Remembering Londósa:
Mediator and Counterpoint in a "Violent" Society

JON G. ABBINK

Introduction

Both in the societies we study and in explanations of social behaviour in general, the role and agency of individuals is very important. More than in the fields of
philology and history, to which Siegbert Uhlig has made so many outstanding and stimulating contributions, in linguistic or ethnographic fieldwork we are dependent on the dialogic relations we develop with certain living individuals whom we often admire because of their achievements, role-model behaviour, courage or
personality. In explanations of human social behaviour not all is to be subsumed under structural models or historical processes: there is also the recognizable agency of persons that has a crucial impact as (re)shaping them.

In this essay I would like to present a remarkable man: Londósa Wolekóro, the late komaru, or ritual leader of the Chai Suri people in South-western Ethiopia, a group of some 15,000 agro-pastoralists in an area of fragile ecology and volatile group relations. Londósa was born in the late 1930s and died in June 2000. I intend here to acknowledge my profound gratitude to him as a host and collaborator, as well as to honour his memory as a good friend and an in many ways exemplary person.

While thus recognizing that a great deal of the success of anthropological field research depends on the rapport with people and on good 'key informants', in addition, the role of the personal in social science and history is epistemologically relevant. Apart from questions of interpretation and explanatory theoretical models there are also issues of methodology and personal style. This subject is well studied in anthropology, accounting for its high, and often perhaps exaggerated, degree of reflectivity. However, I would like to focus not on how we 'manage' these personal relations or how we deal with the data we acquire through personal contacts, but on the person or 'informant' himself, on his role in society, and on his response to an
To summarize a Chai komoru's main functions:10

1. Giving powers (fertility, rain, social order). Related to this religious function, people recognize the supernatural forces, especially the Sky God Tumu and his liaison komoru, as coercive powers but are normative reference points or conductors for human behavior.

2. Their contact with supernatural forces, especially the Sky God Tumu and his liaison komoru, is not performed by 'priests' but are normative reference points or conductors for human behavior. In his pioneering work, the anthropologist David Turton has described the Mursi case and translated the term komoru with 'priest'.

In Southern Sudan, such as the Mursi, Baale, Mûrie and Didinga, have similar religions. In his study of the Mursi in Sudan, David Turton has described the Mursi case and translated the term komoru with 'priest'.

The komoru function in Suri society

In many pastoral societies in Africa we find mediating ritual chiefs, for instance, the 'leopard skin chief' among the Nuer, famously described by Evans-Pritchard, or the 'master of the fishing spear' by Lienhardt for the Dinka people, also in Southern Sudan. Suri and related groups in South-western Ethiopia and adjacent areas in Sudan, such as the Mursi, Baale, Murle and Didinga, have similar religious institutions. In his pioneering work, the anthropologist David Turton has described the Mursi case and translated the term komoru with 'priest'. Komorus have no coercive powers but are normative reference points or conductors for human behavior, linking commoners with supernatural forces, especially the Sky God Tumu and his liaison komoru, giving powers (fertility, rain, social order). Related to this religious function, the komoru also has a role of interstitial, ritual mediator within society. He must articulate consensus and symbolically bundle energy for the good of the people.

To summarize a Chai komoru's main functions:10

- He performs rain control ceremonies if necessary.
- He acts as a ritual 'war leader', i.e., giving formal orders to start battle (usually after divination) or giving advice and ritual blessings before raiding and fights with enemies.
- He initiates mediation and reconciliation among Suri groups (families or lineages).
- He acts as sacrificial at certain social and ritual occasions.
- He initiates fields for a new cultivation cycle.
- He participates in intestine divination.
- He gives periodic ritual and protective blessings for cattle and people.
- He summons up and validates public debates and articulates the consensus reached.
- If disaster, such as cattle disease, lack of rainfall or famine and illness besets the Chief, the komoru is, however, not held responsible for this. Neither is he a chief or 'big man', claiming and redistributing resources or building up a patronage network to compete with others.

The incumbent komoru always comes from a certain old clan within Chai but is chosen by the male public assembly from a number of candidates. Both descent and personal qualities are considered when making a choice, whereby the advice of elder men and women is decisive. In his activities, a komoru frequently refers to the past and to the preceding generations, thus inculcating a sense of history and identity among the people. A komoru should not be involved in arguments and should not engage in acts related to death; no participation in raiding or fighting, no touching of corpses, no funeral functions.

Londósa's life history in brief

Londósa was born into the most prestigious Chai-Suri clan, the Komorténi, the clan of the ritual leaders or komorus. His grandfather and father had been komorus as well. Before he assumed office, his father's brother Gusibarâri had been the komoru. He had taken the place when Londósa's elder brother Arlügu, a promising and charismatic man, had died before he was officially installed. Other brothers were still too young to take over. Londósa's family is a large one, as the komoru has always at least four wives and their clan is one of the most numerous in Chai country. Londósa's father and grandfather were impressive persons who are well remembered. They were occasionally mentioned in the travel literature and in Italian reports. Especially his grandfather, Dolleti Donumora, who was active in the time before and during the Italian period (1936–41) – was a quite forceful personality. His mother was called Ngatigo, a Chai woman from the D’ama clan.

The names that Chai people have reflect their personal history. Everyone has at least four names. Londósa's first name, given by his parents at the baby naming ceremony, was Woletula, a cattle coat colour name. When he became a teacher, the second age-grade, of 'uninitiated', younger people, he received a favourite bull with this colour. In the 20th century the Chai came to call all their komorus with the name 'Dollet', first given to Londósa's paternal great-grandfather, called Bulay Dollet. Londósa was Dollet the Vth. Later he acquired the name Londósa, in fact a Nyagatigato name. When Londósa's father had died, elders of his clan (Komorténi) gave him another name – Bolekira – but that was only used by those elder clan members. After his age-grade initiation in 1994 (see below) he received the name of Ngatildi.

Londósa was born in the Chai heartland at Wayanné, near the Shuluguí mountain, also known as Mt. Naita (2,154 m. altitude). The Shuluguí area is, as the Chai
say, the 'stomach' of their country, their core area with komoru grave sites, their age-set initiation place, and their traditional pastures. It was not a hot lowland area but a relatively cool and forested highland region, where coffee and other forest resources could be found. The Chai (called T'id in the travel literature, after the Juniperus procera tree growing there) had their villages in these hills, while the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, moved to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by their Paranilodi agemates in the north and west of Mt. Shulugüi. Here Londósa grew up, herded cattle and was involved in the skirmishes with the Nyangatom or 'Bume', their Paranilodi agemates, with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.

In 1987-88 the Chai had to entirely abandon the Shulugüi-Wayanné area and move to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, before the Suri got them. The balance was definitively tipped in favour of the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, and with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.

In 1987-88 the Chai had to entirely abandon the Shulugüi-Wayanné area and move to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, before the Suri got them. The balance was definitively tipped in favour of the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, and with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.

In 1987-88 the Chai had to entirely abandon the Shulugüi-Wayanné area and move to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, before the Suri got them. The balance was definitively tipped in favour of the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, and with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.

In 1987-88 the Chai had to entirely abandon the Shulugüi-Wayanné area and move to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, before the Suri got them. The balance was definitively tipped in favour of the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, and with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.

In 1987-88 the Chai had to entirely abandon the Shulugüi-Wayanné area and move to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, before the Suri got them. The balance was definitively tipped in favour of the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, and with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.

In 1987-88 the Chai had to entirely abandon the Shulugüi-Wayanné area and move to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, before the Suri got them. The balance was definitively tipped in favour of the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, and with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.

In 1987-88 the Chai had to entirely abandon the Shulugüi-Wayanné area and move to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, before the Suri got them. The balance was definitively tipped in favour of the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, and with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.

In 1987-88 the Chai had to entirely abandon the Shulugüi-Wayanné area and move to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, before the Suri got them. The balance was definitively tipped in favour of the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, and with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.

In 1987-88 the Chai had to entirely abandon the Shulugüi-Wayanné area and move to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, before the Suri got them. The balance was definitively tipped in favour of the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, and with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.

In 1987-88 the Chai had to entirely abandon the Shulugüi-Wayanné area and move to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, before the Suri got them. The balance was definitively tipped in favour of the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, and with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.

In 1987-88 the Chai had to entirely abandon the Shulugüi-Wayanné area and move to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, before the Suri got them. The balance was definitively tipped in favour of the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, and with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.

In 1987-88 the Chai had to entirely abandon the Shulugüi-Wayanné area and move to the north because of armed expansion and constant cattle raiding by the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, before the Suri got them. The balance was definitively tipped in favour of the Nyangatom, who in the mid-1980s had acquired automatic rifles on a large scale, and with whom the Chai had both a fighting and an exchange relationship. In the late 1950s and 1960s Londósa also engaged in new bond friendships with Nyangatom age-mates. In these contacts he probably received the name 'Londósa'.
by his sons and several brothers. He hardly ever visited his herds in the lowlands, but spent most of his time in and around the Korum hill where his village was located. Only when ceremonial duelling contests were held, in a large open space one hour’s walk from his village, he used to be there.

**Being a Chai**

Londósa became one of my key informants - fortunately, because he was a key figure in Chai society. From our first meeting onwards we had a good relationship. He was quite fascinated but also puzzled that a foreigner was interested in their way of life. He listened to my questions, at times complaining that they gave him severe headaches. Indeed, sometimes I could not put across what I wanted. But he was always ready in his own way to explain Suri ways to me, and showed his pride in doing that. While sitting near his house engaged in talk, we were often accompanied by youngsters and children. If I asked him about Suri social life and history, before answering he repeated the question first to the kids sitting with us. He took his talking to Chai kids - his own or others - seriously.

In Makara village he shared a house with his senior wife in a spacious, fenced compound. Here, important rituals were held (except sacrifices), visitors were received, and Chai teenagers came together for their dances on full moon nights. Also meetings of senior men from his clan, the Komorténí, were called here. Next to the compound stood the house of one of his brothers and of several other patrilateral relatives. Londósa’s village was the centre of Chai socio-political life. Public debates of the senior men were held at the edge of the village.

An interesting aspect of Londósa’s position as a komoru was that while he was recognized and officiating as such, he was not yet fully accepted because of his ‘junior status’ in the age-grade system. Only adult men of the third age-grade (called rõra, singular: rõr) were accepted as authoritative speakers in public assemblies and as major decision makers of the community. While Londósa was in his early fifties when I first met him, he had not yet been initiated into the rõra grade and still was a tégay, technically a “youngster” (the second age-grade). Traditionally in Suri society, the tégay were the unmarried warriors/herders. Anyhow long as he was a tégay he could not do the final installation rites for the komoru-ship. So, as with many adult men of his generation, Londósa’s social age was not in line with his biological age and his family status (married and with many children). This was due to the long delay of the age-grade initiation among the Chai.18 This initiation ritual, ideally done every 15 years, is one of the most important events in Suri society.19 Before his initiation in 1994 and his entry into the newly created age-set, Londósa’s voice in community affairs, divination readings and public debates was only one among many and his ritual authority could not reach its maximum impact.

Being a Chai for Londósa meant leading a life of freedom and cattle-herding, infinitely better than that of ‘toiling peasants’ like the Dizi and other highlanders. He largely shared the disdain of most Suri for highland peasants and townpeople. I knew of no Suri who became a farmer or settled in the highlands. There are some young men who in recent years became involved in the state administration and live mostly in towns outside Suri country, but even then they keep their own cattle, herded by relatives, in the lowlands.20 Feelings of pride come up among Suri when comparing themselves with other groups who do not have their free cattle-herding existence or their ceremonial stick duelling. Chai – and Suri in general – thus cherish their way of life and their independence. It struck me that they usually had little interest in other people’s cultures. All this did not mean that Chai people saw no disadvantages in their own way of life, such as environmental pressure (insecure rainfall, leading to periodic famines), contagious cattle disease from which there was no easy remedy, remoteness from medical facilities, persistent conflict with neighbouring pastoralists, and in general a risky lifestyle. In addition, the Chai, as independent, egalitarian and individualistic people, were hard to deal with and, in a way, not ‘governable’: there was no idea of an hierarchical structure of power or of ranking (like among the Dizi), and for elders or a komoru nothing was enforceable. In the past two decades, this was shown by the increasingly frequent disputes and violent incidents within Suri society, which Londósa could not prevent or control.

**Being a komoru**

Londósa – as any komoru among the Suri – was the central person in the ritual life of the Chai, but not in an authoritarian or self-posturing way. Indeed, he could not impose any sanction or ‘punishment’. The chief characteristic of his role as priestly authority was to admonish people, especially adolescents, to call upon disputants to reconcile, and to perform the proper rituals for Chai as a whole, e.g. initiation of new fields, blessing warriors before an expedition, assisting in a healing ceremony or a wedding. As said above, he should be a mediator between God (Tumu) and people, and between people amongst themselves.

But in this mediatory or peaceful activity he was not a normative role model for other Suri or a person to emulate, but only a kind of living safety valve and ritual officiant that the community as a whole needed. In a sense, he was a captive chief: the mercy of his Community, that needed him for all kinds of functions and needed to follow and sum up common feelings and public opinion within it. He did not have any role in funeral ceremonies or homicide compensation talks, as a komoru should not be involved in matters of death and killing. The komoru was not a normative role model for other Suri or a person to emulate, but only a kind of living safety valve and ritual officiant that the community as a whole needed. In a sense, he was a captive chief: the mercy of his Community, that needed him for all kinds of functions and needed to follow and sum up common feelings and public opinion within it. He did not have any role in funeral ceremonies or homicide compensation talks, as a komoru should not be involved in matters of death and killing. The komoru was not just a mediator but also a counterpoint that the community as a whole needed. In a sense, he was a captive chief: the mercy of his Community, that needed him for all kinds of functions and needed to follow and sum up common feelings and public opinion within it. He did not have any role in funeral ceremonies or homicide compensation talks, as a komoru should not be involved in matters of death and killing. The komoru was
said to have a quality of being ‘dangerous’, or ‘hot’ (in Suri: \textit{barat\textprime}), which is also said of certain ritualistically used plants: being above the average, not to be handled directly or carelessly, and with a certain extra power to invest ritual acts with performative meaning. This is evident in the documentary film “The Mursi” advised by Turton, which has one telling scene where the Mursi \textit{komora} Komora-korra, in the context of the ritual ‘spearing the \textit{komora}’is symbolically threatened by the others, because he is seen as a possible source of ‘danger’. The Chai have similar ideas on their \textit{komora}.

This situation of a \textit{komora} being ‘captive’ explains the unease that Londósa personally seemed to feel between his institutional duty to perform blessing rituals for warriors and cursing enemies on the one hand, and his personal inclination to always call for moderation and peace-making: his position demanded that he subsume the second aspect under first. This explains also his feelings of powerlessness and internal anger at excessive violence and its unforeseen effects. In fact, this was the tragic aspect of his position, that became more pronounced towards the end of his life.

In his career, within the formalized and expected role that he had to play as \textit{komora}, Londósa nevertheless gave his own personal style to his function. As few others could do — certainly as compared to Ngagórik Bolegid\'angí, the late \textit{komora} of the Tirmaga, whom I also saw in action during my fieldwork — Londósa was an authoritative public speaker, who, with his carrying stentor voice, summed up public debates in an exemplary manner, articulating consensus and decisions. When he spoke in the last stage of such a debate, all people automatically rose and listened.

He also showed concern about his family and his people and tried to maintain good contact with everyone. Londósa was considered and forthcoming in daily life, open to visitors, and took children seriously. In view of the escalating conflicts of Chai with the Dizi people, their former allies, he never ceased to call for the restoration of a peaceful relationship between them and the Chai, despite the fact that he had no high esteem for the Dizi way of life as sedentary cultivators living without cattle, with a quite different body aesthetic, a submissive attitude, etc, “that he had no high esteem for the Dizi way of life as sedentary cultivators living without cattle, with a quite different body aesthetic, a submissive attitude, etc.”

Being the \textit{komora} meant daily duties to be performed. One of them was the ritual fire making: each day at dusk, he went to the big fireplace in his compound and carefully lit the fire with wood giving off a lot of smoke, meant as a protective device for the village and an appeal to God (Tumu). He usually performed this alone, a solitary figure absorbed in his duty for the community (see photo 2).

\textbf{Change and impending crisis: Londósa’s premonitions}

One day in February 1992, just after a ritual led by Londósa to bless Chai youths preparing for an expedition to the Bume, a young man from the Taru clan was accidentally shot and killed by a man from the Buley clan. Among the young men and bystanders present there was immediately great panic and anger. The waiter fled to the bush, protected against pursuit by his relatives. Women started wailing, and male relatives of the deceased went to the killer’s village and started robbing property from his house. Londósa, who had officiated just before it happened, quickly withdrew to his compound — we saw that it was forbidden for him to see a corpse or to mingle in matters of death and burial. I was near the place of the shooting and Londósa dragged me along back to his house. The elderly father of the boy — completely in shock — was led away by another man to his house, numbed by grief. He seated himself outside the hut of one of his wives, mother of the boy, in silent, tearless mourning. Londósa sat down and said to me: “Look, look now what happened. This is the fate of the Chai in this time of guns. We were preparing to hit back the Bume and now this comes along, a boy of our own killed for nothing, lying dead on the ground, his family in trouble.”

It was one of several remarks made by him on the plight of the Chai as a militarily society where the increased level of violent incidents as well as an emerging ‘culture of the gun’ were causing great trouble, not only in relations with neighboring groups and government, but also within Suri society. He felt the dilemma they were in. In the above case, the bitter irony of what happened was not lost to him: an elaborate ‘blessing’ ritual that was supposed to have given protection and courage to the Chai young men in their exploits against an external enemy was supplanted by a freak killing of a Suri by a Suri.\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{21} After the boy’s death in the above incident, the expedition to the Bume was delayed.
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{18} \textbf{LESLIE WOODHEAD}, \textit{The Mursi} (Anthropological advisor: David Turton). Film in the \textit{Disappearing World Series}, Granada TV, U.K 1974, 52 minutes
\textsuperscript{20} \textbf{Cf ABBINK}, “Changing Patterns ...”.

\textbf{Photo 2: Londósa lighting the daily ritual fire at dusk (1992)}
Londósa thus had a clear premonition of things to come. He saw that Suri needed modern guns for self-defense and survival, because other groups also had them and used them, but the negative backlash on society was becoming obvious to him. The overall effects of the multiple presence and use of automatics had not quite been foreseen. The Suri have acquired means to defend themselves and to attack if need be, but they use them also to create additional problems, e.g. against Dizi and Me’en people.

The tensions with the neighbouring groups therefore have increased rather than diminished in the last fifteen years. The ready resort to violence – made easy by the ubiquitous presence of the automatic weapons, always carried along – led to higher numbers of dead during confrontations, and to a higher frequency of raiding but diminishing returns. More women and children were victims of the violence. The response of the state authorities to local problems was one of more involvement, but often this took the form of arbitrary arrests, indiscriminate punitive action, or making out ‘justice’ without proper trial (including executions). Mediation efforts by the state were ultimately not successful and bypassed local complexities and norms for conflict resolution.

In late 1999 the Me’en of the Gesha and K’asha areas, tired of the long series of ambushes and smaller raiding incidents on the roads they used to go to the market towns of Tum, Maji and Jeba, combined to carry out a large raid into Suri country and rob cattle. They took away 4 to 5,000 animals, an unprecedented number. Most of Londósa’s herd was also taken. When he heard this, his anger boiled over and he became extremely upset. But he also knew deep down that Suri would blame themselves for this mishap because of the uncontrolled violent actions of Suri youngsters.

At some moments Londósa could grow quite pensive on the future of the Chai, reflecting that when they would not bring their own people, especially the togeth youngsters, under control, their society would suffer. He also was aware of the growing influence of outside forces like the state (and its taxes, bureaucracy and army), tourism, and the impact of Christian mission and education, but he did not yet understand how their combined effect would transform Suri society in a globalizing world.

Londósa also had other disappointments in the personal sphere. While he never openly talked about it, he also felt quite bad about his eldest son Wolechagi: an intelligent person with abilities, but who, due to his exploits as a gun-bearing togeth, and having killed some people, could not be seriously considered as a successor to the komoru position. This requires a peaceful person not stained by blood. He was rejected by the foremost Chai ritual experts, who make recommendations on to whom to choose.

Conclusion: Remembering Londósa

Londósa died of ill-health and anger in June 2000. All Suri I subsequently spoke to, and also many Dizi people who knew him, agree that the loss of so many of his cattle in the Me’en raid, in itself a response to previous Suri attacks on Me’en trav-
Suri and their first member of Parliament, met a violent death in January 2002. He was killed by a fellow Suri in his home area. This tragic event is indicative of the uncertain future that the Suri people are facing at this critical juncture.

Summary

This chapter briefly presents the biography of Londósa, a ritual leader or komoru of the Southwest Ethiopian Suri people and shows how a personal case-study can highlight recent social problems of an ethnic group. Suri face a crisis of security and of social continuity. Both their physical security and their food security are at risk, and they have enduring tense relations with neighbouring peoples and with the Ethiopian state. Like other ethnic groups (e.g., Nyangatom, Toposa, Anywaa, Me'en) they are armed force to defend themselves or contest resources. The relatively quick 'militarization' of society like the Suri in the last 15 years has brought new problems and challenges. Londósa, as the Suri ritual mediator and leader, recognized the problems emerging and called for restraint to Suri exercise of violence, but with little effect. He was powerless to prevent the gradual deterioration of internal social relations in Suri society resulting from this militarization. Feelings of powerlessness and deception with the way Suri society was developing undoubtedly contributed to his early death in June 2000.