Where do People Bury Their Beloved Ones?: Some Aspects of Tipo, Jok and Abila among the Alur People in East Africa

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In this paper, I have attempted to portray the life-world of Alur people through the process of burial. Some Alur migrate and have multiple living bases during their lifetime and through several generations on the shores of Lake Albert. When someone dies, it is common for the body to be carried home for burial. However, when this is not possible, the belongings of the deceased are carried back to be buried, instead of the body. The practice of burial reveals Alur recognition of the spiritual world, as below:

After the body (dano: s.&pl.) has died, the spirit (tipo: s.&pl.) leaves it and travels to another world. Tipo can also come and go between this world and another world which the tipo belongs to. In the case of the tipo having a negative emotion such as jealousy, it threatens living people. Sometimes illness and tribulations are messages from the tipo which is hungry and wants the blood of a black goat. In order to respond to the messages promptly, it is desirable to bury the deceased in their homeland.

In the Alur homeland, the tipo of ancestors are enshrined together with jok (pl.: jogi) and abila. Tipo do not always bring harm to the living. For jok and abila, people build them a house to live in, serve food to eat, plant herbs to take care of them, arrange stones to guard them, and talk to them. Abila symbolizes paternal lineage and jogi represents mother and grandmother. Other ancestors communicate with the living through abila and jok. This interaction brings luck, prophecies, and occasionally misfortune.

Tipo can live in peace in such a life-world where there are daily interactions between the living and the dead. Carrying the dead body or the belongings of the deceased is also a form of interaction with another world by the people who live away from their homeland.

Keywords: Uganda, Alur, migration, life-world, tipo, abila, jok