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## RAINMAKING RITUALS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO KENYAN SOCIETIES

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**ABSTRACT** A comparative examination of the public rainmaking rituals in Kitui District and the secret rainmaking rituals in Bunyore location of Kakamega District, both in Kenya, reveals that public rituals are more susceptible to rapid social change than those of secret. Secondly, although rainmaking rituals are a response to scarcity or unreliability that are rainfall, such rituals can be found even in the areas of adequate rainfall either because the people once lived in an area of rainfall scarcity or the rainmakers are strangers who came from such areas. Thirdly, the efficacy of rainmaking rituals is based on faith, and due to the involvement of the supernatural, they have socio-psychological implications on the participants.

**Key Words:** Rainmaking; Processions; Magic; Prophecy; Occult.

### INTRODUCTION

Sir James George Frazer who wrote widely on the types and practices of magic, considered rainfall rituals as falling under the purview of magic. This is because the purpose of rainfall rituals is to influence weather conditions in order to cause rain or to cause drought either for the general good or destruction of the people in the specific society in which there is a belief in man's ability to influence weather conditions. In his writings as projected in the "Golden Bough", Frazer takes an evolutionary perspective in the study of magic and magicians. He says:

In...society, where uniformity of occupation is a rule, and the distribution of the community into various classes of workers has hardly begun, every man is more or less his own magician, he practises charms and incantations for his own good and injury of his enemies. But...(when society becomes more advanced) a number of men...(are) set a part for the express purpose of benefiting the whole community by their skill whether that be directed to the healing of diseases, the forecasting of the future, the regulation of the weather, or any other object of general utility (Frazer, 1942: 6).

There is, therefore, private and public magic and by implication private and public magicians. From ethnographic literature and field research among the Kitui Kamba, we can conceive of rainfall rituals as being either private or public in the manner in which they are performed, even though both of them are aimed at affecting the public in general. Private rainfall rituals include all those that are secret or occult in nature, under the control and direction of an individual or an elite group of rainmakers whose duty is to diagnose the causes of drought or too much rain and to reverse the situation for the benefit of all in the society. This is the category of rainmakers that would fall into Frazer's category of public magicians. According to him, these are:

...a body of men relieved...from the need of earning their livelihood by hard manual toil, and allowed, ...expected and encouraged, to prosecute researches into the secret ways of nature. It... (is) at once their duty and their interest to know more than their fellows; to acquaint themselves with everything that could aid man in his arduous struggle with nature, everything that could mitigate his sufferings and prolong his life (1942: 61-62)

Public rain rituals, on the other hand, include those rituals that have as their major component, public processions. Although there may be an elite group of experts who guide others in what is expected to be done, a large group of people actively participate in the process of rainmaking.

It can be hypothesized that the occult rainmakers may be found among politically centralized systems of organization such as chiefdoms or kingdoms. In these societies, chiefs or kings were divine and were expected to be chief magicians and rainmakers in the land. Otherwise they had a group of such experts at their courts all the time for any natural calamity such as drought, famine, flood or epidemic, which was sometimes associated with the personal shortcoming of the individual chief or king. In some cases, therefore, ordinary rainmakers occupy "a position of great influence, from which if he is a prudent and able man, he may advance step by step to the rank of a chief or king" (Frazer, 1942: 61). This is, in fact, what happened among the Banyala of western Kenya in historical times when the ruler, Nasokho, who could not succeed in interceding for his people against drought, and the resultant famine, and loss of life, was replaced by a Maasai rainmaker who succeeded in causing it to rain after he had told the Banyala, a Luyia-speaking group of people, to prepare their fields. In this way, the rainmaker, Masiribayi, became the ruler by public acclaim (Were, 1972: 9).

Following Malinowski and Raddiffe-Brown, who held the view that every institution in society emerges and persists in existence to serve a specific function, it can be hypothesized that the diverse kinds of rainfall rituals emerged in arid and semi-arid areas as a means of coping with inadequacy and unreliability of rainfall. This is to say that man found that he could adapt to conditions of rainfall inadequacy and unreliability by the manipulation of supernatural forces which were believed to be closely associated with weather conditions. This is not to say that rainmaking rituals are to be found only in the areas of rainfall deficit. Ethnographic evidence reveals that there are some societies in East and Southern Africa, which have sufficient rainfall for agricultural production but in which rainmaking is a lucrative and prestigious profession.

In this paper, therefore, I wish to demonstrate that unreliability of rainfall is not a sufficient condition for the emergence of rainmaking institutions. People who used to reside in an area of rainfall scarcity and unreliability, may continue the art of rainmaking even when they have migrated into an area of plentiful supply of rainfall. Similarly, a rainmaker in one society may be a foreigner who originally resided in a region with scarcity of rainfall as did Masiribayi in the Banyala case. In order to achieve my goal, I wish to compare the rainmaking rituals of two societies in Kenya, namely, the Kamba of Kitui District of Eastern Province of Kenya and the Banyore of Kakamega District of Western Province of Kenya.

## RAINMAKING IN KITUI DISTRICT

Kitui District lies in a semi-arid region of Kenya which receives up to 30 inches of rainfall annually for the two planting and harvesting seasons. Although marginal agriculture is possible when the season receives its expected rainfall, making it possible for an early maturing maize variety and millet, beans, cowpeas, pigeon peas, green grams and pumpkins to grow to maturity, livestock form the basic source of cash through sales for those who still have them. The district experiences persistent droughts and famines and since 1890, when a colonial post was established in the district, food relief has become a significant means of survival for many families whenever severe droughts and famines occur.

Information collected in the district in 1982 and in 1985, shows that there used to be several rainmaking rituals in different parts of the district (Akong'a, 1985). There was an annual public rainmaking ritual in southern and central parts of the district; and the cults of Lala and Nzambi wa Ulu are still found in eastern and northern parts of the district, respectively.

### Public Rain Making Ritual in Southern and Central Kitui

The myth of creation of the Kamba people reveals that it was the natural order of events for the Kamba to sacrifice to god, *Mulungu* or *Ngai* who was considered as the creator and provider. There reached a time, however, when the Kamba got too complacent with life ignoring to offer thanksgiving sacrifices before tasting the first fruits of their harvests as it was customary. *Mulungu* became angry and closed the skies, making Kambaland an area of rain deficit. According to the myth, this is the time when people of Kamba extraction began to wander-off in search of food and water (Mbula, 1974: 34). It appears that following this unfortunate event, the Kamba realized their omission and resumed their sacrifices, but this time they were not directed towards *Mulungu* as it was before but to ancestral spirits who until today, are interpreted as closer to the people and therefore, through whom their welfare is taken care of by *Mulungu*.

The knowledge concerning the rainmaking rituals collected in Kitui reveals that each localized region had its own mode of offering sacrifices for rain. In southern Kitui, for example, the rainmaking ritual was in the past performed during the month of August or early November when the long rains are expected. The day of the ritual was a holy day selected by old men in advance and announced at all public gatherings such as community work sessions, dances, watering places and at the *kyengo*, the dry season common grazing area. On that day, everyone was expected to observe peace and purity by abstaining from quarrels and contaminating activities such as sexuality.

Everyone arrived early in the morning at the site of the ritual by the hillside. This site was either a haunted cave or thicket—a place that could not be approached by an individual without feeling afraid. When a person happened to pass by such a spot at night, he or she could hear horrible, mourning human and livestock sounds but without seeing anything. Old informants claimed that at such spots, they can still

see flames of brush fires at night but when they check in the morning, they find no trace of burnt material. A spot of this nature may have been a grave of a notable culture hero which had become sacred ground and therefore a shrine inhabited by ancestral spirits. This is called *ithembo*.

At such spots, old men and women who had reached their menopause assembled in a solemn sacrificial mood. Two youths, a girl and a boy, presumed to be virgins and thus pure in matters relating to facts of life, were then given a goat (in southern Kitui) or a bull (in central Kitui) to drive around the surrounding hill for seven times. On finishing the seventh round, the animal, which had no blemish in the colour of its skin or hide, was slaughtered by the old men who collected the blood on calabashes. Some of the blood and the items brought to the sacrificial site by married women such as milk, seeds of all the crops they would plant that season, cooked food, etc. and the alcohol brought by the old men, all on calabashes, were poured into the *ithembo* together, calling the names of specific ancestral spirits and inviting them to the feast. "As they do this," wrote Berestford-Stooke, "they pray to *aimu* (spirits) for rain, plenty of food, many children and deliverance from all evil" (1928: 40).

The body of the slaughtered animal was divided into two parts: the first part was cut into small pieces, mixed with some blood and thrown into and around the *ithembo* for the ancestral spirits to eat. The rest was divided among all the old people participating in the ritual including the two youths. The married, fertile women who brought the seeds and food for the spirits did not, however, share in the consumption of the sacrificial meat. When the women had performed their task of offering, they retreated to perform the *Kilumi* dance, leaving the old men and the women who had reached their menopause to roast and consume the animal, each person getting even a tiny piece. While all this was going on at the *ithembo* and its vicinity, youths (boys and girls) performed their own dance at a distance. There was a belief that dances and sacrificial food would appease the displeased ancestral spirits into considering to open up the skies in order to end the suffering of the living. In fact, dancing was performed by married women and youths, separately, for three evenings prior to the day of sacrifice. It was on the fourth evening that the date of the sacrifice was finally announced.

What is described of the Kitui Kamba rainfall ritual is very similar to what used to happen among the Kikuyu as described by Mr. Jomo Kenyatta, the late President of Kenya:

1) Precautions had to be undertaken to make the ritual as pure as possible. Kenyatta says; "The lambs for sacrifices of this nature must be only those which were acquired by lawful means: either bought by grain cultivated from rightfully owned land or by honey from a beehive made out of a sacred tree. The possessor of such a lamb must be a man who is known to be honest and trustworthy. He must not be a man who committed murder, theft, rape or had any connection with poison or witchcraft" (1938: 244). In Kitui, the person who would give the goat or bull for the next sacrifice was named during the ritual by one of the female dancers who got possessed and received the message from the possessing ancestral spirit. Following the sacrifice, the female dancers proceeded to the man's home, singing, dancing and carrying the head

and skin of the animal just sacrificed. Even if the man had not been present at the place of sacrifice, he accepted the responsibility of ensuring that there would be a suitable animal for the next sacrifice.

2) Among the Kikuyu, a girl and a boy led the procession, driving a sheep in front of them just as the two youths among the Kamba drove the sacrificial animal around a hill seven times before it was sacrificed. However, instead of the two youths taking the animal round the hill as the elders waited among the Kitui Kamba, the whole procession went around the sacred (mugumo) tree seven times in the Kikuyu case.

3) The Kikuyu directed their prayers or incantations towards *Mogai* (God) and although the sacrifices were performed at the sacred tree, they were performed facing Mount Kenya, which is believed to be God's residence. The Kitui Kamba, on the other hand, directed their prayers to named ancestral spirits, *aimu*.

4) In both societies, there is an evidence that it rained almost immediately following the sacrifices. From his own personal experiences as one of the two youths that were entrusted with leading the sacrificial procession among the Kikuyu, Kenyatta authoritatively says:

In the case of the ceremony in which I took part, I well remember that our prayers were quickly answered, for even before the sacred fires had ceased to burn, torrential rain came upon us. We were soaked, and it will not be easy for me to forget the walk home in the downpour (Kenyatta, 1938: 249)

Among the Kitui Kamba, the day following the day of sacrifice had to be kept holy by abstaining from cultivation or any hard work related to subsistence production. This means that even if it rained immediately following the sacrifice, it was not a signal for immediate planting. If anyone contravened this taboo, he or she was fined a goat. In case the person was reluctant to give it, a large group of married women gathered together and forced themselves into the home of the culprit wailing until the goat was handed. They also had the right of seizing such a goat by force if persuasive moves failed over to them. The goat was then sacrificed at the *ithembo* following the same procedure as already described. Still, the following day after repetition of the sacrifice had to be kept holy to compensate for the one lost.

In Kitui central, there was an additional belief that drought or any other natural disaster such as an epidemic was caused by a newly arrived stranger residing among them. The person was believed to have come into the community with powers unfamiliar or unknown to the people, a thing that may have displeased ancestral spirits. Such stranger was peacefully expelled from the community by a large group of married women who carried small drums, which they beat, sang and danced as they led the stranger away. The women carried food which they ate on the way if the stranger had to be escorted to a far-off point. The journey sometimes took a whole day. At the place where the women considered the boundary between their neighbourhood and the next, they strangled the cock they had brought along and threw it after the stranger, telling him never to return to their village.

An incident in which a man from Meru was spotted at Voo in eastern Kitui at the beginning of what turned out to be a prolonged drought was recounted to me. The man was escorted by a large group of women all the way from Voo in eastern Kitui to Ngomeni in Far North division and was told to cross the river Tana into Meru.

The women then killed and threw into the river the cock they had brought along for "rubbing-off" the foot-steps of the stranger. Back at home, the women killed another cock and took it to the *ithembo* together with other food items as an offering of appeasement to the ancestral spirits.

In Changuithya location of Kitui central, I was told of another case in which a white man was suspected of being the evil stranger. This was at the time when white people were starting to arrive in what is now Kitui town. There was a severe drought, followed by a severe famine. When members of the community arrived at the conclusion that the white man was the cause of their afflictions, they started sneaking into the man's home every night to throw stones at his house until the man became weary of their behaviour and left voluntarily. It is said that the people resorted to this method of driving the white man away because they did not know how to approach him and even if they had wanted to escort him away as it was customary, they did not know where the white man had come from. What is interesting, however, is that in all cases of this nature, people were expected to exercise restraint so that the stranger would not be harmed in any way. It was believed that harming the stranger would bring about another spell of bad omen. This is probably why the men left the responsibility of expelling the stranger to women who, in normal circumstances were unarmed and defenseless and therefore, would not be attacked by a man in his normal senses.

#### THE CULT OF LALA IN EASTERN KITUI

In eastern Kitui, the annual public rainmaking ritual just described was also performed in the past but it may not have been as central to rainmaking as it was in central and southern parts of the district. What seems to have predominated in eastern Kitui is the belief that certain prophets, *mwathani*, were associated with the knowledge concerning rainfall. These prophets are men of foresight who usually use no magic to gain their knowledge but who when possessed by ancestral or other spirits pronounce whether there would be adequate or inadequate rainfall. They are, therefore, in a position to advise people in their communities what they should plant in a given season relative to the amount of precipitation expected (*Kavyu*, 1973: 2). The power of the *mwathani*, therefore, comes from the underworld as *Kavyu* notes;

When Mutitu hill is heard roaring late at night, or early morning hours the already dead prophets are asking a sacrifice for their friends who give them the prophets' power.

This request is made to the living *mwathani* or the person concerned (usually from the *mbaa mbua*—the rain clan)—the last time was in August 1973 (*Kavyu*, 1973: 3).

The sacrifice is a secret between the living and the dead prophets only. It is, therefore, an occult affair. It is even said that during past severe droughts when many people and livestock lost their lives, a child stolen from a distant area such as Machakos (another Kamba inhabited district) was buried alive as part of the appeasement of ancestral spirits (1973: 3).

#### Lala the Prophet

There is a tradition in eastern Kitui which lauds Lala, the son of Mutya Kwata,

as having been a prophet or medium who, "with precision could tell when people would expect rain" (1973: 4). In addition, he could prepare protective magic, especially in times of war. In fact, he was personally associated with a rainfall ritual that involved his diving into River Matia as people waited on its banks with a sacrificial bull. "If (while diving) he got hold of long stick/pole sharp at the end, it meant people would expect good millet harvest; if a short pole thick and blunt it meant a good cowpeas harvest" (Ibid.). According to *Kavyu*, the bull that was sacrificed was taken around the pole after which its ear lobes were severed and thrown into the water. The bull was then taken to a fig tree, *ithembo*, to be slaughtered and the meat was taken to another fig tree where it was roasted and eaten. As in other sacrifices already described, no one was permitted to break any bones during the feast or to take any piece of meat away from the sacrificial site.

A variant of the above mentioned tradition indicates that when reference is made to Lala, it is because of the supernatural powers of his daughter rather than himself. They mean to refer to Kathambi mwitu wa Lala, that is to say, Kathambi daughter of Lala or *mwitu wa kuu kumwe*-one legged lady. According to this tradition, *mwitu wa Lala* was a woman who had migrated from an unknown place with prophetic powers which made people to think that she should have got them from Lala, a Kamba cultured hero.

Whether Lala was a mythical or historical figure is not so important. What is important is that "before and during his lifetime, the religious female (kilumi) dance was used in praise of the life-giving creator, *Mulungu*. After Lala's death songs have been sung in his praise" (Kavyu, 1973: 5). This is not unusual in Kitui in general because sacrifices are also directed towards ancestral spirits rather than *Mulungu*. A good illustration of this is found among the members of the cult of Nzambi who worship and sacrifice to her either for healing purposes or in order to gain knowledge concerning weather conditions.

## THE CULT OF NZAMBI IN NORTHERN KITUI

In the northern parts of Kitui, people do not subscribe to the rainfall rituals found in the central, southern and eastern parts of the district. They have their own tradition centred on a mythical woman called Nzambi. In fact, in Kitui today, they are the Nzambi and Lala cults that are still in practice. Information gathered from Waita in Mwingi division shows that no one can belong to the cult of Nzambi unless one has been called to service by Nzambi herself. The calling usually comes through prolonged, apparently incurable illness. One middle aged woman who belongs to the group of Nzambi worshipers told me how before she joined the cult, she had been very ill for two years. She had been incapable of performing any hard work. Her husband who has another wife junior to her took her to various hospitals and traditional herbalists, but to no avail. Then, one evening, after she had forced herself to prepare a meal for her children, she leaned on the bed to rest feeling exhausted, when she thought she saw a strange woman walk into the house with a stick. The woman lifted the stick as if to strike her but at that moment she woke up from her nap shouting and running around. She removed all her clothes and was running past the gate



when her husband caught up with her. That night, Nzambi, usually referred to by cultists as *Nzambi wa ulu*, the washer of eyes, sent a message through a cultist that the illness was an affliction from her. She wanted the sick woman to become her vessel.

No time was to be lost in fulfilling Nzambi's wish if the woman were to survive. She needed a drum, bow and a gourd with rattles. In such cases, the drum is sent for from her natal home while the bow and gourd are provided by two witchdoctors, a male and a female, both of whom must be members of the Nzambi cult. Although the bow and arrow are symbols of vivility, the bow is acquired without the arrow. A bow without arrows is blunt, feminine and impotent although if acquired by a woman as in this case, makes her acquire some masculine characteristics. The initiate after getting healed, is permitted to exhibit certain behaviour that is normally expected of men such as drinking in company of men, participating in the rituals other women would not normally be expected to participate, etc. The two witch doctors who provide some of the required paraphernalia become closely attached to her with the view of socializing her into the cult by transferring vital knowledge to her. She is, for example, instructed on how to diagnose and heal spirit and witchcraft related diseases. She is also taught various herbal medicines and the symptoms of the diseases they cure. In the final analysis, the initiate not only gets healed by becoming a medium of Nzambi but also becomes a diviner and herbalist through instruction and experience.

Psychological and nutritional research carried out among the Zulu and Nguni Bantu of South Africa by Lee (1969) and Gussler (1972) respectively on the phenomenon of spirit possession of this nature revealed that what the people diagnose culturally as spirit possession or *ukuthwasa*, the crying disease, could, in fact, be brought about by "convergence of biological, environmental and cultural factors" (Gussler, 1972: 87). This is because the disease is found mainly in women, who by custom, are not permitted to consume protein food such as meat, poultry and fish and although they can consume curdled milk, herds have tremendously been reduced due to the former colonial and current apartheid practices of appropriating African land for white settlement. According to Gussler, overreliance on maize may cause rough skin (pellagra) since maize lacks vital amino acid, niacin. Lack of niacin and thiamin in the body is known to cause anxiety states that border mental instability, leading to such behavioral traits as wailing and wandering about. I do not intend to label the Nzambi cultists as suffering from what is known in South Africa as *ukuthwasa* or wailing disease, but the similarities between the Kitui and the South African cases are overly suggestive.

Not only are the symptoms similar but the folk diagnosis of the afflictions are also the same. That is, the illness is thought of as spirit possession and as such, it is not considered as a biological problem. Secondly, the cure in both cases involves the patient accepting the calling to serve the institutionalized spiritual being, a process which transforms the patient not only into an obedient medium of the possessing spirit but also into a diviner and herbalist through prolonged training. Thirdly, it can be said that the channeling of the affliction into culturally acceptable and useful forms helps the patients to acquire new personalities through the pro-

cess of reaction formation. In this case, failure to conform to the expected new personality causes a relapse into the former state of health. The healing process, therefore, only helps the patients to cope with their health problems, so they do not get cured in the medical sense. However, it is important to observe that the recurrent drought and famine in Kitui are capable of producing the socio-psychological and biological conditions similar to those observed in the politically oppressed ethnic groups of South Africa studied by Gussler and Lee. According to the Kitui informant, by the time she had acquired the required paraphernalia, she was completely normal, waiting to undergo the prolonged training in herbal medicine and divination.

In Kitui, the cultists are expected to drum for and to feed Nzambi in their homes, and at certain periodic times, in a common ground, followed by sacrifices to her. When Nzambi is hungry, she is said to appear to one of her cultists in a dream or vision. The person to whom she has appeared prepares tea without milk and clean, cold water to be poured as libations at various places in his or her compound. As the libation is poured, incantations are said, mentioning the names of Nzambi and ancestral spirits. Although Nzambi is a spirit, she is not thought of as a spirit of the dead. Her exact origin is unknown. In the evening, the cultist to whom she has appeared lights a bonfire in the courtyard to give warmth and light for Nzambi. She then puts on a specially decorated dress and starts drumming. The colour of the dress worn when drumming for Nzambi is selected in accordance with the colour of the dress Nzambi was wearing when she first appeared to the cultist. In case this dress or any other paraphernalia is touched without a good reason as it was when it was being shown to me, then the spirits have to be fed on tea and water. Failure to do so would anger them, driving them to punish the cultist concerned with beatings or illness.

It can, therefore, be concluded that one aspect of the cult of Nzambi has to do with the preservation of the lives of the individual cultists. The second aspect is related to the concern for the welfare of the whole community through rainfall. A cultist may receive a message from the spiritual world concerning whether there will be enough rainfall or not, and what the people in the community should be advised to plant. For example, if little rainfall is expected, people are advised to plant millet, green grams, pigeon peas and cowpeas; while if a lot of rainfall is expected as communicated from the spiritual world of Nzambi, then maize can also be planted in addition.

In Kitui as in the Lobedu society in South Africa, inadequacy of rainfall is not simply a natural phenomenon that has no human cause. Usually, when the message about inadequate rainfall is received, the reasons for the inadequacy may also be given. This may include a member of the community contravening the law of nature: the members of the community ignoring offering sacrifices to their ancestral spirits thus, reducing them into beggars in the underworld; or a person of high status in the community being buried in an inappropriate site or with inappropriate rituals. If this is the case, then what is revealed to be wrong has to be righted for people to have the confidence that rainfall will come as expected (Krige, 1943: 279).

The cultist who receive such information is expected to spread it to all the others for action without failure. Each one of them is expected to feed Nzambi and the ancestral spirits on tea and cold water as usual, pouring each drink at two spots at a time so

that if there are any ancestral spirits that are in conflict with one another and therefore, who cannot drink from the same source, they can have their fill without problems. The cultists are then expected to leave their compounds with drums onto the common cleared ground used whenever all the cultists have to assemble. They drum till late at night before each one of them retires home for sleep. This is repeated for three nights in a row, but on the fourth night, the drumming goes on till morning when the participants proceed to a big sacred tree nearby or in the surrounding hills, to sacrifice a goat.

The goat is lifted up when it is slaughtered so that the blood drips directly into the first of the seven holes made in a row in the ground. As the first one is filled, the blood overflows into the next and so on. If all the seven holes get filled the cultists conclude that there will be adequate precipitation. On the other hand, if all the holes do not get filled, it is symbolic of the onset of drought. After slaughtering the goat, the seeds brought to the site are thrown at the tree serving as the *ithembo*. The meat is then roasted and eaten there without carrying any piece home. Of course, some is cut into small pieces and thrown around to named ancestral spirits and Nzambi. Afterwards, the contents of the entrails are distributed to members of the cult to sprinkle in their own gardens before planting. It is believed that this reduces the intensity of the rays of the sun and enables the planted seeds to sprout without problems.

Following the sacrifice, the head and the skin of the sacrificed goat is taken to a member of the community who is believed to be rich in livestock. He is expected to offer a goat for the next sacrifice. If the person refuses to give the goat when the time comes, a thing that was unknown until April, 1982, then a member of the cult may donate the goat or all the members of the cult may contribute money to buy the required goat. All that is needed is that the sacrificial animal must have been acquired through rightful means and by a person who is upright in his conduct and clear in his conscience.

In April, 1982, at Waita in Kitui north division, the cult survived after going through a crisis, in which the man who was given the head and skin of the goat sacrificed in 1981 refused to donate a goat on the pretext that he is a Christian who no longer believes in the efficacy of rainfall rituals and that the previous sacrifice had been performed in his absence. Under the current circumstances, the cultists could not have gone into the man's home to take the goat by force as required by custom. They resorted to legal means by approaching the assistant chief of the area for assistance in acquiring the goat from the man's home. The assistant chief, however, made their condition rather desperate by declaring that sacrifices are no longer efficacious in modern Kenya and that they needed a licence from him to assemble for ritual purposes.

The cultists now blame the uncooperative members of the community and the local administration for the inadequate rainfall in northern division of Kitui district that season since the usual pre-rainfall rituals were skipped. In fact, the Far North (Kyuso) division, which is supposed to be drier than Kitui North (Mwingi) division, had a better harvest, at least of green grams and cowpeas following the little rains of that season. In July, 1982, when I visited Waita, the cultists were preparing to retreat

into the nearby hills for their sacrifices to Nzambi. According to them, non-observance of the expectations of cult membership risks not only the crops but also their own lives in relation to the spiritual world of Nzambi.

### RAINMAKING IN BUNYORE LOCATION OF KAKAMEGA DISTRICT

According to Wagner Gunter, the Banyore were not rainmakers until the arrival of an elderly woman from Nandi District (Wagner, 1949: 153). The woman had no fixed abode and when she arrived in neighbouring Maragoli location, she was temporarily sheltered by a man. To show him gratitude for his hospitality, the woman offered to teach the man how to make rain. But the man was scared of the thunder and snakes that accompanied the rain so he chased her away. Eventually, she reached Bunyore and was welcomed by Nganyi of Ebusiekwe sublocation. Up to now Nganyi's family is the only family in Bunyore that is associated with rainmaking, probably in the whole district.

While I was carrying out a socio-cultural profile of Siaya District to the south of Bunyore location, a story similar to the one provided by Wagner on how the art of rainmaking was acquired by the Banyore was collected. According to the story, a destitute woman called Anyango, came from Gwasi in Mbita Division of south Nyanza. She sojourned at Simbi in Karachuonyo, but because she was ugly, she was sent away. She pleaded with these people telling them that she had something of value which she would give them if she was allowed to stay, but they refused it telling her to use the thing to improve her own outlook. Later, when the people heard that the woman they had sent away had taught the Banyore the art of rainmaking, they coined the proverb *sunga luo nomiyo koth nodhi lul*, that is, Luo arrogance or pride made rain to go to the Luyia. The woman is said to have been born to a Luo father and a Maragoli mother.

When she left Karachuonyo, she went to Gem, still in Luoland. The Gem people welcomed her, but when she started to use her medicines to teach them how to make rain to show them her gratitude, they got scared of lightning, thunder and snakes. They told her that they were not prepared for such a profession but that their maternal uncle, Nganyi, in neighbouring Bunyore, would be grateful to know more about rainmaking since it was an art he possessed already. She was, therefore, directed to Nganyi's home. This is the same Nganyi mentioned by Wagner. Thus, although the neighbours of the Banyore had the first chance of acquiring the art of rainmaking, they lost the chance and eventually, until recently, they had to send delegations with tribute to Nganyi's family to solicit for rain.

### RAINFALL RITUALS IN PERSPECTIVE

Rainmaking rituals, which form part and parcels of traditional culture, are in technologically less developed societies today labelled by the educated elites and Christians as primitive practices that are incompatible with western scientific logic

and Christianity. In Kitui District, for example, people bewail Christian influence which they say has led people to ignore the rainmaking rituals as a result of which they experience crop failure more often than before.

It is, however, interesting to find that in Bunyore location, which receives over 60 inches of rainfall and which gets good harvests during its two planting and harvesting seasons in a year, people are still convinced that without the art of rainmaking of Nganyi family, they would have problems. They also believe that when there is drought, it is because the Nganyi family was angered about something in the community and therefore made it not to rain. This is an area which came under the influence of missionary activities early this century more specifically the Church of God Mission at Kima and Church Missionary Society (Anglican) at Maseno and therefore everyone claims to be a Christian. In contrast, many of the oldmen in Kitui District deny that they are Christians and do not go to church. What then can explain the differences in levels of commitment to traditional and Christian religions in relation to rainmaking rituals? Writing about the Bunyore during the first half of this century Wagner said:

The rain magician among them is an influential person whose reputation often extends beyond the boundaries of his own tribe. His alleged foreknowledge and power organized cooperation among his clients for the purpose of sending petitions and paying tribute to him on a scale...unparalleled in the social life of the Bantu of Kavirondo (Wagner, (1949: 144).

First, in Bunyore, the rainmaking rose to prominence because the act of rainmaking is secret, and confined to only one family. According to Wagner, "to prevent his sons from competing with him while he is still alive and to safeguard the full privacy of his office, the rainmaker performs his magic all by himself without the assistance even of one of his sons who will eventually succeed him. He entrusts his knowledge to his successor only when he is near death (Wagner, 1949: 157). The art of rainmaking is, therefore, inheritable property among the Banyore. This is partly why it has not changed much and is still recognized in a predominantly Christian community. In contrast, the art of rainmaking in Kitui was public knowledge. When the missionaries came and labelled rainmaking primitive, they discarded it. It can, therefore, be hypothesized that aspects of culture which are practised in public change faster than those practised in private.

Secondly, rainmaking in Bunyore is economically rewarding for Nganyi family so that they cannot discard it. The family is until today given gifts in form of livestock, grains or money to make it rain during drought or to make it not to rain in a particular area if there is a big occasion such as a wedding ceremony, funeral service or a political rally. The Nganyi family also uses the art of rainmaking as an instrument of conformity to the demands of their lineage. If a person is married to a woman from this lineage, for example, he cannot mistreat the woman.

In 1963 when Kenya acquired independence, Musungu, the current champion of the rainmaking lineage of Nganyi, was invited by the government through the local member of parliament to travel to Nairobi with the aim of warding-off the rain in the city as Kenyans went through the festivities of welcoming the first African Government in Kenya. This greatly boosted the fame of the rainmakers back at home in Bunyore.

Compared with the community based public rituals found in Kitui, therefore, the occult rainmaking practices found in Bunyore are bound to persist so long as there are individuals in the families concerned, willing to inherit the art of rainmaking and as the rainmakers retain the power of manipulating the members of the community into believing that they have medicines which attract or repel rain and hail. Merton would, however, like us to believe that rainfall rituals are based on empty illusions. He says:

Our meteorologists (may) agree that the rain ceremonial does not produce rain, but this is hardly the point. It is merely to say that the ceremony does not have this technological use; that this purpose of the ceremony and its consequences do not coincide. But with the concept of latent function, we continue our inquiry examining the meteorological phenomena, but for the groups which conduct the ceremony (Merton, 1968: 118).

Although as a functionalist, Merton would want to downplay the meteorological functional reality of rainmaking rituals, this is the core of their cultural significance as attested to by Mr. Kenyatta's authoritative statement that such rituals brought about positive results almost immediately following the sacrifices. Similarly, Krige, who observed public rainfall rituals among the Lobedu writes: "...the clouds which had been in the sky at dawn had thickened and, while the pots were still cooking, rain fell and extinguished the fires, which had to be rekindled (Krige, 1943: 279).

These testimonies are very similar to the Biblical record that Elijah prayed and it "did not rain for 3 years".<sup>(1)</sup> Three years later, he prayed so that it could rain and while he was still praying, clouds started forming and there was a storm to demonstrate to the prophets of Baal that there was the true God, the God of the Jews, who they were persecuting and yet, who was capable of great miracles.<sup>(2)</sup> This confirms that rainfall rituals are based on faith and through faith the participants can make it rain. We cannot, however, ignore Merton's views because even the people themselves may recognize the multi-dimensional aspects of the rituals over and above their meteorological functions. According to Mr. Odegi-Awuondo, for example, the Turkana blame the ineffectiveness of their rainfall rituals today not only on the change from sacrificing cattle to sacrificing camels but also to the notion that some Turkana elders go to the sacrificial sites not pure in conduct and at heart but anxious to partake in the feast. They, therefore, accuse one another of having transformed rainmaking rituals into occasions for consuming meat.<sup>(3)</sup>

We as social scientists are not justified to condemn rainfall rituals as based on false premises, unless in the process of rainmaking moral principles are contravened. This is because, to participants, rainmaking is a real and true experience. In fact, the revival or resilience of such rituals may go a long way into reviving and, therefore, preserving very vital aspects of our culture, which were suppressed during the colonial times and the early periods of our independent existence as a nation.

For example, on April 28, 1984, it was reported in the *Daily Nation* newspaper that elders in Meru District, neighbouring Kitui District, had re-enacted the pre-colonial rainmaking ritual and had succeeded in making it rain. This was when the long rains that usually start over most of the country in the month of February had delayed, sending ripples of fear among Kenyans of all walks of life that the situation of drought and famine currently being experienced in southern Africa, the Sahel and Ethiopia had finally arrived in Kenya. According to the newspaper report, "Hardly had the smoke from the sacrificial black lamb swarled into the evening sky, when a heavy

downpour started that lasted the whole night". The details of the ritual according to the report are as follows:

The Meru elders gathered to plead with the gods, strictly followed the traditions of their ancestors and first shaved their heads clean, and applied a white clay soil from the Igombe hills. They then tied a band made of sheep's skin around their heads.

The lamb was then slaughtered and the meat placed on an Alter above a fire. The contents of the stomach were spread on a path along which some selected women walked as the elders sprinkled them with honey.

The women who had brought grains of maize and finger millet for the ritual were expected to stay indoors overnight. The elders were left behind eating the meat and within minutes the downpour began.<sup>(4)</sup>

From this very recent experience in rainmaking, one can say that in times of severe droughts, governments should permit people with a knowledge of the rainmaking rituals to try causing it to rain instead of preventing them from doing so as it happened in Kitui district of Kenya in 1982. Of course, one of the reasons why such rituals are not allowed or are ignored is that the majority of the people in places where such technology exists, especially in Africa, have been brainwashed through Christianity and western education to believe that the rituals are primitive and outdated historical anachronisms. Other people believe, as observed in the quotation from Robert Merton, that participation in magical practices such as this one, is irrational and, therefore, based on false consciousness. Instead of leaving the population to suffer from the deleterious effects of drought, such traditional experts should be given a chance to exercise their expertise and even be remunerated whenever they succeed as those in Meru did since causing it to rain is a positive contribution to society and therefore a contribution to socio-economic development.

After all, Laments Friedle:

Just as the American farmer (in the western world) might resort to cloud seeding as a scientific solution, doesn't he also pray for rain occasionally, despite his scientific knowledge? If we pointed this out to him and asked why he thought prayer would help even though he understands the meteorological causes of rain, we would probably get an answer something like "well, it won't hurt, will it?" And there is some element of "science" in practices that appear magical to us. People probably would not perform a rain dance (or ritual in general) when rain was not normally expected, indicating that a certain amount of observation and "scientific" prediction is a prerequisite for expecting success from magical practice (1976).

#### NOTE

(1) 1 Kings, 18: 1.

(2) 1 Kings, 18: 42-45.

(3) Personal communication.

(4) Daily Nation Newspaper. Saturday, April 28, 1984: 3.

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