

# **Oruka on Home, Will and Spirits: A Philosophical Interpretation**

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**S.M Otieno**



Odera Oruka



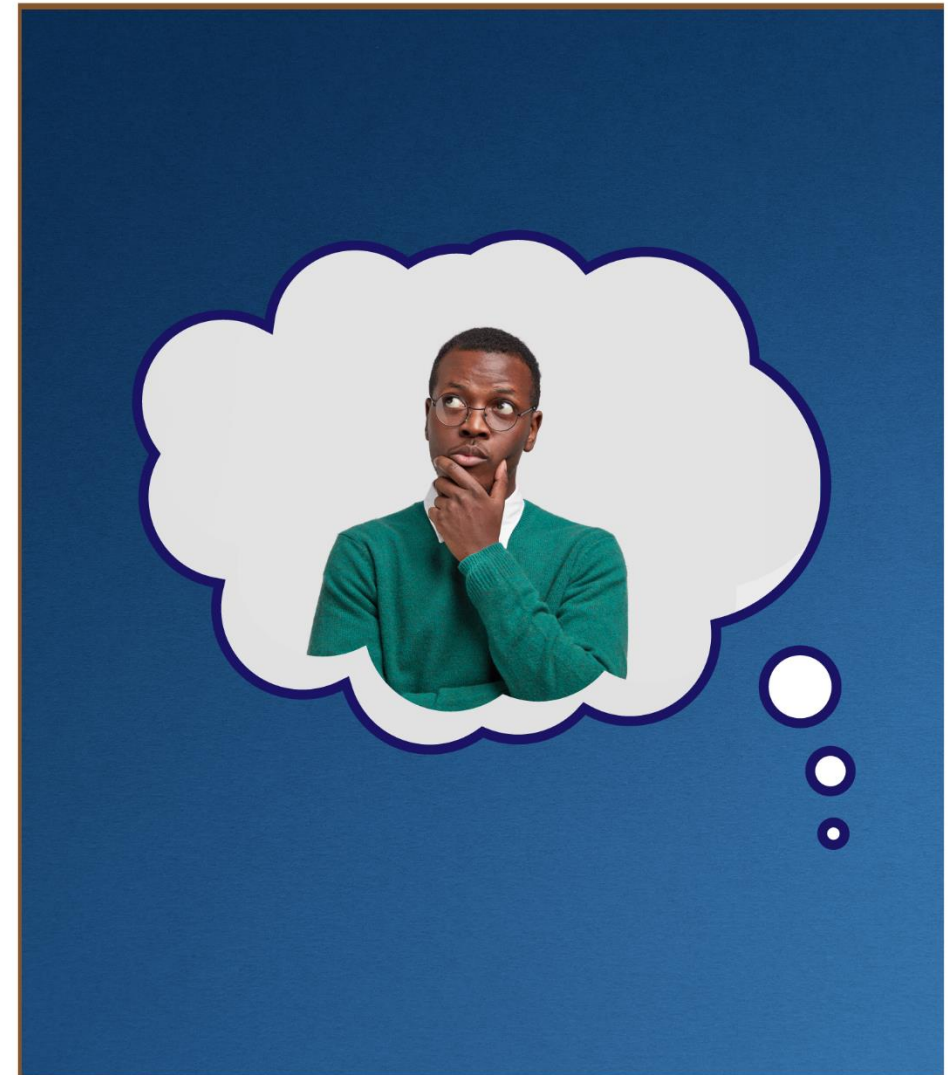


# The Kernel

This presentation addresses the fundamental issues raised in Oruka's response to cross examination in the trial leading to the burial of S.M Otieno, better known as SM.

# My Thinking

The contestation here is that there could be issues and concepts in the sociology of power and social mode of articulating them that may not lend themselves to philosophical method of analysis.



# What did Oruka Intend?

In his 'expert testimony' Oruka unwittingly exposes the very problematic nature of his approach to the method of philosophic sagacity, valorizing culture and tradition at the expense of a critical evaluation of them. I suggest this could not have been the original intention of Odera Oruka.



# Expert on Luo Culture

The argument here raises doubt about the intended role of Oruka as an 'expert' witness in an issue of sociological significance as raised in the burial of SM. It also challenges some of the 'knowledge' Oruka claimed to have drawn from sages about 'Luo culture' and 'Luo philosophy'

# One Body, Two Graves

The issue of contestation was where SM would be buried. Mrs. Virginia Wambui Otieno insisted she wanted to bury her husband at the Upper Matasia farm in the Nairobi area, in accordance with the wishes and will of SM.



# Cultural Philosophy or Philosophy of Culture?

The Umira Kager clan, led by Otieno's younger brother, Joash Ougo and Molo Siranga, the clan spokesman, wanted the body buried in the deceased's ancestral home in Nyamila Village, Siaya District, about 300 miles away from Nairobi in accordance with the tradition and culture of the Luo people of Kenya.



# Issue

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- The issues, though sociological required that fundamental meta -philosophical questions be asked about them.
- Home and a House.
- Will, Spirits and *Manyasi* (an elixir).

# Oruka the 'Expert'

Oruka's perceived expertise in matters of sociological significance stems from his research work, based among the Luo of Siaya, and his interview of sages which uncovered, in Oruka's view, "Luo Culture" and "Luo Philosophy."



# Will vs. Custom

SM:

I have bought a piece of land in Ngong

...this is very unusual for a Luo to buy land in right at the heart of Maasai and Kikuyu

SM:

We must change our outlook. One acre in Ngong is worth 10 in Siaya. It is common sense to buy land in Ngong.

I shall be buried at Ngong and I have made this plainly clear to all parties that might be interested in my funeral...

# Home/House

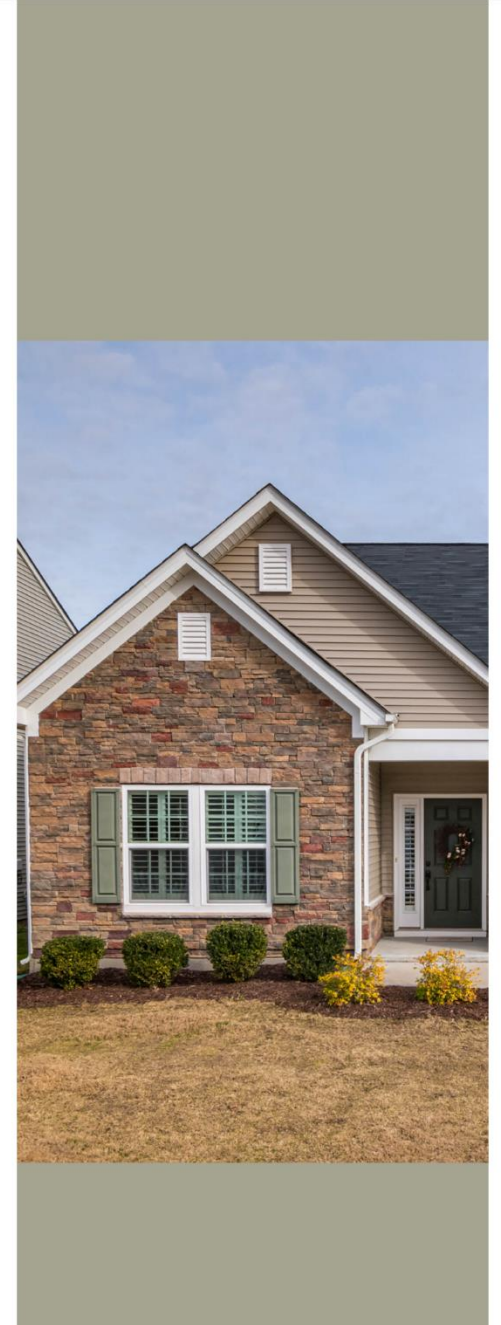


Among the Luo, as Oruka explains, a home can only be a home when the traditional rites of building have been performed. In the absence of the traditional processes, the building would merely be a house, even if it is built in Luo land.

Matters Arising: What happens if?

# Home

By the same token, a building constructed outside the Luo land, but for which all the traditional rites are performed, would be a home and not a house







# Home

A home is where you have been blessed by your father or uncle to build whereas a house is a building created for the purpose of living in

# Will

A will is valid as long as it does not contradict a community's custom or belief.

# Is/Ought Controversy

Is Oruka a Positivist or a Naturalist?





# On Spirits

- The Spirit will haunt you if the customs are on its side
- There has to be a legitimate reason acceptable to the world of spirits before a spirit begins haunting someone.

# Culture Dynamic?

Yes, but there are some rules or customs which remain the same for a very long time before changing.



# Quick Questions

- Does a Will derive its validity from coherence with customs?  
How will the conflict between the Will and tradition be resolved?
- Is Oruka a naturalist or a positivist?
- Whose interest did Oruka's testimony serve?
- Luo Custom or Philosophy?







Thank You!!!!