

Rubbing off the Dirt: Evil-Eye Belief among the Gusii

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Social anthropologists working in Sub-Saharan Africa have paid little attention to the evil-eye belief compared to witchcraft or the spirits of the dead, and its description is fragmentary. This is related to the peripheral or minor part played by the evil eye as well as the primacy of other causes of misfortune in social life. This article highlights several aspects of the belief and the practices of the evil eye among the Gusii of southwestern Kenya, such as: methods of the evil eye, their effects, their treatments, symbolic features of the belief, and social relationships between evil-eyed persons and their victims.

Ethnic groups referred to here for comparative analysis include the Teso, the Luo, the Kipsigis, and the Logoli in Kenya, and the Nuer in Sudan. Despite many divergences, the evil-eye belief in these societies is shown to have several significant features in common. Evil-eyed people are not held personally responsible for any damage caused by their evil eye. Damage caused by the evil eye is generally much less serious and infrequent compared to other supernatural causes of misfortune. Evil-eyed people and their victims are, in most cases, not related in terms of kinship, residence or economic interest. These features are compared and contrasted with those of witchcraft belief.

Key words: evil eye, witchcraft, Gusii, Kenya.

1. THE EVIL EYE AS SEEN BY THE GUSII

The Gusii are a sedentary agricultural people living in southwestern Kenya. They have a population of about one million and speak a Bantu language. Most of the data I collected were directly related to residents of Nyaribari Chache Location, Kisii District, where I lived.

It was toward the end of my initial fieldwork among the Gusii, conducted from August 1977 to March 1978, that I realized that they had an evil-eye belief. During my field research, I had collected data on spirits of the dead, witchcraft, sorcery and curses, because a part of my research focused on supernaturalistic explanations of the causes of misfortune, such as illness, infertility in both men and women, death and burial, bankruptcy, and disharmony in human relationships. People told me a lot about various causes of misfortunes they had experienced and that I myself witnessed. I also recorded situations such as the purchasing of folk medicines at markets, searching for appropriate herbs, and attending hospital as outpatients. However, nobody had ever mentioned a case in which the evil eye was a cause of illness. No one I spoke to referred to any particular person as evil-eyed.

It was not very difficult to collect data on symptoms of misfortune, methods to deal with misfortune, and some aspects of power which caused misfortune. It was not usually necessary to bring up the topic intentionally: the data could be collected sporadically, and sometimes a large amount of information was collected at one time, as concrete cases emerg-

ed concerning particular individuals. As I analysed and compared these data, I felt that I had enough material with which to formulate a rough framework for making sense of Gusii beliefs in supernatural causes.

However, when I looked through my fieldnotes, I realized that I had no data on belief in the evil eye. I asked Mr. Ratemo Ombogo [this and following names are pseudonyms], a primary school teacher and my research assistant, about the evil eye. I knew something about this belief as I had collected some information about it among the Ari of southwestern Ethiopia, and I had also read *The Evil Eye* (Maloney ed. 1976). According to Ratemo, the Gusii call the evil eye *ebibiriria*, and an evil-eyed person is called *omonyabibiriria*. Ratemo explained as follows:

Data No.1 (Interview with Ratemo Ombogo, male, 32 years old, Nyaribari Chache Location, 19 March 1978):

An evil-eyed person may be a man, but is usually a woman. If a woman is evil-eyed, her daughter is also likely to become evil-eyed.

When an evil-eyed person stares at someone, the person stared at will start to feel itchy and his or her belly will become swollen. If the victim does not receive treatment at once, he or she will die sooner or later. The disease can be cured by using oil or Vaseline, that is, by continually rubbing the skin with oil so that things which were close to the victim at the time of the attack by the evil eye will emerge from under the skin. This will cure the disease.

The red color first absorbs and then repels the power of the evil eye, so people buy red clothes to avoid it and that's why a mother puts red clothes on her baby. An evil-eyed person is often attracted by babies because of their brown skin. Women who have such lighter-skinned babies should be particularly careful of the evil eye. Babies are not the only victims of the evil eye. Regardless of sex or age, anyone can become infected by this disease. This includes not only human beings but also cattle, goats, and cocks, all of which can be killed by the evil eye.

An evil-eyed person can infect somebody with the disease by stepping on their toes while they're shaking hands. Osebe, the wife of Osoro who is Jacton Ogutu's dead younger brother, has the evil eye. Nobody wants her in their homestead. So, be careful that your toes aren't stepped on by Osebe when you shake hands with her. If you're wearing shoes, you're safe. When an evil-eyed person is chopping meat, they can infect somebody with the disease by getting the victim to hold one end of the meat. I have also heard that someone can be infected if they help an evil-eyed person to carry firewood by carrying some of it on their own head. The evil eye of the Gusii isn't as dangerous as that of the Kipsigis.

Prior to my own research, Philip and Iona Mayer, and Robert A. LeVine and Barbara LeVine also conducted anthropological research among the Gusii, respectively between 1946–1949 and 1955–1957. When I returned from my initial fieldwork, I looked through their research reports to see whether they mentioned the evil-eye belief. I could find only the following one-page description (LeVine & LeVine 1966: 119–120):

Infants are particularly susceptible to the "evil eye" (*okobiriria*), not because they are young but because their skin is still light brown and therefore delicate. Adults whose skin is light brown are also thought to be affected by it, as are light-colored animals and trees with red flowers. When the child's skin develops a darker hue and rougher texture, however, the evil eye is no longer a danger. Although men have been known to have it, it is mostly women who have the evil eye. When such a woman looks at a child whose skin is still brown, any small things near the child—grain, feathers, flowers, wool of a blanket, ticks on a domestic animal—will cling to his skin. If not removed in time, the objects will work their way through the soft brown skin, lodge in the visceral organs, and kill the child. The practice of the evil eye is said to have been introduced by Kipsigis women who were sold into the tribe as wives when there was famine in Kipsigis territory. It is unconscious and not controllable by the person who has it, so that when such a woman gives birth she is forced to focus her eyes on eleusine grain held in front of her to absorb the evil effect and prevent it from reaching her infant. Therapy for the effects of the evil eye on infants resembles that used among the Kipsigis. When parents notice the adherent substances on the child's body, they rub his

whole body with clarified butter, which is thought to remove the harmful materials. This process, called *okongura*, must be done without talking about the evil eye, for its evil is felt to be more effective when it is mentioned or even thought about. Some informants said a specialist is hired to do the rubbing, but other parents claimed to do it themselves. If an infant dies, it may be said that the therapy was not applied soon enough, before the stuff had penetrated the child's skin, for once it gets inside the body, no cure is possible. Internal organs, particularly the heart and liver, are thought to be so soft and sensitive that their being touched by any foreign object will cause death. Nyansongo parents are quick to notice adherent particles on their infants' skin, for they are most anxious to prevent the onset of the fatal disease.

This description by LeVine & LeVine (1966) was largely confirmed by my own research, as shown in the interviews presented below. However, the word *okobiriria*, which the LeVines define as "the evil eye," is actually a verb meaning "to inflict someone with the evil eye." The noun *ebibiriria* in its plural form is used to designate both the substance which evil-eyed persons have in their own bodies and which can be transplanted to another person, and the symptoms usually associated with victims of the evil eye. This word is more appropriate to refer to the evil eye among the Gusii. As I have mentioned, an evil-eyed person is called *omonyabibiriria*, meaning "a person of the evil eye." A person who is stared at by an evil-eyed person, that is, a person who is infected with the disease of the evil eye, is called *omobiririgwa* (pl. *ababiririgwa*), combining *biririgwa*, the passive form of the verb *okobiriria*, and *omo*, a prefix indicating a singular person. People cannot tell how or in what form the evil-eye substance is stored within the body of an evil-eyed person. Once it gets out of his or her body and is transmitted to somebody else, it is believed to take the form of small particles of dirt.

Due to lack of information on the Kipsigis, I was not able to confirm the LeVines' remark that the Kipsigis have the practice of rubbing the whole body with butter as a method of treating the evil eye. However, this sounds similar to the way in which the Gusii use oil, fat or Vaseline.

My second trip to the Gusii was made between August 1979 and January 1980. I lived in the village of Masongo, Nyaribari Chache Location, as I had during my initial fieldwork. Most of my data were collected on occasions such as rituals and similar events, or through rumors circulating among villagers. However, in the case of data on beliefs about the evil eye, I could not obtain any information without asking people about it specifically. While data on other aspects of supernaturalistic explanations of causes of misfortune could be collected through daily interaction with villagers, it seemed that the evil-eye belief occupied a special place in their belief system. In fact, I found, looking through my fieldnotes, that I took notes on the evil eye only in mid-October 1979 and the end of December 1979, both times when I had intentionally asked people about the evil-eye belief. In the following pages, I set out the substance of my interviews with Gusii people:

Data No.2 (Interview with Asiago Nyaboga, male, 75 years old, and his wife Bathseba Nyaboga, 65 years old, 10 October 1979):

In the past, Gusii people didn't have the evil-eye belief. It was introduced from the Kipsigis.

Evil-eyed people's eyes become red when they attack someone. Small children, in particular babies who have brown skin, are vulnerable to the evil eye. Adults may be attacked from time to time. Suppose, after a visitor leaves your house, one of your children who has been cheerful suddenly starts crying in a shrill voice and never stops crying, and finally begins to scratch their body. It shows that the visitor was evil-eyed. On such occasions, you have to wash the baby's body, not with water, but with oil. In the past we used cattle fat but today we use oil that we apply to hair. In other words, we used to use hard fat but now we can use liquid oil. You can use "Baby Jelly," the creamy oil you can buy at shops. Rub the baby with this kind of oil or fat. If you don't have oil, you can rub with leaves of *omuong'o*. In this way, you can "rub off" the dirt (*okong'sa* or *okobirigisa*).

When you are attacked by the evil eye, things surrounding you at the time, such as soil, grass, cattle hair, pieces of glass, will enter your body. When you're attacked by a very powerful evil eye, these things can sometimes be seen through your skin. If you rub your body with oil, they will

come out from your neck and other parts of your body. They can be got rid of while they're still under your skin but once they penetrate further into your body, you're finished—you can't be cured. All you can do is wait for death.

Once *abakorerani* (sing. *omokorerani*) [see the end of Analysis 2.5.] were the only kind of people who were able to rub off the dirt. Other people could never get rid of the evil-eye substance, no matter how much oil or fat they may have applied. Today, however, anyone near a victim can participate in the practice of rubbing off the dirt. If the evil eye has been poured over you very powerfully, you have to continue rubbing off the dirt every day for about one to two weeks. Not only people but also cattle and dogs can be victimized by the evil eye. If the victims are animals they can't be saved. They're finished. Think about it—how can you spread oil or fat over hairy animals such as cattle, dogs, or goats?

When an evil-eyed person attacks you, they never speak to you. All they have to do is to stare at you. So, if you walk past an evil-eyed person without exchanging some kind of greeting it can be very dangerous. When someone who you know is evil-eyed walks toward you, you can avoid being infected with the disease by saying secretly to yourself, several times, "Don't give me the evil eye. Don't give me the evil eye" (*tombiriria, tombiriria*). If you meet an evil-eyed person when you are carrying a baby, it is safe if the evil-eyed person says something to the baby or takes the baby in their hands and tries to entertain it. If they say something, it shows that they have no intention of pouring their evil eye over you or your baby.

Evil-eyed people are normally calm and harmless, but periodically they want to pour the evil eye over somebody. It is said that they become nervous when there is no one to become an easy victim of their evil eye. When the power of the evil eye becomes strong within them, it is irresistible. When this happens, they will stare at something red so that power of their evil eye becomes weak and fades away. In the past, the typical red thing was finger millet, but nobody plants this nowadays. When a woman is incapable of controlling power of her evil eye, she sometimes stares at her own baby. If there is finger millet near her, she can avoid doing that. If there is no finger millet, any red flower will do. She can control the power of the eye by staring at red things. People want to put red clothes on babies so they can avoid the evil eye.

Evil-eyed people can make you become evil-eyed. When they meet you and say hello, they may give you money or ask you to carry something because it's too heavy. If you take the money or carry the burden, dirty things like mud or hairy catapillars will cling to your hands when you aren't looking. If you don't do anything with them, you'll become evil-eyed. As soon as you find dirty things, you should throw them back to the evil-eyed person and try to catch him or her. If they try to run away, you should follow and catch them. Don't forget to beat them until they bleed. Remember—until they bleed. Beat them with a club, a stick, a piece of wood, or whatever—and scream. You cannot give back the dirty things to that person without doing all this.

A cunning evil-eyed person may leave money on the road. Suppose you pick it up and put it into your pocket. You will find later something dirty on your hands when you take out the money from the pocket and now you will find that you are a full-fledged evil-eyed person. With that kind of thing in your body, you will find that you have pains all over your body and your eyes will become red, painful and you will finally start shedding tears.

However, an evil-eyed person is able to recover from the disease. First of all, if the victim is a man, he has to prepare a ram, or if it is a woman, a ewe. They must call a witch doctor (*omonyamosira*) and then kill the sheep within their own home and strip off its skin. This should be done about four or five o'clock in the early morning. Then together with the witch doctor they go to the river to a place where there's a waterfall. The victim has to see to it that nobody witnesses this sacrifice (*ekeng'wansa*), from beginning to end. When they leave home, they should wear the sheep skin over their head, inside out, that is, with its hairy side inside. On arriving at the waterfall, the victim should stand under the water still wearing the sheep skin in this way, letting the water beat down on them. Then, still under the water, they should tie the sheep skin around their stomach. When the victim returns home, the witch doctor will give them some medicine, and will then mix another medicine with clean water and use it to wash the evil-eyed person's body. In this way, the evil-eyed person can get rid of the evil eye.

Data No.3 (Interview with Miregwa Obwoge, male, 35-40 years old, Nyaribari Chache Location, 11 October 1979):

When you are attacked by a powerful evil eye, symptoms will appear on that day. If it's not so powerful, you'll become ill a few days later. If your baby is crying in a shrill voice, you should assume it's because of the evil eye. If it is because of the evil eye, you should wash your baby with ordinary water and spread oil or fat on the baby. In particular, you should rub the baby's abdomen. Even if the baby's skin looks clean, some things will come out as you rub the baby. If your baby was lying on the ground when it was attacked by the evil eye, the color of the baby's dirt will be earthlike. If the baby was near adults who were drinking local beer, beer grounds will come out. If it was playing on the grass, something green will come out. If the baby was in a sugarcane field, something similar to sugarcane comes out. You should rub the baby well, repeating this periodically. Kerosene doesn't work. Nor does Kimbo oil. I myself would use Vaseline, palm oil (which is hard to find these days), or the brown oil used for baking cakes.

If no dirt comes out, rub the baby's skin with large tobacco leaves taken from a field. When you rub the skin either with your fingers or with tobacco leaves, rub it slowly from bottom to top. You should not rub the baby's skin with towels, sheets, or clothes in which the baby is tucked up.

There is another method to cure the victim of the evil eye, though I've never applied it. First of all, fill a pot with water and put a one shilling coin in it. Put the pot over a fire, while rubbing the baby's skin with your fingers or with tobacco leaves. Things which were near the baby when it was attacked by the evil eye will appear in the boiling water within the pot.

Don't send a victim of the evil eye to hospital. If the victim is given an injection, the effects of the evil eye will appear quicker and the baby will die soon. You have to cure the baby the way we do here.

The evil eye will go into your large intestines and make all your internal organs swell. The medicine that a witch doctor gives to a patient is to cause vomiting or diarrhea and it's made from leaves with notched edges, that is, leaves of *omoneke* and pumpkin leaves. Both of these leaves are chewed together, then put into a stalk of pumpkin. The medicine is put into the baby's large intestines through its anus. The things which had entered the baby's body will then come out from its mouth and anus.

People whose blood matches that of the evil-eyed person are more likely to be affected by the evil eye. Suppose an evil-eyed woman puts firewood, which she's carrying on her head, onto someone else's head, at the same time stepping on that person's toe with her bare foot. This means that the woman poured the evil eye over the person and before long they'll have a headache and be unable to see things clearly.

An evil-eyed woman tries not to attack her own baby. Every morning she stares at red clothes or finger millet that she keeps on a shelf under the roof so that her evil eye becomes powerless.

When an evil-eyed person wishes to get rid of the disease, they buy a black sheep. They ask the *omokorerani* to come to their house in the morning. The *omokorerani* kills a sheep and removes its skin. The *omokorerani* puts the skin onto the evil-eyed person's head and takes the person to a waterfall. If there is no waterfall, the *omokorerani* dams up some water to create one. The evil-eyed person takes off the sheep skin and stands under the waterfall. The person can get rid of the disease in this way. After this, the person should not eat sheep meat: if they do, the disease will recur.

As an evil-eyed person becomes older, the power of the evil eye weakens. Some people say that it is easier for a woman who is no longer able to become pregnant to get rid of her evil eye. Whether a woman is able to bear a child or not, she can cure herself of the evil eye if she does what I've said.

When an evil-eyed person wishes to train you, they will attach something like dirt to your hands. When you find it, you have to beat and hurt the evil-eyed person until they bleed. Then the evil eye you received will leave you and return to the person who originally had it.

Data No.4 (Interview with Joseph Ombati, male, 38 years old, Bassi Location, 15 October 1979):

Moraa, whose husband, Nyapeni, is my maternal uncle, received the evil eye in Ekerbo, Wanjare Location. One day, three years ago, Nyapeni told Moraa to go to Ekerbo to buy local beer. Mary Mokeira, whose husband is Oigo, is a famous brewer of local beer in Ekerbo. She is also known as an evil-eyed person, though those whose bloodtype is different to hers are not affected by her evil eye even if they drink Mary's beer. Anyway, Moraa did not know that Mary was evil-

eyed. When she returned home with the beer she had bought, she told her husband that she felt pains all over the body while walking home. She asked him why that had happened. Her husband, however, did not pay attention to what she said and did not do anything for her. I can't believe that he didn't realize that an evil-eyed person can pour the evil eye over someone while giving him or her something, considering that she bought local beer from the evil-eyed person. So Moraa became evil-eyed. Her son's wife, whose name is also Moraa, as well as her fourteen-year old son, Nyabuto, were infected with the disease. So then there were three evil-eyed persons in the same homestead.

One day, two years ago, Moraa came to my house to drink. At the time, I didn't know that she was evil-eyed. Other people drank inside the house, while Moraa drank alone outside. One of my sons was playing in the garden. Suddenly, I heard him burst into tears. I went out to find him rolling about on the grass. I couldn't find Moraa. My son had been attacked by the evil eye before, at Suneka Market, though I don't know who the evil-eyed person was at that time.

A man who was drinking with me said that Moraa must have been evil-eyed. I rubbed my son with creamy oil to get rid of the dirt. Everyone who was there went to Nyapeni's house to question Moraa. At first, she insisted that she was not evil-eyed. But finally she admitted under pressure from us that not only she herself but also her son's wife and her other son were evil-eyed. The village headman (*omotureti*) came and declared that the three evil-eyed persons were to stay within their homestead until they had recovered completely from the disease.

Soon after that, Nyapeni heard that Isaaka, an evil-eyed man, had been cured by Peris, a Luhya woman whose husband was a Gusii man. Nyapeni was a daily servant at the house of Kioge, a primary school teacher. Kioge, on hearing about Isaaka, told Nyapeni about him. Nyapeni, by arrangement with Kioge, visited Peris in Bogutero, West Kitutu Location, along with Kioge and Isaaka, to ask her to cure the people in his homestead who had the evil eye.

Peris went to Nyapeni's house a few days later. She told Nyapeni to gather as many neighbors as possible in front of his house. What Peris demonstrated was not the same method we would apply among the Gusii. Peris got eight people including Nyapeni and his wife, Moraa, to stand in a single line. The other six were the couple's son Tom and his wife Moraa; the couple's other son Nyabuto; Nyarangi and Kemunto, the two wives of Nyapeni's brother; and finally Nyarangi's son, Samuel. Peris told them to wash their hands with water that she'd brought from a spring. When their hands had dried, she got each one of them to hold an enamelled cup with a handle and she poured a little water into each one. She put white powder on one of each person's hands and got them to put the powder into the cups. The water in the cups held by Nyapeni's wife Moraa, their son's wife Moraa, and their other son Nyabuto turned into blood, which confirmed that those three were evil-eyed. Peris took the cups from the three people, saying, "You can't use them anymore. I will use them at home." She poured the blood into a bottle. She also said that it would cost 350 shillings to cure the three people, and she gave them a powder to be taken through the nose, and another powder to be taken mixed with water. She left, saying that they should take both powders every morning before getting up.

Soon after that, all three recovered from the disease. They invited Peris and entertained her by killing a goat. Peris' method is different from the general method in which an evil-eyed person is taken to a river to stand under a waterfall after a sheep has been killed.

Data No.5 (Interview with Omari Asiago, male, 43 years old, Nyaribari Chache Location, 17 October 1979):

One of my cousins, my mother's sister's daughter, came to my home in March this year. Her name is Moke and she lives in Nyaribari Masaba. Although I'd heard a rumour that she'd been trained to be evil-eyed by one of her father's wives, I didn't believe it. However, I now believe she's a full-fledged evil-eyed person, because she poured the evil eye over my daughter, Heren. Moke is an infamous evil-eyed person in Nyaribari Masaba and no man is willing to become her boyfriend.

Moke came to my home about four o'clock. My daughter was playing outside with some other children and when Moke left the house, my daughter began to cry in a shrill voice. I didn't know why she was crying at the time. At about seven o'clock the next morning, Heren began to cry again, and I found dirt around her neck. My mother came and told me that it was because of the

evil eye. We rubbed her with oil to get rid of the dirt. We boiled water in a pan and put the dirt into it along with a one-shilling coin. My grandmother, Sabina, also came and told us to bring leaves from an *omuong'o* tree growing on the riverbank. My grandmother boiled these and got Heren to drink the soup. She said that she had to do that before the evil eye settled down in Heren's stomach. Within an hour, Heren had loose bowels. That was a good sign. We wiped her body, waited a while, and wiped it again, doing this repeatedly. Four days later Heren recovered completely.

Data No.6 (Interview with Meshak Ogucha, male, about 70 years old, Nyaribari Chache Location, 29 October 1979):

One Sunday in 1969, although I don't remember what month, I met Ongaga's wife, Nyanchama, when I was on my way back from church. We passed each other near the coffee factory. Ongaga's wife is evil-eyed, though Ongaga himself isn't. I said hello to Nyanchama. I began to feel itchy all over my body soon after I arrived home and I realized that she had poured the evil eye over me. I wiped my body with a pig lard and drank pig lard with tea. I did it twice a day, morning and evening, and recovered in one week.

The evil eye she poured over me must have been very light. We said hello to each other. If she had not said anything, I would have had more serious symptoms. If we'd shaken hands, I would have become evil-eyed. Nyanchama's evil eye is very powerful. Rumour has it that Samuel Tumbo, Isaak Tumbo, and Musa's children all died because of her evil eye.

When your blood and an evil-eyed person's blood attract each other, and when the evil-eyed person's blood is "burning" or *bitamorero*, you are more likely to be attacked by the evil eye. If you do not receive any treatment within three days, you will die.

Evil-eyed people don't walk around together. People who are evil-eyed know each other but they don't behave like cattle thieves, going around in a group. They don't pour the evil eye on people who live in their own homestead. When an evil-eyed person pours the evil eye over you, the person shakes hands with you or lets you hold one edge of a piece of raw meat while they are cutting it. An evil-eyed person doesn't pour the evil eye because they want to but because of the pressure of certain irresistible forces.

When you are attacked by an evil-eyed person, you have to beat him or her until they bleed. If they bleed, the evil eye that's in your body leaves you and returns to that evil-eyed person.

When an evil-eyed person drinks local beer, they like to attack you. That is because *ememera*, the germinated finger millet used as malt in the making of local beer, activates their evil eye.

The evil eye belief was brought into the Gusii from the Kipsigis. In the past, people hated an evil-eyed person coming to their homesteads, much more than they do nowadays. An evil-eyed person can in rare cases be a man, but is normally a woman. That's because women touch various goods with their hands at the market.

Because people don't want to marry someone who is evil-eyed, in the past evil-eyed people tended to marry each other. Today, however, it is much more frequent to hear people say that somebody's wife is evil-eyed, because young men who haven't arranged a go-between choose women at the market as they please.

2. ANALYSIS

These interviews include information which is contradictory, and often which does not make much sense. On the one hand, this can be seen to be partly due to a lack of established or stereotypical features attributed to the evil-eyed people. For instance, it is easy to find common images associated with witches such as night running, a taste for the flesh of corpses, the use of special lanterns when they walk about at night, a preference for group activities, night dancing, and the theft of physiological discharges and paraphernalia from anticipated victims. On the other hand, it is partly because I did not do intensive research on the evil eye. I taped and took notes as people said whatever came into their heads about the evil eye. Both these points stem from the fact that the evil-eye belief occupies a secondary place in the Gusii's overall belief system and is not considered of much importance.

There are many inconsistencies in the stories told by the people I interviewed, such as on

the origin of the evil eye, its effect, how it is transmitted, how it is cured, and the relationships between an evil-eyed person and the person over whom the evil eye is poured. It is not possible on the strength of the present data to reconcile the apparent contradictions. Nevertheless, I can still construct a general conception of the evil-eye belief among the Gusii. Below I elaborate on several important points, drawing on the data above as well as data obtained in other interviews.

2.1. The origin of the evil eye belief among the Gusii

People over 70 years of age unanimously state that the evil-eye belief did not exist in Gusiiland when they were young and that it was introduced to the Gusii from the Kipsigis. I found only one person who said that the belief was brought from both the Kipsigis and the Nandi. It is interesting to note that all of those who told me about the dissemination of the evil eye from the Kipsigis say that the evil eye was first brought to North Mugirango Location, which is in the northeastern part of the Kisii District and adjacent to the Kipsigis region.

In December 1979, when I visited Nyaribari Masaba Location, to the east of Nyaribari Chache Location and adjacent to the Kipsigis region, old people told me that the evil eye had spread from North Mugirango Location to other places in Kisii District. An interview with one of these old people confirmed the description by the LeVines quoted above. This old man told me that Kipsigis would sell their children to the Gusii when the Kipsigis were suffering from famine. Gusii people who had no daughters would buy Kipsigis girls, and those with no sons would buy boys. He said that these children brought the evil eye into the Gusii (Interview with Nyakweba Obwoye, male, 70 years old, Nyaribari Masaba, 21 December 1979).

Another man, insisting that the evil eye did not exist in his youth, said that it had spread among the Gusii after markets were opened on the border between the Gusii and the Kipsigis. According to him, the markets, which were infamous for the evil eye, were located in North Mugirango Location (Interview with Orange Isomba, male, about 75 years old, 22 December 1979).

We may infer from this that the evil-eye belief began to spread among the Gusii about the time when incessant armed fighting between the Gusii and Kipsigis ceased because of the abolition of the Gusii cattle villages, *ebisarate*, in the 1910s following the establishment of the British colonial rule in the Kisii District. These cattle villages were dens of young men's fighting groups. However, I should add that the evil-eye belief might have existed in the regions adjacent to the Kipsigis.

2.2. Evil-eyed people and their victims

Many people say that evil-eyed people are women. Those referred to as evil-eyed included some men, but most were women. Their most common victims are children of either sex. This is because their skin has not yet turned black but is still brown. People with lighter skin, regardless of age, are more likely to be victims of the evil eye. As mentioned in Data Nos. 1 and 2, and also in the LeVines' description, animals or plants are sometimes said to be victims of the evil eye but, in practice, these appear to be very rare.

It is important to note that an evil-eyed person does not attack residents of their own homestead, as Meshak Ogucha mentioned in Data No. 6. The assailant in Data No. 4 was the interviewee's maternal uncle's wife and the assailant in Data No. 5 was the interviewee's mother's sister's daughter. The assailants in both cases belonged to different clans from the victims. It was on the occasion of unanticipated visits by assailants that the children fell victim to the evil eye. Meshak, the interviewee in Data No. 6, and Ongaga, the husband of the evil-eyed woman who attacked Meshak, both belonged to the Nyaribari clan, but to different lineages.

People talk about witchcraft in terms of relationships within a homestead or relatively close relationships such as those between husband and wife, between the wives of one man, between children of wives of one man, and between cousins. However, people talk about the evil eye in terms of relationships between either non-kin or remote kin involving no

rights or duties. Accusations of witchcraft are frequently made and they are a sign of bad relationships between the parties concerned. But people talk about misfortune caused by the evil eye as if it was merely an accident, and they make no mention of past relationships between the assailant and the victim or the victim's close kin.

It is not clear what distinguishes an evil-eyed person from a victim of the evil eye: if a person who is infected with the disease doesn't receive appropriate treatment, will they eventually become evil-eye? An evil-eyed person is described not only as *omonyabibiriria* but also as *oyo obwate ebibiriria* (a person who has the evil eye), while a victim of the evil eye is called *omobirigwa* (a person who is affected by the evil eye) or *oyo siarerwa ebibiriria* (a person over whom the evil eye is poured). One of my informants distinguished the expressions *okoewa ebibiriria* (to be trained in the evil eye) and *ogosiarerwa ebibiriria* (to have the evil eye poured over one) by claiming that the former becomes a specialist in the evil eye while the latter is a victim.

It is frequently said that an evil-eyed woman's daughter often becomes evil-eyed but her son rarely does. A Gusii mother and her daughters are always close to each other in their work within the homestead and out on the farm. They move together in fetching water from the spring, collecting firewood in a grove, going to church, going to market, and so forth. Circumcised girls sleep in a kitchen hut which is always located very near to their mother's hut. In contrast, the hut in the homestead for circumcised sons, *esaiga*, is usually placed far from the mother's hut so that the boys can spend most of their days without seeing their parents. The daughter's relationship with her mother is the most intimate of the various dyads within the family (Matsuzono 1981:79-86). As many Gusii people theorize, this is why the daughters, through direct physical contact or indirect contact with things, are far more easily affected by their mother's evil eye and some of them eventually become full-fledged evil-eyed people.

A person who has had the evil eye transmitted to them will also become evil-eyed unless they receive appropriate treatment, although detailed information on this process is lacking. Those who become evil-eyed in this way are also mostly women, because women are more frequently involved than men in giving and receiving things in markets and in their daily life, thereby giving them undesirable opportunities to be victimised.

2.3. Blood and red

Blood and red are important features of the image of the evil eye. When the blood of a evil-eyed person is so active that it seems as if it were "burning" (*bitamorero*), people of the same blood group are very likely to become victims of the evil eye. When someone cuts raw meat, the person who holds one end of the meat is likely to have the evil eye transmitted to them. This is related to the idea that the blood of raw meat easily transmits the evil eye. The image of blood is not restricted to the evil eye belief. For example, the expression, "my blood and your blood go together" (*amanyinga ane na ayau aigwananire*), is often used if someone is trying to court a girl. When someone drinks local beer that a witch has secretly poisoned, they may say, "my blood feels" or "my blood becomes hot." The Gusii have many rhetorical expressions concerned with blood.

The most typical red things is red finger millet (*obori obobariri*). Every informant mentions it. Evil-eyed persons are attracted by red things and the power of their evil eye decreases when they look at red things. Although most people do not think that finger millet or red clothes which evil-eyed people have stared at will be destroyed, it is interesting to note that the LeVines said that trees with red flowers are likely to be affected by the evil eye, and similar ideas seem to exist among the Kipsigis and the Logoli as will be shown later.

2.4. Methods of the evil eye and their effects

Ogosiarera (to pour the evil eye) is a word used in the contexts of sowing seeds in a field, pouring water over something, and spraying insecticide on coffee trees or the bodies of cattle. In the context of the evil eye, it means "staring." An evil-eyed person transmits the evil eye by staring at the victim at the same time as directly touching their body or giving them things they own, for example, stepping on someone's toes when shaking hands, asking

somebody to help carry firewood or giving someone money. When transmitted, the evil eye is transformed into various things present nearby at the time and these then cling to the victim's body in the form of minute particles of dust or dirt.

Children over whom the evil eye is poured are said to suddenly burst into tears. Children as well as adults will come to feel itchy with pains all over their body. Their eyes will become red and filled with tears so that they cannot see clearly. Dirt (*riiko*) will usually be found around their neck or belly. This dirt includes things which were near the person when the evil eye was poured. In fact, it seems that people recall things which were near them by examining the form, color, smell and taste of dirt. For example, someone glancing at my green cigarette lighter said that green-colored dirt would appear if it was near the person over whom the evil eye was poured. They may say that the person who becomes ill because of the evil eye must have eaten something prepared with salt if the dirt is salty.

If a person doesn't get rid of the dirt while it still clings to the skin, it may get into the large intestines (*eruti*) and cause all the internal organs to swell. In general, symptoms of the evil eye appear soon after an evil-eyed person has departed, but, if their power is weak, the symptoms may not appear for several days.

2.5. Treatments

By beating an evil-eyed person until he or she bleeds, a victim of the evil eye is said to be able to return the dirt to the evil-eyed person. However, nobody mentioned having witnessed or experienced this. There are three categories of treatment: (1) getting rid of the dirt by rubbing a victim's body with oil or the leaves of special plants; (2) cleansing a victim's body by getting them to stand under a waterfall after a witch doctor has killed a sheep; and (3) getting the dirt of the evil eye to appear by putting a one-shilling coin into a pot of hot water.

People disagree on the kind of oil most effective for treatment. The leaves used to rub a victim's body, such as *omuong'o*, pumpkin and tobacco leaves, have as a common feature glandular hairs on one side. The third method has developed more recently and is considered to be simpler and easier than the other two. The second method is used not only for treatment of a seriously affected patient, but also for purification of an evil-eyed person by getting rid of the evil eye from their body. Among the Gusii, evil-eyed people are believed to be able to find ways of avoiding having to suffer the disease for their whole lives. The informant in Data No. 3 remarks that, "as an evil-eyed person becomes older, the power of their evil eye weakens." Some people say that it is easier for a woman who is past childbearing age to get rid of her evil eye. I also heard that Monyangi, Osano's wife living in Bassi Location, succeeded in getting rid of her evil eye in 1974 by the second method, and she talked about it proudly to neighbors. She later became a diviner (*omoragori*).

The adoption of the Luhya woman's new treatment (Data No. 4), and the various opinions about effective oils for rubbing off the dirt, may reflect a "spirit of enterprise" among the Gusii in terms of the possible explanations and treatment of misfortune. The Gusii have adopted various explanations of misfortune from the Luo, and many Gusii are trained in new treatments and medical botany by Luo witch doctors (Matsuzono 1983:73). In much the same way, they have adopted the evil eye from the Kipsigis.

Informants differ in their experiences and opinions as to the role that witch doctors and *abakorerani* (sing. *omokorerani*) play in each of these three kinds of treatment. A person, male or female, is invited to conduct a set of healing rituals. This person is called *omokorerani* and chosen from among those who have experienced the rituals as a victim.

2.6. The evil eye belief in adjacent societies

In the belief systems of Black African societies, the evil eye plays only a peripheral or minor part. There are only fragmentary ethnographic descriptions of it. For example, Evans-Pritchard states in *The Nuer Religion* that "the evil eye is an act of covetousness or envy" (1956:15). Among the Nuer, there are healers specializing in getting rid of objects attached to a sick person's body by someone who has the evil eye (*peth*). He describes these specialists as "little men and women who perform their petty rites for the benefit of their im-

mediate neighbours and for inconsiderable rewards" (Evans-Pritchard 1956:96).

Nagashima, in his recent book discussing folk aetiology among the Teso in Kenya, allocates just one page to the problem of the evil eye at the end of an elaborate discussion. He notes that the power of the evil eye among the Teso "has comedic rather than serious implications" (Nagashima 1989:384). Nagashima also notes that evil-eyed people are born that way and will remain so all their lives, and that they will shed tears when looking at something new. Food and new things, particularly new clothes, which are looked at by an evil-eyed person, may become rotten or disintegrate. However, in this case, the evil eye is harmless to human beings.

In the case of other ethnic groups adjacent to the Gusii, Abe (1983:32), for instance, notes that among the Luo, who live to the west of the Gusii, evil-eyed persons are called "witches of eyes" (*jajuog wang*). They constitute a category of witch in the narrowest sense, along with "witches of night," and they are usually women. The power of an evil-eyed person is inherited from their mother and it becomes active after marriage. When an evil-eyed person looks at what someone else is eating with jealousy, envy or malice, the food will become rotten and indigestible and the person who eats it will get a stomachache. *Jatak*, or healers specializing in the evil eye, exist. They make a cut in the patient's abdomen and try to remove what is causing the stomachache from the patient's stomach. Most victims of the evil eye are children. There are evil-eyed people who prevent cattle from milking properly or crops from growing well.

According to Wagner (1949:125-127,184,271), who conducted research in the 1930s in western Kenya among the Logoli, who live north of the Gusii, witches of night are mostly men, as among the Luo, but other types of witches also exist. Among them are two types of witches related to the evil-eye belief. One type is called *omulasi webikoko* or a "thrower or shooter of *ebikoko*"—a female witch who causes her victim to get a stomachache. *Ebikoko* includes small objects such as a victim's hair and ornaments. The witch collects these things and mixes them with ash or powder and secretly carries it with her. When the witch stares or winks at the victim, *ebikoko* enters the victim's body and causes the stomachache. Both men and women may fall victim to the witch's evil eye.

Another type of evil-eyed person, usually a woman but sometimes a man, is called *omusohi*. His or her eyes are red and sharp. This witch does not use medicine but causes misfortune by using the power of the eyes. They mainly victimize calves or other things, but sometimes human beings. The thing stared at may "shrink in size or quantity and deteriorate in quality" (Wagner 1949:127). For example, a cow that has been stared at will be unable to produce milk; food will not be cooked no matter how long it is kept on the fire; and gourds in the garden will crack. People carry amulets with them to protect themselves from the evil eye and they have special methods to prevent the evil eye from causing damage to grain.

Finally, among the Kipsigis living to the west of the Gusii, who are said to have introduced the evil eye to the Gusii, Komma (1983:85-86) notes that "when a man who has powerful eyes looks at something 'soft' like a baby, an infant animal, a gourd, or someone in the process of initiation, it will be damaged." The power of the evil eye is inherited and is considered to be a sort of disease. Evil-eyed people are able to decrease the power of their evil eye by staring at the sun for a while in the early morning, and they are forbidden to look at anything soft. Komma also comments that it is men who practice the evil eye (1983:88), although he did tell me that an evil-eyed woman might exist (pers.comm.). He also remarked that the evil eye plays no significant part in the Kipsigis folk aetiology, a point also made by Orchardson (1961:30-31). Peristiany described witches (*ponindet*) in the following terms (1939:226): "she [a *ponindet*] has an evil eye. Her pet practice is to 'throw' foreign bodies like stones and thorns into bodies of people to make them die." According to Komma (pers.comm.), Peristiany has here mixed up witches (*ponindet*) with evil-eyed people. However, this remark is reminiscent of the practices of evil-eyed people among the Gusii.

If it is true that the evil-eye belief was introduced to the Gusii from the Kipsigis in the early part of this century, one would expect to find common features in the two ethnic groups in terms of the methods of practicing the evil eye, and the symptoms and treatment of the

disease. However, I do not have the data needed for such a comparative study. When this kind of belief spreads from one people to another, it is not necessarily the case that the whole set of beliefs will be transmitted. Once the idea of the evil eye is accepted, the people receiving the beliefs may alter them in various ways. This highlights the need to collect more detailed stories about the processes involved in the introduction of the belief.

The statements made by the LeVines and Komma seem to point to another contradiction. The former state that it was Kipsigis women who, on becoming wives of Gusii men, introduced the evil eye. The latter argues that most Kipsigis evil-eyed people are men. At present there is no way to determine whether both statements have some validity or whether one is incorrect. Masongo, the village in which I lived, is comparatively close to the Luo. It is only an hour's walk from Suneka Market, which is on the border between the two ethnic groups. However, village elders say that the evil eye did not originate from the Luo, but was brought in from the Kipsigis through North Mugirango Location to the far north. I do not have sufficient data to resolve these problems.

Even with this lack of data, it can be seen that the form of the belief varies among the Gusii and the other ethnic groups in the surrounding area in terms of, for example: the dominant sex of evil-eyed persons; the kind of things which are vulnerable to the evil eye; methods of prevention and treatment; and the categorization of the evil eye in relation to witchcraft. Both Wagner among the Logoli, and Abe among the Luo interpret an evil-eyed person as a kind of witch, while Komma distinguishes the evil eye from "witchcraft" though admitting that they are closely related. Among the Gusii, the evil eye and witchcraft are viewed quite differently, although the evil eye is sometimes referred to as a "witchcraft of eyes," *oborogi bw'amaiso*.

The Gusii say that there are many contrasting features which distinguish witchcraft and the evil eye. To give a few examples: an evil-eyed person may attack a victim at any time during the day, and the effect of the evil eye shows itself immediately after the attack. A witch, however, performs vicious acts only at night and these take effect on the victim much later. Witches always operate in a group, but evil-eyed people act alone. Although there are some notorious witches in most villages, every person is, in theory, vulnerable to the accusation of practicing witchcraft. However, evil-eyed people are usually known as such and other people are free from suspicion of practicing the evil eye. There is a Gusii saying: "It is good to be a witch rather than a witch of eyes" (*Mbuya koba omorogi, kobua koba omorogi bw'amaiso*). This saying emphasizes the more unfortunate state of being of evil-eyed people who may victimize anyone nearby at any time, including their own children. This is in sharp contrast to witches, who will have a specific reason for attacking people.

Despite these divergences, the evil-eye belief in these societies has several significant features in common:

- (1) In some cases, evil-eyed people inherit the substance of the evil eye. In others, they are regarded as unlucky people who have been given the evil eye by someone else. In either case, the evil-eyed person is not held personally responsible for any damage caused by their evil eye.
- (2) Damage caused by the evil eye is generally much less serious and infrequent compared to other supernatural causes of misfortune. It is considered as a kind of accident that befalls the victim.
- (3) Evil-eyed people and their victims are, in most cases, not related in terms of kinship, residence or socio-economic interest. This is the main difference between the evil eye and witchcraft in all the societies illustrated above. Cases of transmission of the disease or the power of the evil eye seldom involve complaints or demands for compensation.

Social anthropologists have paid little attention to the evil-eye belief compared to witchcraft or the spirits of the dead. In the light of points (2) and (3) above, it seems clear that this lack of interest has stemmed from the primacy of other causes of misfortune in social life, coupled with an anthropologists' focus on the study of intracommunity rather than intercommunity interactions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between a language and a culture in the light of the borrowing from the Kara language observed in the Koege language. Neighboring societies exchange things and cultures, such as behavioral patterns, skills of living, religious customs, personal manners and so on. Speech terms are also exchanged, and this cannot be done independently of the exchange of things and cultures. It is also related to the relationships of the societies between which these exchanges take place. Nevertheless, behavioral patterns of people are not so simple as to be explicable in terms of relationships between societies. Both Koege and Kara societies, however, exist in rather separated areas, although not absolutely isolated from the rest of the world. Therefore, by studying how the Koege language has borrowed from the Kara language, we can to a great extent eliminate factors introduced from outside societies and obtain clues to explore the relationship between a language and a culture only in the two societies. I have defined culture as behavioral patterns, skills of living, religious customs, personal manners and so on. In other words, culture means inner values originating in life style and social relations. In this article, life style is much simplified to represent means of living, subsistence and relevant practices.

The Koege language has borrowed extensively from the Kara language with regard to vocabulary and grammar. We shall examine how the Koege language has borrowed from