the Sigor division
sinönyinon – a climbing plant
siolup – a clay cap men get on their heads after completing *sapana*
sir – to cross
sira – animal skin, clothes
sirumoi – an emotional state of anger and rage some warriors get into before going on a raid
sirup – sin
sitöt – a tree type
siw – to see
siwaw – a wasp
so – a buffalo, a funeral ritual
sömöngör – the house of the elders in the circumcision camp for boys
sönkwöt – quartz
söp – to live, recover, heal, survive, recuperate
söpon – life
sörö – thanks
söromnya – kidney (*sörömoy* pl.)
sösī – to feel jealous, to envy
sosotwo – a milk tree
sotim – a big goat
sukotion – bamboo, another name for the *ngokoi nko musar* ritual
sus – gras, v. to bother, disturb
syolut – quarrel
tagh – front, first
takat – a chest

tamnyan – sticks tied together to light a fire
tany – a cow (*tuka* pl.)
tapes – wide, broad, large
Tapes koliong - a place where only flies live, an expression used in rituals
tapogh – Mercury, the morning star
ter – to listen
terema – an arrow used to bleed cattle
terin – the one who listens
tetiriany – to jump, a part of the circumcision process
tikö – shading, making a clay cap
tilak – a tree type
tiltil – a woodpecker
tilya – joint cattle ownership
tilil – clean
tir – to disperse
tis – to purify
tisö – a cleansing ritual
tisön – a person who has gone through the *tisö* ritual
tiyos – a male initiate (*tiyoi* pl.)
tö – to give
tontolwo – a tree type used in rituals
tönus – a drum, a ritual in which young men are urged to go on raids
töpewö – sticks tied together used to light fire
törökwö – an evergreen tree used in many rituals, a symbol of life, strength, longevity
töronkwö – a tail
toror – high, far off, notable, well known
Tororot – the Pokot high god
tow – flat land in valleys (an ecozone)
töwönyon – the boy who is the last to do things during the circumcision period. He is
 also the last boy in his group to be circumcised
tuwöt – a tree type
tumöt – a grass type
tung – to press
turu – a period when Mercury appears on the sky before Jupiter, or other stars do not

appear in the sky at all during the night
tuwöt – an evergreen tree used in rituals symbolizing life, strength and longevity
tuyunwo – a milk tree
weri – a son, boy, man
wero kukot – an instrument used during *poro* to make a loud sound, a bull roarer
werkoyon – a prophet, (*werkoy* pl.)
wit – to pursue
wiitägh – what has been completed, the name of the last part of the circumcision
 process
worö – male, a lad
wow – big
wowon – a peg from a tree, such as *yemüt* or *tilak*
woyogh – uncontrolled rage
wuw – forest, bush, wilderness
yar – to look for, search, seek
ye – now
yegh – hand
yemüt – an evergreen tree used in many rituals, a symbol of life, strength and
 longevity
yi – here
yil – to smear, anoint
yim – sky
iyi – to give birth
yo – a mother
yomöt – wind, a disease resembling asthma

Swahili

babu – an ancestor
Dini ya Msambwa – religion of the ancestral spirits
jina – name
Misri – Egypt
mtu – a person
mwanzo – beginning
mzee – an old man, elder (*wazee* pl.)

ugali – stiff porridge of maize or millet

Nandi

kariik – a weapon, a bell

kaptich – joint cattle ownership

Turkana

kinei – a goat

meri – white with black dots (used about the color of goats)

athapana – the mud head cap men get after completing *sapana*

Karamojong

asapan – an initiation ritual, the same as *sapana* among the Pokot

elamacar – a piece of meat from near the anus of a bull

Kisii

lirima – a violent emotional energy inherent in the nature of men (Heald 1999:16)

Kipsigis

kimangan – joint cattle ownership

Sebei

kamanakan – joint cattle ownership

tilyet – the relationship between men who share joint cattle ownership

tilyenyu – the way men sharing joint cattle ownership address each other

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APPENDICES I - VI

APPENDIX I

QUESTIONS RESEARCH ASSISTANTS USED DURING THE FIELDWORK

Questions research assistants used during the fieldwork

At the beginning of an interview, the research assistants filled in a form with information about their informants, which was like this:

Researcher:

Writer:

Informant:

Age:

Generation (age-set):

Clan:

Sub-clan:

Home:

Date of the interview:

Typed:

Typist:

1. Questions about the history of Pokot, i.e. the clans.

In Swahili

Maswali kuwauliza watu kuhusu historia ya Pokot

1. Jina la mtu
2. Jina la "klan" (or) yake
3. Maana ya jina la klan yake
4. Jina la sub-klan yake
5. Maana ya jina la sub-klan yake
6. Kwa nini wazee walichagua jina hili la klan?
7. Kwa nini wazee walichagua jina hili la sub-klan (sub-klans)?
8. Mwanzo wa klan hii. Ilitoka wapi?
9. Mzee au wazee gani (w)alianza klan hii? (Majina)
10. Mababu (ancestors) waliishi wapi kabla ya klan na sub-klan kupatikana (kuundwa)?
11. Mababu walifika mahali wanapoishi wakati huu kwa njia gani? (route)
12. Klan ina mnyama au "totem" gani? (jina katika kingereza na kipokot)
13. Sub-klan ina mnyama au "totem" gani? (jina katika kingereza na kipokot)
14. Kwa nini watu walichagua "totem" hii au hizi?
15. Klan ina uhusiano gani na totem yake?
16. Kwa nini klan ilihama mpaka area wanoishi sasa?
17. Klan ilifika lini mahali/area wanaoishi sasa?
18. Wakati wazee wa klan hii walipofika area yao ya sasa, watu wengine waliishi huko?
Nani? Watu wangapi?
19. Hadithi gani ni muhimu kwa klan hii? Sema tafadhali.
20. Sub-klans zinakuwa "related" kwa njia gani? Gani ni karibu sana na gani sio karibu

sana? Eleza hapo.

21. Watu wa sub-klan moja wanaweza kuoana na watu kutoka sub-klan nyingine?
Kwa nini wanaweza au hwawezi? Eleza.
22. Watu wa klan hii wako fundi "specialists" katika:
 - kazi au ufundi fulani?
 - mila fulani, "rituals"?
 - mambo mengine?

In English

The History of the Clans in Pokot, questions to be asked:

1. Name of the clan
2. The meaning of the clan's name
3. Name of sub-clan
4. The meaning of the sub-clan's name
5. Why did the ancestors choose this name?
6. The origin of the clan. Where did it come from (place)?
7. Who were the main ancestors (persons)?
8. Where did the ancestors live before the origin of the clan/sub-clan?
9. By what route did the clan members reach the area where they live now?
10. What is the totem of the clan (in the Pokot language)?
11. What is the totem of the sub-clan (in the Pokot language)?
12. Why did people choose this totem? (A story)
13. What kind of relationship does the clan have with the totem?
14. What route did the clan take to reach the area they live in now?
15. When did the clan reach the area they live in now?
16. Were there people living in this area when they arrived? Who? How many?
17. What stories are important for the clan? Tell them please.
18. Relationship with other sub-clans in the clan. Which are the most related and which least? Grade all the sub-clans with respect to the degree of relationship.
19. Is it possible to marry people from the other sub-clans?
 - Why?
 - Why not?
20. Are the clan members specialists in respect to:
 - Some kind of work?
 - Rituals?
 - Crafts?
 - Other powers or qualities?

2. Questions about Pokot rituals

Swahili

Maswali kuhusu *sapana*, *poro*, *tohara n.k.*

1. Iitoka wapi?
2. Wapokot wamefanya hii tangu mwanzo?
3. Iitoka wapi? Lini?
4. Kwa nini wanafanya hii? Kwa nini walianza?
=====
5. Muhimu kuandika "rituals" zote neno kwa neno
6. Andika nyimbo zote.

In English

Questions about *sapana*, *poro*, *circumcision etc.*

1. Where did it come from?
2. Have the Pokot people always practiced it?
3. Where did it come from? When?
4. Why do people practice it? Why did they start doing it?
=====
5. It is important to write every word of the all the rituals
6. Write all the songs.

APPENDIX II
VARIOUS RITUALS

Various rituals

1. *Kikatat*

The *kikatat*-ritual is a very common everyday cleansing ritual among the Pokot people and used as a solution to a wide range of problems. A white or gray goat is slaughtered and some chyme from its intestine is applied to the forehead and cheeks, sometimes also the legs and hands, of those who need to be cleansed, sick people, people who have buried a corpse etc., as the elder leading the ritual says: “*Anyin, anyin, anyin, sweet, sweet, sweet,*” which means that those on which he has applied the chyme have now become cleansed. The people present eat the meat of the goat. The ritual is performed in the afternoon (cf. Visser 1989:133).

2. *Moy*

In the *moy* ritual, which is performed to chase evil spirits away from sick people, people sing almost all through the night and one of them rubs a wet stick unceasingly, that is placed on a drum or a skin tied over the opening of an earthen cooking pot, creating a constant booming sound, which along with the cursing songs people sing are believed to chase the evil spirits away. In other instances when this ritual is performed, a black or red billy goat is strangled and the meat cooked and consumed by the people present but small pieces of it are thrown into the bush and some chyme also as people say: “If you are the spirits, *oy*, of the father’s side, go! If you are the spirits of the house of the mother, go!” The spirits should be satisfied by the food and leave the patient and the house. Women are more active in performing this cleansing ritual than men (cf. Visser, 1989:128-130).

3. *Tisö*

There are indeed several cleansing rituals called *tisö*, but the name means cleansing. Some of the rituals are simple and without any sacrifice at all but others are elaborate. *Tisö* is very common among the Pokot people and can be used to deal with a wide range of problems, such as when people have struck the fence of someone’s kraal as a result of quarrelling, or struck the stones of the cooking stove for the same reason, have had sex with a relative of the same clan, a person of the same sex or with an animal, if the shadow of a man or a woman who has recently had sexual intercourse has fallen on a child, if the shadow of a pregnant woman or her husband has fallen on

a baby (is not as serious as the former), if a woman who has lost a child holds a baby before going through a cleansing ritual, when a man has killed an enemy during war, accidentally or intentionally, if human blood has been found in a home, when someone has carried a sick person to a doctor or to a hospital or participated in burying a corpse, if someone has left his excrements in another person's house or if a man has entered the house of girls who are going through initiation, *chemeri*, or urinated inside it, if an animal has dug up or tried to dig up a grave, if a married man who has children wants to be circumcised, if a goat enters a neighbor's field and eats from it, and finally if a delivery of a child has been abnormal, e.g. the feet have come first, twins have been born or a woman has become pregnant before four menstrual periods have passed from the last time she gave birth to a child.

The *tisö*-rituals vary according to the problem and some of them have their own names. The *kikatat*-ritual is used as a remedy for some of the causes *tisö* are also used for. The most elaborate form of *tisö* is performed when a woman has become pregnant before completing four menstrual cycles, has had an abnormal delivery or given birth to twins. Three rituals, *moikut*, *kitunga*, and *riwoy*, have to be performed. In the first one, *moikut*, the root of the *moikut*-plant is chewed and its juice spit over the woman's body while a bell, called *pemoy* is rung. When it has been performed the woman can enter other people's homesteads and it protects the baby against evil eye.

Some months or years later the second ritual, *kitunga* (from *ke-tung*, to press), or *tisö keech* (*keech*, a sheep) is performed. A black or red sheep is killed and its eyes removed while it is still alive in order to make the person, on whose behalf the ritual is performed, be feared. A sheep is chosen, because it has more fat than goats, and some of it is smeared on the mother and her child or children. The sheep is also chosen because it is said to be humble, but goats are rude because they often break into other peoples' fields and gardens causing them to be cursed and may thus bring curses to the ritual. There are a lot of sexual gestures in the ritual, and only those who have gone through it before are allowed to participate. First a small dam is made in the river and people play there, trying to spray water from their mouths on those of the opposite sex, but the real ritual takes place at the home of the people who need it during which the leader bites the tail off the sheep to be sacrificed and eats it. Then he leads the people into the house where the parents of the child concerned are made to sit on the floor with their backs to the wall, under a cowhide, called *minyön*, which goes from the upper part of the wall to the floor. The people present, men and women,

imitate the mating of goats with all the accompanying sounds and the people howl abusing erotic words at the people of the opposite sex in a competition between the sexes similar as in the *lapan*-ritual in the circumcision process. It seems as if people are using magic to mend the conception of the child again and to rectify the sexual act which was the cause of this ritual and make sure it will not repeat itself again. This is very similar to *parpara* (cf. 7.3 *Parpara*, a cleansing ritual for newly weds). After the ritual the sheep is skinned and the meat cooked. Then people eat it with porridge, *pan*, made either from maize or finger millet.

When *tisö* is performed on behalf of a woman who has become pregnant before completing four menstrual periods, or has given birth to a child whose feet came first at birth, or twins, then the third and last stage, *riwoy* is performed. It is done when she has reached menopause, but it is performed on behalf of the children before they reach the age of puberty. A black cow is killed in such a way that its feet are tied together, and it is laid on the ground. Before the husband of the home kills it by striking it on the head with a heavy mullet, all the clan's children, who have gone through the ritual before, called *tisön*, jump over it many times. Then they sit around it and beat it with their hands, joined by their mothers, singing: “*Aye riwöy oohe aya aye riwöye*,” “Oh yes cleansing, *oohe aya aye* yes cleansing.” As they sing this song the leader of the ceremony performs a ritual of blessing for the father of the house, pouring honey beer all over the cow's body saying: “*Ichichim ikil lö simotwo*,” “be firm as the *simotwo* tree.” Then the cow, which has been killed, is opened carefully, and great care is taken that no blood pours down so that people can drink it. Then the meat is eaten with porridge and a lot of beer is drunk.

4. *Putyon*

A prophet can tell people to perform the *putyon* ritual when he believes he has received a divine prompting about the coming of misfortune such as a dangerous disease, famine or enemies. The name *putyon* means literally hair. In this ritual a goat or a sheep of a certain color, which the prophet chooses, according to the nature of the imminent problem, is speared on its right side, facing Mt. Mtelo, early in the morning when the sun is still in the east, from where blessings come (cf. 4.1.2 *Asis*). All the people of the community attend and bring their animals to the ritual. Before the sacrificial animal is slaughtered everyone, people and animals, go four times, facing Mt. Mtelo, around a big fire in an offering area, *moywon*, which has been lit by

rubbing together two sticks, *pighon*, from branches of trees such as the *yemüt* (also called Elgon teak), *torokwö*, *mormorwo*, and *törötwö* and the hard and smelling *tumöt* grass, which gives a lot of smoke. These trees are all strong and valuable some evergreen and most of them bear edible fruits. The smoke from these plants smells pleasantly for *Tororot*. If it goes straight up it is a sign that *Tororot* accepts it favorably but if it bends it shows that he does not. When the offering animal has been speared, it is skinned and everyone present is given a patch of the hide and the people take it home and make several skin strips which they tie around their arms and the arms of their children, and on the doors of their houses in order to keep misfortune away. Then some of the elders bring a trough, *otupö*, made from a strong fig tree, *mokongwo*, which symbolizes life and endurance, which contains colored clay that has been dissolved in water, white, red, brown or gray, depending on the reason for the ritual. This is sprinkled both on people and animals with branches from the same trees that are used as firewood in the ritual. The prophet leading the ritual should be from the *Chemán* sub-clan of the *Ptinko* clan, or the *Kapatei* (or *Chepkapatei*) sub-clan of the *Solyongin* clan.

5. *Punyon*

The *punyon* ritual, which means enemy, is performed in December. It is usually performed when particular sicknesses affect the people or the animals of a community. The actors are mainly young uncircumcised girls but some circumcised, unmarried girls may also participate, but all of them are wearing animal skin clothes designed for uncircumcised girls. They wear jingles, *kwirkwiris*, and carry long straight sticks, called *kiröyis*, resembling spears. They are believed to be pure, sinless, *tíilil*. No men take part. The night before the ritual takes place, the girls assemble at the home of a man from the *Chemán* sub-clan of the *Köymö* clan, who gives them either milk or meat of a buck, and they sing the whole night. A man who has killed an enemy from another ethnic group, *kolölion*, (cf. 6.5.4 The *masyan* cleansing ritual) paints them with clay of various colors, white, red and brown. They tie a certain kind of sisal rope, *sarokit*, around their upper arms, resembling the *mastin*, long narrow straps of goatskin worn by men who have killed enemies. They take a short sleep before embarking into the woods at dawn in complete silence to the place where the ritual is performed. There they undress, only wearing a small animal skin patch to cover their private parts, and stab a tree, called *kípes pö mürön*, the thigh of mature

men, with their sticks by a sudden strike. All of them do the same and then they praise themselves for killing the enemy. Now the ritual has come to an end and the girls dress and return. Food and water has been prepared for them in a nearby field and they sing loudly on their way. When they arrive the women who prepared the food take leaves from the *moikut* plant, chew them and spit the sap on their chests and armpits saying: “*Anyin, anyin, anyin,*” “sweet, sweet, sweet,” which means that they have now been cleansed of all impurities, especially evil spirits. After the meal a man from the *Köymö* clan lights a fire in the middle of the field with branches from the *lopotwö*, *yemit*, *tuiwöt*, *cheptuya*, and *kiromwö* trees and Sodom apples. The reason for burning branches from these plants is to spread the smoke over the land in order to drive diseases away and bring blessings because these plants symbolize life, blessing and longevity. As the fire burns all the girls who participated in the ritual dance around the fire, led by girls from the *Köymö* clan, run from east to west and back again in an oval line. After a short break two or three mature women lead a song as soloists when the dance resumes again. They sing:

Ee siong (x 2) *Karemba siong, ee siong,*

Yes it is all right, (x2) going round in the ritual of *karemba*, all right.

Kipö karemba Köymö

The *karemba* ritual belonged to *Köymö*.

Karemba is another name of the *punyon* ritual. The next day people assemble again wearing ordinary clothes and dance ordinary dances in order to rejoice, believing that their problems have come to an end.

6. *Lapay*

The word *lapay* means everything, and the ritual has two purposes, to compensate for the loss of the life of a murdered person and, to reconcile the clans of the murderer and of his victim. According to the Pokot tradition, people are not allowed to kill a murderer if he is a fellow Pokot, which thus minimizes the loss of lives. When someone has been murdered a big group of people from his clan visits the home of the murderer and confiscates most of his belongings. As the fine is collective his extended family must participate in paying the fine, which is often about 60 heads of cattle. If the family does not own so much, it is allowed to keep a few animals but the relatives

of the deceased person come and take their offspring as they are born until the fine has been fully paid. Sometimes this situation keeps people in poverty for the rest of their lives. In the agricultural part of Pokot, a big portion of land is also confiscated. *Lapay* is brought to an end when representatives of the clans take a goat, hold it each on his side, slaughter it and cut into two halves, show it to the sun, *Tororot's* eye, and sing a song called *silisil*. This is an oath where they declare that an end has been put to further hatred and enmity between the clans. The process ends with a ritual of blessing. However, no intermarriage will take place between the two clans, often for decades, as it is believed that a curse, called *morion*, will affect those who marry. The *parpara* ritual may bring this curse to an end (cf. 7.3 *Parpara*, a cleansing ritual for newlyweds).

7. The *sapit* ritual

There are two versions of the *sapit*-ritual. In the first, people take a red ram early in the morning from a member of the *Tulin* clan and bring it to a big cave where they keep it until noon. The cave symbolizes an open mouth. Then the elders take the ram, hold its feet, while one of them keeps its nose closed and blows air into its mouth until it has almost been suffocated. Then one of them says, "The goat has died without problems but we say very sincerely that it will bring death to sorcerers and evil witchdoctors who have caused our animals and people to die." The other men respond: "Die!, die!, die!" The goat, which is still alive, swells at this point as a balloon and dies of suffocation. It is strongly believed that sorcerers and evil witchdoctors will die in the same way. The dead goat is buried as people are buried to symbolize that their victims will be buried in the same way.

The other version of this ritual is very different. Milk and animal blood is collected from every home in the community, mixed with strong herbs, roots from trees such as the *sitöt*, *sinonten*, *tontolwo*, *matakea*, *komigh*, and *lopotwo*. Everyone drinks from the mixture as the elders say something like this, "You, blood of various animals and herbs of various tree types, be harmful to sorcerers and witchdoctors and anyone who practices sorcery, *pan*, to shorten the lives of other people, let them die." People believe this will affect the evil doers.

At this stage, two young men, one from the *Tulin* clan and the other from the *Talai* clan, are chosen to perform the rest of the ritual. As good hunters, the men of the *Tulin* clan are regarded to be precise shooters and kill their prey effectively. The

young *Tulin* man makes a small bow and an arrow, without the sharp metal tip, from the *tontolwa* plant, which is believed to be effective in oath taking. Everyone in the community is present. It is compulsory for all the elderly people in the community to attend, and they have to line up and crawl on four feet, like the cows, when the *Tulin* man shoots everyone with the bow and arrow, aiming at their veins, while the elders say together: “Die! Die if you are a sorcerer, *ponin*.” As this takes place the man from the *Talai* clan pours the mixture of blood and herbs into the mouth of everyone who has to drink it. This continues until everyone has been shot at and has swallowed the mixture.

People believe that the outcome of this ritual will be evident two years later, because then many sorcerers will die but some will not be affected. No remedy is said to exist for this ritual when it has been performed.

8. The *mutat* ritual

The word *mutat* means to cut. This ritual must not to be confused with circumcision, which is also called *mutat*. It is performed by four up to ten men on behalf of the council of elders, *kokwo*, to kill unknown thieves, murderers and sorcerers, *poni*. The men take soil from the footsteps of the offender, add leaves from the *kitorinon* plant which are thorny and poisonous, small white stones, *sengwet*, symbolizing the bones of the wrongdoer, and mix it with human excrement, preferably from the wrongdoer, colored clay in liquid form, *muntyin* (*munyan*, sing., *muntyin*, plural), a piece from cactuses called *kireswo* and *matakar*, and smoke. Everything is put into a small pot and sealed thoroughly and placed in a secret place, e.g. a crack in a cave, so that it will rot quickly. Then the leader, who is naked through the whole ritual, turning his anus towards the sun to show that he is serious, calls upon the gods and ancestral spirits to give him power to kill the evildoer.

After the ritual one of the men who participated in the ritual, slaughters a black goat, and conducts a cleansing ritual to purify the men who performed the *mutat* ritual, smearing all of them with chyme from its intestine. For three days the men behave as people who mourn the loss of a relative. They stay together during these days and are not allowed to mix with other people. The elders watch the pot in the cave and make sure no one destroys it. If the wrongdoer becomes aware of what the men have done, he must approach them or reveal himself before the council of elders in order to be forgiven. He will have to return what he may have stolen, provide beer

and food for the elders, and a sacrificial animal for a cleansing ritual. Up to a year may pass until the cursed person dies if he does not reveal himself and nothing is done to stop the effect of the curse. Sorcerers, *poni*, can also perform this ritual secretly.

9. The *kiralat* ritual

The *kiralat* ritual is performed to kill unknown thieves. About ten elders, who have a good reputation and are known to be good at performing this ritual, and have gone through the *poro* and *ngoriti* rituals (see 6.1 *Poro* and 6.3 The *ngoriti* ritual) are chosen to conduct it on behalf of the community. They do it standing in the middle of a river, near a waterfall, obstructing the water saying something like, “What is this, which is red, which is grey? Let it die and fall down like this water.” Then they remove the obstruction and the water rushes down the riverbed. They assert that the enemy has now died. The men also utter the cursing word *porokok* several times, which is a word they learned in the *poro*-ritual, and obstruct and release the water several times saying, “Open the mouth as you die, open the mouth before you die.” They repeat this until they feel they have done it often enough to secure the effect of the ritual.

When the ritual has been completed, a black goat is slaughtered and a cleansing ritual is performed for the men who performed the *kiralat*-ritual. They are smeared with chyme from the slaughtered animal and cleansed while the elder leading the cleansing ritual says: “Sweet, sweet” as he smears them. This cleansing ritual is performed to prevent the cursing of the *kiralat* ritual to affect them. The man who has suffered loss from the hands of the thieves, provides the goat. People say that about a year passes until the transgressor dies. If he reveals himself before becoming critically ill, the elders go quickly to the river and stop the effects of the curse by obstructing and releasing the water again saying, “We have finished what we did here.” The confessing transgressor provides a goat for the cleansing ritual of the elders when they have completed this neutralizing ritual. If the thief does not reveal himself, or no one has died as a result of the cursing ritual, the elders repeat it again all the same in order to neutralize the effects of the curse, lest it might affect themselves.

10. The *liakat* ritual

Liakat means literally to untie. The ritual is performed to neutralize a curse and is conducted by a man for whom this ritual has been performed, e.g. a twin who has

received a special blessing. He takes white clay, *munyan*, and certain herbs, puts them into a trough, *otupö*, and visits the patient, asks him to describe where the sickness is, how and when it started, the surnames of those who might possibly have bewitched him, the names of their clans and sub-clans, because some curses are believed to affect the people of the sub-clans and even of the main clan of the culprit if he does not reveal himself. The man starts the ritual by pouring water into the trough he brought in order to dissolve the clay, and mixes the herbs with it. The patient must lie down covered with skin, *sira*, and face Mt. Mtelo, the dwelling place of *Tororot* and a symbol of the good of life. Then he jumps four times over the patient reciting the surnames of those who might have bewitched him, because it is believed that the power of the witchcraft becomes effective through their names. Now he takes a branch of the *cheptuya* tree, spits at it, dips it into the mixture, and sprinkles the mixture to the east and west, chasing evil spirits to these directions so that they will go down with the sun. This is believed to cut the power of the witchcraft. If the cause of the sickness was indeed a curse, the patient is believed to recover quickly.

11. Kilokat

People perform the *kilokat* ritual by a milk tree (*simotwo*, *sosotwo*, *nyorpotwo*, *mokongwo*, *tuyunwo*, *pohgyotwo* etc.), because its roots are believed to reach down to *Ilat*'s dwelling place. They hang a goat up in one of its branches so that it faces east, cut its throat and make the blood pour over the sick person while *Ilat* is evoked and told to drink it rather than thirst for the blood of the sick person. Then the animal is flayed and small pieces of meat are cut from all of its parts and thrown in all the four main directions. The man who performs the ritual spits under the arms and legs of the sick person, to north and south, east and west and thus shares the animal with *Ilat* and the ancestral spirits. Then the rest of the meat is boiled and eaten by those who are present. After the meal, the sick person leads the remainder of the ritual. When it is over and the sick person is on his way home he or she is asked: "What do you want?" He or she answers: "I want life." Then he or she gets the answer: "You will have it now." The sick person is not allowed to leave his house for three days for fear that *Ilat* may strike him with lightning and kill him. When the ritual has been completed and the three days have passed, people believe that *Ilat* will not hunger for the sick person anymore.

If the ritual turns out to be successful, an animal with the same color will be used next time it is performed, led by the recovered person who will continue to do it because no one is allowed to perform it on behalf of others unless it has first been performed for him or her. It is strictly forbidden to tap sap from the milk tree used in this ritual, cut it or burn, because it is believed to lead to the culprit's death if he does not perform the *tisö* cleansing ritual to save himself. Visser has a different description of the *kilokat* ritual (1989:133-135).

12. Atorö

Only men, who have gone through *sapana*, can perform the *atorö* ritual, which came to Pokot from Turkana. The objective of the ritual is to increase respect for men in the society. The front part of the top of a human head is called *atorö*, but in this ritual a clay cap is made with two holes in it so that ostrich feathers can be inserted as a decoration. It is called to shade the *atorö* to make the clay cap. This ritual is optional and is practiced first and foremost among the pastoralists, although several agriculturalists in Cheptulel have gone through it.

When a group of men want to go through *atorö*, they ask the elders, who have already done it, to do it for them. Usually they refuse the initial petition so that the men have to slaughter bulls and he-goats to make a big feast for them, every man contributing an animal. Such a feast can last many days, even a month, during which the men do not go home. The ritual cannot be performed unless all the elders agree unanimously to do it.

Atorö takes place at the men's resting place, often in a dry riverbed. All the candidates make a line and pass several stations where elders wait for them. At the first one an elder sprinkles them one by one with water from a wooden trough, *otupö*, with a branch of a *tuwöt* tree as they pass saying, „*Anyin, tülilöch mürön, ngötöpöch mürön*,“ „sweet, the young men are clean, the young men are sharp.“ In this way the men are cleansed from curses and these phrases express a wish that nothing evil will interfere with their life, neither a curse nor an enemy. The use of the branch of the *tuwöt* tree is a wish that the candidates may be fertile and strong as the tree, and stand firm in all conditions of life, provide a good shade for their families, and protect them when necessary.

When they have been sprinkled with water they move to the next station where an elder smears them from shoulders to the stomach with white clay from a

trough. As white is the color of peace and cleanliness, it is a message that they should be peacemakers and follow the rules of the society, and not quarrel or abuse people.

At the third station, an elder smears them with chyme from shoulders down to finish cleansing them from any curse, which the water might have been unable to remove.

The fourth and last station is the making of the clay cap, or shading, *tikö*, of the *atorö*. When the clay has been applied on their heads, the candidates stay until the clay cap has dried. Then the first part of *atorö* has been completed and everyone goes home. A month later the ritual resumes again when the candidates meet the elders at the same place as before to ask them to be allowed to insert ostrich feathers, *cheptusongol*, into the holes of the clay cap. As when the candidates approached the elders the first time, they are reluctant to give an affirmative answer. Again the candidates have to slaughter animals and make a feast before the elders approve their request, but they are not as difficult as the first time. The colors of the ostrich feathers vary according to the men's age-sets. In the circumcision age-set system the *Kapsakis* are given brown feathers to insert into the holes of the cap, the *Sowo* black, and the *Körörgörö* white.¹³⁰ Various *sapana*-sets also have different colors.

Ostrich feathers are used because they are beautiful and soft, they do not break easily, and sway according to the rhythm when people dance. It is not easy to kill an ostrich because it is wise and the men hope that in the same way they will not become easy prey for their enemies. The ostrich feathers are used on important occasions and announce the status of the man who is carrying them. As noted in chapter four, mothers wear them during the initiation period as a part of their head decoration to indicate the status of their children. After inserting the ostrich feathers the *atorö* ritual has come to an end.

There are several advantages going through *atorö*. The men enjoy increased respect, such as getting a larger share of the animals captured in raids, having the first priority to jump at *adongo* dances, are given milk in wooden jugs, *alepüt*, not gourds, at feasts, also at the milk and blood ceremony of *sapana*, instead of drinking from the big trough, *ateker*, as the others who have not gone through *atorö*. Men, who have not

¹³⁰ According to the Baroja (1998:109) the *Kapsakis*, is the junior part of *Sowö*. He mentions *Körönkörö* as one of the age-sets, spanning the period 1938-1950. As mentioned in chapter four, the age-sets may have more than one name according to locality.

yet gone through the ritual, even if they have gone through *sapana*, serve them at rituals.

The songs sung during *atorö* are a translation from the original Turkana language, which is discernable in the translation. These songs are called *kiywar* and are also sung at *sapana*.

Kiywar pö Cheptusongol

Eywala longoroko

Put on white, black and brown¹³¹

Ywalaile

Put on top of the forehead¹³²

Ekalesi longoroko Kemamunyakek

Black and white¹³³

*Kemamunyaket*¹³⁴

Cannot breastfeed

Soloist:

Etete dung kitanakinakek

Antelope breastfeeds its young

Etomunangi dung kitanakinakek

Human being breastfeeds its young

Ekalesi dung kitanakinakek

Ostrich breastfeeds its young¹³⁵

Kiywar pö Tany

Etoru, etoru, nyitako napolipoli

Passed, passed through calf dewlap¹³⁶

Nangoria ngetia ngipenyok

Red and white head belonging to guests¹³⁷

¹³¹ These are different colors of ostrich feathers.

¹³² The ostrich feathers are inserted in the holes of clay cap on top of the forehead.

¹³³ The appearance of the ostrich from afar.

¹³⁴ *Kemam* = without, *nyaket* = udder, *Kemamunyaket* = without udder.

¹³⁵ The ostrich feed its young by giving it grass and insects.

¹³⁶ The calf passed under the dewlap when he went to suckle his mother.

13. *Mwata*

Although a wife breaks the marriage oath she takes when the wedding ring, *ptirim*, is tied on her in the ceremony of *nayat*, the man committing adultery with her is regarded as the real culprit. As a remedy she must be washed in the *mwata* ritual. The name of the ritual is derived from the verb *ke-mwat*, to wash or purify. It is performed at sunrise, because the rising sun is believed to bring blessings. In this ritual the whole body of the wife is washed. It is done with the urine from the adulterous man. Then her body is smeared with cowdung and milk from the cattle of his clan. The cowdung cleanses her of all evil spirits but milk is a symbol of life. Honey is finally smeared around her mouth and her children are also given some of it to eat, denoting that life will now be sweet. Honey is sometimes used as medicine and is believed to have healing effect.

Visser has another interesting version of this ritual where a mixture of milk, honey beer, cow dung and cow urine as well as urine from the adulterer is poured over the *ptirim*, which is in this way washed and the marriage of the adulterous woman cleansed (1989:143).

Often *mwata* is the end of *muma* (cf. ritual no. 14 below, the first part) a very strong oath taken if a woman is suspected to have committed adultery but denies it. People wonder if she has committed adultery when her children become ill and no ordinary treatment seems to help. If nothing is done to stop the consequences of *muma* it will spread from the culprit to his children, his siblings, extended family, sub-clan, and the whole clan.

Due to the serious consequences of *alomi* and the shame of being exposed as an adulteress, women are normally faithful to their husbands. Both *mwata* and *muma* are performed in the council of elders, *kokwo*. *Alomi*, caused by adultery, does not affect people who have not performed *nayat*.

14. *Muma*

Muma is a very strong oath, which the elders conduct when they suspect that someone has committed a crime, e.g. theft or adultery, but denies it. If the suspect is guilty but

¹³⁷ The cow with white body and red patches on its head belongs to all the guests, i.e. the milk, blood and the meat can be given to guests.

denies his guilt again during the oath taking he or she is believed to die as a result.

There are several versions of this oath

A man who, as an example, suspects that another man has stolen his goat, can call the elders of the community and bring together members of both his clan and the clan of the suspect and tell them that he wants the man he suspects and himself to conduct an oath. He will give the people of the suspect's clan time to think and consult each other. After two weeks the elders hold another meeting. If they agree that the oath should be taken, the accuser will look for a black goat or a bull and very old men who bring herbs from various places, Sodom apples, white stones and spears. Members of the two clans will attend the meeting. The men must be naked when they take the oath. Some will hold the bull's head while the others will hold the tail. Then the accuser will make a cut across the back of the goat or bull so that the blood will spout very powerfully on all the men present and the old men ask *Tororot* and the ancestral spirits, *kukö*, to let the blood curse the man so that he will get powerful diarrhoea and vomit in the same way as the spouting of the blood and with the same sound, if he has stolen the goat. From the time of the oath the members of both clans regard each other as enemies and will not intermarry.

There are other versions of *muma* when people are suspected to have committed other offences, e.g. adultery or stolen a cow, and refuse to confess their guilt in order that people may be reconciled.

If a man is quite sure that another man has stolen his cattle, he can call the elders together who may decide to take a skull from a hyena and a human being and go very early in the morning to the home of the suspect, when people are still at home, and place the skulls in the doorway of his cattle kraal so that the cows pass over them when they go out while the man pursuing the case says repeatedly: "If you are my cow let death break this home and I am asking the hyenas to be fed from the meat of this home, but if you are not mine, then you may live in peace and I am asking that many more animals may come from this home" (cf. Visser 1989:144).

When this is finished, the men take the skulls and leave. If his cow was among the cows of the suspect, death will now go from the thief to all the members of the clan. The effects of an oath can differ according to its prescription, i.e. the degree of its consequences. It can cause the death of one person or many people, death of animals, sons only etc. Sometimes the transgressors reveal their wrongdoing when they are near

to death and the elders can sometimes save them by performing a ritual to stop its effects if they are informed early enough. Others die without revealing anything.

The oath will affect people and kill them in the following way:

Muma Performed by the elders



The thief will die and his children at the same time



The brothers and sisters of the thief die and their children



All the relatives of the thief's extended family will be affected



All the members of the sub-clan of the thief will be affected



All the members of the clan will be affected



Those who shared food with the thief or the stolen commodity will be affected.

Reconciliation can be made when a thief reveals himself and asks for forgiveness. He is usually fined.

15. Tree worship

The tree worship consists in a sacrifice to the *simotwo* tree, which is commonly used in rituals among Pokot people everywhere, or the *kadukuyang* tree, when human or animal diseases have affected the community. Six men perform a cleansing ritual, one of which must belong to the *Chepsapul* sub-clan of the *Siwötoy* clan, because this ritual is said to have been introduced by people who belonged to this clan. Cow milk, from a cow whose first calf is still alive (such a cow is said to be *roryon*) is poured on the tree and ostrich feathers attached to its trunk. A white goat is sacrificed and the men throw its chyme, *aghian*, on the tree trunk saying something like: "What has gone wrong in our land? Why are all these diseases? Please help us. We depend on you, so, come to our rescue. Receive this milk and the offering we give to you." Then they bless the tree saying: "Sweet, sweet, sweet, have long life, have long life, protect the land, sweet." The *simotwo* and *kadukuyang* trees are symbols of life, longevity,

strength and endurance. White is the symbol of peace and good will. Ostrich feathers are durable and by using them the men wish the tree good health and long life. The word sweet is used in cleansing rituals to remove curses and misfortune. It is forbidden to cut these trees.

APPENDIX III
HOW TO BECOME A SORCERER

How to become a sorcerer

An informant provided the following description of how a man becomes a sorcerer. The training is composed of several stages. In the first the mentor removes all his clothes when he performs a ritual called *ponin*, sorcerer. When he calls the initiate by his surname, he removes his clothes. Both of them kneel, facing opposite directions, east and west, making their anuses meet in order that the trainee becomes polluted through the anus of the trainer. In the second stage, called *kiarat*, which means to train or teach, they stand naked together and sing the song *Oroye*,

Oroye lopiyo oo oroye

Oroye I kill a man oroye the man is dead

Kaparan chi oroye lopiyo

I spear a man, oroye I kill a man

Oroye lopiyo oo oroye

Oroye I kill a man oroye

Kaparan punyon oroye

I spear the enemy oroye

Aa oroye

Kaparan kuma oroye aa oroye

Aa oroye

I spear oroye aa oroye

Kososian ngwinyinete oroye aa oroye

I am jealous in this world [i.e. I do not want him to live] oroye aa oroye

When this is over, the mentor rests for a while and drinks some honey beer, *kumin*, if the trainee brought him some, before he starts the next stage, a ritual called *lopiyo*, scandal, in which he stands upright, still naked and makes the trainee pass four times between his legs. When this ritual is over, the fourth stage starts where the trainee is taught to cleanse himself after cursing someone to death. He must kill a

black goat and smear himself with its chyme, *aghian*. In the fifth stage the teacher marks the initiate by removing a tooth from his upper jaw or makes a big scar on his forehead to show that he has now become qualified and is able to curse people to death.

The sixth stage is the most difficult and some people fail to pass it because the initiate must prove his utter cruelty by bewitching what he loves most, his firstborn child, *poret*, his own wife, parents or his favourite ox. If he passes this stage the mentor chooses a day when he will give him full authority to use sorcery the way he wants, and the pot of witchcraft, with a living puff adder inside.

When the witchdoctor bewitches someone, he stands near the pot and boasts about his qualifications as a witchdoctor, rendering where and how he acquired his abilities to bewitch or to belittle his prey, calling it by the name it was given at birth. If the snake in the pot responds with a hissing sound the man is convinced his prey is already dead. When the novice has qualified to keep a puff adder he calls himself bad names such as: *Chuwang-wang*, no sin, trespass, offence can catch him, *Lomeritung-tung*, he who kills children, *Kaptich*, he who kills cows, *Chepocheshien*, a place of bones from human corpses, and *Chemis-tirmis*, a person who can let everything die completely.

APPENDIX IV
SONGS FROM THE CIRCUMCISION PROCESS

Songs from the circumcision process

1. Sole sol, we pray to you

- I. *Sole sol ee sole sol, eya ee*
We pray to you ee we pray eya ee
Eya ee papa sole sol(x2)
Eya ee father we pray (x2)

Choir:

Chenga nyi moneku ee sole sol
Take your children ee we pray
Eya ee eya ee papa sole sol
Eya ee eya ee father we pray

Kikimwowun ne ee sole sol eya ee
What have we done to you? *Ee we pray*
Eya ee papa sole sol
Eya ee father we pray
Itighech we koko tapogh ee sole sol
Protect us you Jupiter's wife ee we pray
Eya ee eya ee papa sole sol
Eya ee eua ee father we pray
Iyilwech kore ee sole sol eya ee
Anoint our land ee we pray *eya ee*
Eya ee papa sole sol
Eya ee father we pray

- II. *Torongwo kumwokoi ee karanya hohe*
The tail of mangoes ee dry *hohe*
Ee hehe eya hohe
Ee hehe eya hohe

Choir:

Nyono kokotapogh eya ee eya ee papa sole sol
Come Jupiter's wife *eya ee eya ee father we pray*

Nyono koko kopusui eya ee
Come wife of ever rising Jupiter *eya ee*
Eya ee papa sole sol.
Eya ee father we pray.

2. Kukö. A version from Kongelai

o ... o oyoe .. kipaye oeo .. oyoe wöyayo ...
oo ... oo .. oe .. e o .. o .. oye kukö o .. o ...
grandfather
oya papa ee o e o oya wöyayo .. ooooo
father

kesala poyon .. e .. oeo .. kesala poyon
 let us praise the aged let us praise the aged
e .. oeo .. oeo .. wöyayoo .. ooe..
oye kukö oye kipaye .. oeo
 grandfather
wöyayo oe oeo .. kesala pikarwal
 let us praise the gray haired
ee oo asala pkarwal oo oe ööyayo
 praise the gray hair
oo ... ooe nyo kiwö mösop ee oeo
 who went to the highland
wöyayo oe oeo ... kiyör wech kunyik
 to look for a big headed club
ee oe ... kiyörwech kunyik oe oo
 to look for a big club
ee wöyayo oe oe oo kukö kankan
 grandfather
o oo kukö kankan o ooe yöyayo
 grandfather
oeooo ... nyo wiröy kapich .. ee oo
 which hits people's home
nyo wiröy kapich .. ee oo oe wöyayo
 which hits people's home
oe oe oo kiyöri tipö pich .. e .. oo
 brought peoples' daughters
kiyöri tipö pich .. ee oe ooe wöyayo
 brought people's daughters
oe ... oo oe .. oo tipiko kamama .. ee
 uncle's daughters
oo tipiko kamama .. ee .. oo .. oe .. wöyayo
 uncle's daughters
oe .. oe .. oo nyo mito Changwan .. ee
 who is in Changwan
oo nyo mito Changwan ee .. o .. oe wöyayo
 who is in Changwan
oe .. oe .. oo .. nyo mito Kolilon ee ..
 who is in Kolilon ..
o .. nyo mito Kolilon .. e .. ooe ..
 who is in Kolilon
wöyayo .. oe .. oe .. oo .. oye kukö
 grandfather
oo .. oye .. kipkarwal .. ee .. o .. oe
 the grey haired
wöyayo oe ... oe .. oo .. oye wöyayo

oe .. e .. oo ..

APPENDIX V
POKOT CLANS

Pokot clans

Name of Clan	Totem	Pokot name of the totem	Origin of the Clan	Remarks
1. Soliongin	Thunder	Ilat	Sebei-land, Mt. Elgon.	Were originally Sebei. Terchon = rain without lightnings and thunders. Solyongin was a twin son of Ilat, also called Terchon.
2. Ngisurin	Thunder	Ilat, thundeerstorm	Kölköl, Loshamatak at the border of Sudan and Kenya. Mooved via Tiatiy. Some to Masol and Kara-Pokot others to Baringo. Visser: Mt. Elgon	Originally Solyongot and Ngisurin were one clan. Ngisurin was a twin son of Ilat.
3. Sïpan	Elephant	Pelyon	Tiati. Moiben.	
4. Oröyïn	Camel, Monitor lizard	Tamas, Maratas	Kwakituk at the border of Kenya and Sudan in Turkana, sometimes called Kölköl or Loshamatak. Visser: Kölköl, across Kerio.	
5. Sötïn (means sun)	Sun	Asis	Island in Lake Baringo. Visser: East.	Were originally Njemps. The sun was chosen because it rises in the east and they come from the east.
6. Talöyin	Baboon	Mayos	Marakwet or East.	Seems to be the same clan as no. 20, Talayn or Tallai.
7. Riïyon,	Hyrax	Kaner	North of Rong. Visser: Caves or the east behind the Titati Hills.	

Name of Clan	Totem	Pokot name of the totem	Origin of the Clan	Remarks
8. Sighyon	Bee	Sakam	Tapasiak in Uganda. Visser: Tapasiach/Kara Pokot	Moved because of wars, diseases and famine.
9. Siwotöy	Buffalo (Visser) Female buffalo (Benson). Buffalo (Kierw, Kam.) and moon (Kirew).	Sö Tyompö yim	Cherangani or Eastern plains Berek on the border of Pokot and Turkana (Benson). Rong, east of Moiben (Kirew, Kam.)	Moved because of famine and wars with the Maasai. Buffalo is regarded as their cow but the moon as their daughter's husband.
10. Lökeniyon	Visser and Benson: Frog. The sub-clans of Chepökamali and Chepötilak have white-necked crow.	Pnyakaw Kukai	Visser: East, area of Tugen. Chemoyö come from Uganda (Kir, Kam.). Chepökamali and Chepötilak originate in Chemirkai in Cherangani hills, near Lelan. Were one group in Moiben (Mosin).	This clan is big among the Marakwet.
11. Rongin/Moyoy	Visser: A kind of a dove. Female buffalo. Warthog.	Kayuntĩ So nyo le teta Lotura.	Iten Rong, near Tambach	Were originally Keyo people. This clan was originally two, Rongin and Moyoy. No informant mentions the dove as a totem.
12. Sanyökin	Red ants	Pirech	Kötut eastern side of Elgeyo Marakwet. Marakwet. Visser: Cherangani.	
13. Silökin	Hawk	Sirörö	Kowogh in Mwino. Island in Lake Baringo. Were called Chompus or Njemps.	

Name of Clan	Totem	Pokot name of the totem	Origin of the Clan	Remarks
14. Tinchön	Hyena	Kawagh	East of Mt. Tiatiy. Visser: Tugen	
15. Chepinin	Monkey	Warany		A part of Tinchön (Visser).
16. Söchon	Lion	Ngötiny	Moiben. Visser: Soy, near Eldoret.	
17. Tulin, Chesikö < sikon = cowdung	Visser: Jackal. Wild pig (the Kapöghe sub-clan).	Chepkonö Lotura	Visser: Cave at the , western foot of the Cherangani hills, Ptabar. (The Kasikö sub-clan). Marakwet and Moiben.	Founder: Tula. Composed of two groups, one from Marakwet and the other from Soi near Eldoret.
18. Kapilyon	Visser: Dog White-necked crow.	Kukiy Chewiryökö	Visser: Mountains near Marich. Cave in Ptabar, on western side of Cherangani hills. Four of the Kapilyon sub-clans belong to Sikowin clan. Dog might belong to them.	
19. Sikowin	Dog	kukiy	Mt. Elgon.	Visser has this clan as a part of the Kapilyon-clan.
20. Pkomör	Buffalo	So	Rongin, plains.	Emigrated to escape death.
21. Kösöm	Bee-like insect.	Kösömnyon	Elgon, plains.	
22. Talayn	White-necked crow Baboon.	Kukay Mayos	Cave of Ptabar and moved from there to Mwino (Chepösököy). Benson: Mt. Elgon → Cherangany hills→Ptapar in Lelan and Kapedo. Visser: Ptapar in Mwino.	
23. Ptingo	Snake	Moröy	Kölköl, across Kerio	
24. Köymö/Kanoyin	Colombus monkey	Monges/Tiyochon	Masop/Cherangani	

Name of Clan	Totem	Pokot name of the totem	Origin of the Clan	Remarks
25. Ptuyin	Donkey	Sikiria	Samburu, bordering w. Turkana. Visser: Elgon/plains	Traveled around Turkana. Some stayed there but others continued to Sekerr, and then to Sontany mountain, Mwino, Mogho and Annet.
26. Kapkögh	White necked crow	Kukai kacherelkat	Tikön, east of Baringo.	
27. Koghoghin	Black monkey	Tiyöchon	Cave in W-Cherangany hills, near Kachepkölel.	Started with Kakrop people who lived for a time near Kapcherop.
28. Kopil The same as 18	White necked crow		Cave in Ptabar. From there to Mwino.	Forefather: Chemimöt.
Songuk				
30. Tingeyin	No totem	No totem	Kaibanan in Tingei near Rong, (Chepökenyewa sub-clan)	
31. Mkeyin	Coumbus monkey		Mtya near Eldoret.	
32. Pkemeyin	Calabash	Psilangwa	Baringo.	
33. Törük	Ilät	Ilöt	Sebei.	

APPENDIX VI

IMPORTANT TREES AND SHRUBS IN WEST POKOT

Important trees and shrubs in West Pokot

Most names in the thesis are found in this list, but not all. One reason is that some plants have more than one name among the Pokot people.

Nr.	Pokot name	Latin name	Usage
1	Adomeyon	<i>Cordia sinensis</i>	Roots and bark used as medicine, edible fruits, fodder, bee forage, fibre, timber, walking sticks and stools made from it.
2	Adurkoit	<i>Acacia albicla</i>	Dye for clothes, soil conservation, fixes nitrogen balance in soil, fodder.
3	Amanyany	<i>Carallum foetida</i>	Food for humans, soil conservation.
4	Apariongoeng	<i>Cactus spp.</i>	Medicine for removing animal placentas, soil conservation, edible fruits.
5	Arerönyon	<i>Cadabe farinosa</i>	Fodder, medicine for coughs (leaves), toothbrush.
6	Atat	<i>Acacia elatior</i>	Fodder, medicine (bark), fibre, fencing material, shade, fixes nitrogen balance in soil.
7	Chekewö	<i>Salvadore persica</i>	Fodder for camels, edible fruits, medicine, shade, soil cover, salt (from its ash), toothbrush.
8	Chemalukutany	<i>Diospyros mespiliformis</i>	Fodder, edible fruits, medicine, shade, used for woodcarving, walking sticks, building poles.
9	Chemanga	<i>Acacia senegal</i>	Bee-forage, fodder, fixes nitrogen balance in soil, fuel wood, charcoal, posts, tanning, shade.
10	Chepangi	Mexican marigold (Engl.)	Pesticide against crop pests (e.g. aphids, weevil and stalkborers), fertilizer.
11	Chepanyinta (Miraa)	<i>Catha edulis</i>	Medicine for kalazaar, stimulating drug, poles.
12	Chepiliswö	<i>Maerua subcordata</i>	Edible fruits and roots, fodder for donkeys and camels, soil conservation, to cleanse dirty water.
13	Chepopet	<i>Clerodendrum myricoides</i>	Arrows, medicine for maggots, beads, fuel wood.
14	Chepöron	<i>Albizia coriaria</i>	Medicine for kalazaar (roots, bark), bee-forage, ornamenats, shade, toothbrush,.
15	Cheptuya	<i>Euclea divinorum</i>	Medicine (roots, fruits), furniture, timber, and posts.
16	Chesamus	<i>Acacia gerrardii</i>	Fodder, medicine, bee-forage, woodcarving, fixes nitrogen in soil, fuel wood.
17	Chuwuw	<i>Acacia hocki</i>	Fodder, medicine (bark), bee-forage, edible gum, fuel wood.
18	Iwak	<i>Sansevieria raffillii</i>	Rope, soil conservation, to mend gullies, dewormer, medicine against typhoid (roots).

19	Kaliya	Odenium obesum	To treat kalazaar, beautiful flowers, beehives.
20	Kamakiten	Albizia antheminea	Medicine against tapeworms (bark and roots), stools made from it, fodder, shade.
21	Katagh (Minta rotwö)	Commiphora africana	Ornamental, insecticide, edible fruits, medicine for stomachache, young shoots are good fodder. Keeps flies away from homesteads, life fence, furniture from it, water troughs, spoons.
22	Kerelwö	Croton dichogamus	Edible fruits, fodder, medicine, leaves burned for beehive smoking, building material.
23	Kinyotwö	Ximenia americana	Edible fruits, oil, medicine for sterility (roots).
24	Kipöw	Croton microstachys	Stomach medicine, bee-forage, posts, soil conservation, shade.
25	Kireswö	Euphobia candelbrum	Building poles, life fence, soil conservation, ornamental.
26	Kiromwö	Ozoroa insignis	Medicine (typhoid), fodder, tea (bark), its soot used for milk gourds.
27	Kisoyö	Solanum nigrum	Vegetable
28	Kökötetwo	Corrisa edulis	Medicine for sterility (roots), edible fruits, ornaments, soap made from it, fodder, fuel wood.
29	Köloswö	Terminalia brownii	Fodder, medicine for yellow fever, dye, building poles and posts, fuel wood, bee- forage, bee-hives.
30	Kölyön	Acokanthera schimperii	Poison for arrows (<i>supet</i>) edible fruits. Medicine for calves against diahorrea (leaves are burned). Shade, soil conservation.
31	Kömöl	Combretum molla	Building material, woodwork, chewing gum (<i>incha</i>), medicine (roots), bee-forage, leaves used as bedding (<i>sisisinyon</i>) for circumcised girls.
32	Kömolwö	Vangueria acutilipa	Edible fruits, building poles, rafters, fuel wood.
33	Köpkö	Acacia nilotica	Bark used as stomach medicine, green pods for treating eyes, bee-forage, fodder for livestock, pods are good for deworming livestock, poles, charcoal.
34	Köpulwö	Gardenia volkensii	Malaria medicine, shade, wood carving, soil conservation.
35	Korkorwö	Erythrina abyssinica	Wood carving, fuel wood, bee-hives, fodder edible fruits, beads, used in rituals.
36	Körösyon	Gadaba glabra	Edible fruits (boiled for 8 hrs, not when fresh, otherwise poisonous), shade, medicine.
37	Kutkutya	Galinsoga	Medicine for typhoid and flu, soil cover.

		paviflora	Nice flowers.
38	Kwarkwaryan	Cissus rotundifolia	Soil cover, Somalis use as vegetable.
39	Likwön	Boscia angustifolia	Medicine for stomachache, believed to prevent misfortune (bark is chewed) (<i>pitöt</i>), shade.
40	Lilwö	Sterculia stenocarpa	Fodder, edible roots, beehive, bee forages.
41	Lolotwö	Lanea fulva	Edible fruits, shade, rope, flute (<i>pkireru</i>)
42	Lomnyon	Balanites pericellaries	Edible fruits (boiled for 12 hrs., otherwise poisonous), fodder for camels and goats, shade, building materials, poles, used for woodwork.
43	Lömöywö	Zizygium cuminii	Edible fruit, fodder, shade, soil conservation.
44	Lopotwö	Solanum incanum	Treatment for wounds (fruits), fodder (leaves), drug for stomachache. Traditional healers use for sending evil spirits away from sick people (<i>pitot</i>). Used in the <i>katkatat</i> cleansing ritual.
45	Manampelyon	Teclea pilosa	Fodder, medicine for stomachache and eyes (bark and leaves), poles, fuel wood, shade.
46	Masyon	Commiphora edulis	Fuel wood (<i>kwen</i>), bee-forage, edible fruits, used to make furniture (stools),
47	Melöy	Urtica massaica	Pesticide, soil cover
48	Mikurkong	Harrisnia abyssinica	Medicine for typhoid, infertility of women, sexually transmitted diseases (roots), fodder, soil conservation.
49	Milkisyö	Ovaria leptochadon	Edible fruits, bee-forage, fuel wood, rafters, building material (stores).
50	Mintirilwö	Commiphora schimpori	
51	Miskitonwö	Combretum hereroense	Edible fruits, good fodder, building material
52	Moköngwö	Ficus sycamorus	Edible fruits, medicine, bee-hives, fodder, shade, rituals are performed under it and its branches are used in them.
53	Mokuwyö	Grewia villosa	Bows, spears and arrows. Fodder, medicine, edible fruits.
54	Molkotwö	Canthium lactescens	Edible fruits, building material, medicine, fuel wood.
55	Moniwö		
56	Möntörwö	Thorn apple (Eng.)	Live fence, soil conservation.
57	Mörykwö	Haplocoelum foliolosum	Edible fruits, fodder, posts, poles.
58	Moseswö	Canthium lactescens	Edible fruits, medicine (bark), fuel wood, glue, fibre, building material, shade, fence.
59	Mosolion	Sarcostema	Food, animal fodder, soil conservation, drug

		viminale	for headache.
60	Mötökorwö	Euphorbia tirucalli	Pesticide for weevils, medicine for wounds, protection of gulley eroded areas.
61	Moykut	Cyperus tuberosus	Medicine for stomach, flu and for sending sickness away <i>pitöt</i> .
62	Muchukwö	Berchemia discolor	Edible fruit, beads, fodder, shade, black dye for clothes, fuel wood, color for tea, hard wood, furniture.
63	Nyermenwö	Hildebrantia obcordata	Medicine made from roots (against worms in humans), soil conservation.
64	Orolwö	Scelpocarya birrea	Edible fruits, fodder, medicine, shade, fodder, wood for woodwork.
65	Oron	Tamarindus indica	Fodder, shade, edible fruits, medicine (roots and fruits), bee-forage, beehives, shade, wood-carvings.
66	Pagha kawagh	Lantana camara	Lifefence, soil conservation, bee-forage.
67	Panan (Akwakwayan)	Albizia amara	Fodder (leaves,) shade, broom, bee-forage, stomach medicine (bark).
68	Panyirüt	Acacia reficiens	Fencing, fibre, fodder, bee-forage.
69	Parasinta	Terminia spinosa	Bee-forage, poles and posts for building, beehives.
70	Pchitchit	Commiphora abessinica	Medicine for kalazaar (<i>termes</i>), stool making, bee-forage, bandages for wounds.
71	Pilil	Acacia nubica	Bark used as medicine, camel fodder, provides milk gourds, good soot (<i>sutöw</i>)
72	Piryokwö	Pappea capersis	Fodder, building material, edible fruits, medicine (kalazaar), bee-forage, woodwork.
73	Pöghyotwö	Ficus capensis	Chewing gum, dye for clothes, edible fruits, windbreak, for making troughs.
74	Portotayon	Commelina bengalensis	Vegetable, soil cover and animal fodder.
75	Ptanya	Amaramthus tricolor.	Vegetables (leaves), soil cover, animal feed.
76	Ptarí	Acacia brevispica	Fence, fuel wood, building material, bee- forage (for the best honey), fodder, roots used as medicine for goats.
77	Rachan	Leptadenia hastata	Vegetable, soil cover, animal fodder.
78	Rena	Acacia xanthophlora	Gum is edible, fuel wood, bark used as medicine, fodder, fencing material.
79	Reperwö	Garciria livingstone	Edible fruits, fuel wood, timber poles, posts, shade, bee-forage.
80	Riköyö	Combretum acculeatum	Posts for buildings, fuel wood, edible fruits, medicine, fodder.
81	Riröntö	Delonix elata	Animal fodder, shade, toothbrush, bee- forage.
82	Royin	Kigelia africana	Fruits used to ferment beer, firewood, medicine for sterility, kalazaar, beehives.
83	Senetwö	Cassia	Medicine against malaria for young

		didymobotrya	children, typhoid. Ceremonial tree, soil conservation in riverbeds, mosquito repellent.
84	Seretion	Cynodon nlemfuensis	(Stargrass (Eng.))
85	Ses	Acacia tortilis	Fibre, fuel wood, bee-forage, used in rituals, (e.g. <i>sapana</i>), fodder, fixes the balance of nitrogen in soil, shade.
86	Sikowö	Solanum aculeastrum	Medicine, fencing.
87	Simotwö	Ficus natalensis	Edible fruits, life fence, shade, ceremonies performed in its shade and branches are used in rituals.
88	Siryökwö	Rhus natalensis	Edible fruits, medicine for typhoid (leaves), toothbrush, shade, fodder.
89	Sitoghön	Acacia drepanolobium	Building material, fuel wood, medicine (bark), fodder for livestock, pods eaten by children.
90	Sitöt	Grewia bicolor	Edible fruits, medicine, poles, posts, walking sticks, bows and arrows, fodder, shade, mulch, in rituals (branches, for blessing).
91	Siyoyöwö	Ficus dexdelena (dekdekana, Bolling)	Edible fruits, fuel wood, bee-forage. Used in rituals.
92	Sönköwyö	Zanthoxylum chalybeum	Medicine for typhoid, malaria, flu, flavouring for tea, dye, fodder, shade, fuel wood, charcoal, bee-forage.
93	Söpöwö		
94	Sorichon	Bosica coriacea	Human food (seeds are boiled). Medicine for typhoid (leaves, bark, roots). Toothbrush, fodder (leaves), fuel wood.
95	Sörökitwö	Sansevieria ehrenbergii	Rope, soil conservation, the juice is used for deworming livestock.
96	Sösöytö	Pordocarpus spp.	Timber, fuel wood.
97	Sosyon	Phoenix canariensis	Edible fruits, gourd brush, dye, fruits for beer making, thatching, soil conservation, shade, ceremonial (blessing).
98	Sungululwö	Boswelia hilderbrandtii	Edible fruits, shade, bee-forage
99	Suriyö		
100	Takaywa	Hyphaena coriacea	Edible fruits, shade, thatching, leaves for making baskets (<i>köröp</i>), building poles, rafters, charcoal, soil conservation.
101	Talamach	Ipomoea hilderbrandtif	Used as toilet paper locally, soil cover.
102	Talamoghyon	Acacia mellifera	Bee-forage, stomach medicine (bark), fodder, fuel wood, dye clothes (bark), fencing.

103	Tapoyö	Lanea triphylla	Fodder, edible roots and fruits, fibre, life fence, bee-forage.
104	Tik̄it	Terminalia mentalis	Building poles and posts, shade, soil conservation.
105	Tilingwö	Meyna tetraphylla	Fodder, bee-forage, edible fruits, firewood, building posts.
106	Tilomwö	Zizyphus mauritiana	Edible fruits, fence, building posts, bee-forage, shade, medicine (stomachache).
107	Tingoswö	Flocourtia indica	Edible fruits, medicine, fodder, life fence, fuel wood.
108	Tingwö	Acacia kirkir	Fodder, fixes nitrogen balance in soil, posts, poles, charcoal, bee-forage.
109	Tirökwö	Zizyphus macronata	Edible fruits, building posts, poles, rafters, shade, fuel wood, bee-forage, medicine for stomach.
110	Tiyin	Dichrostachys cinera	Poles, posts, medicine for headache and stomachache (leaves, roots). Digging tool, fodder, fixes nitrogen balance in soil.
111	Tiywö	Cadaba farinosa	Fodder, fuel wood, poles, medicine (bark and roots).
112	Tolkos	Aloe	Medicine for malaria, wounds.
113	Töndwö	Prunus africana	Shade, timber, fuel wood, bee-forage.
114	Töpörerwö	Cordia ovalis	Fruits, fuel wood, medicine (ringworm), fodder, building material, to cleanse utensils.
115	Törökwö	Juniperus procera East African Cedar	Timber, furniture, shade, fuel wood, soil conservation, used in rituals.
116	Toronwö	Grewia tenax	Fuel wood, bee-forage, edible fruits, fodder.
117	Tumeghyö		Vegetable, cooked with maize flour.
118	Tuwöt	Diospyros scabra	Fodder (leaves, fruits, seeds), fuel wood, shade, poles, dye for clothes.
119	Tuyunwö	Balanites aegyptica	Gum used for treating eyes, edible fruits, oil, utensils, vegetable (<i>sokorya</i>), medicine (roots and bark), windbreaker, fodder, used in rituals.
120	Wocholwö	Ficus spp.	Fruit, fodder, firewood, bee-forage, shade.
121	Yem̄it	Olea africana Wild olive	Shade, bee-forage, timber, edible fruits. Very resistant to cold and drought. Branches used in rituals.