

## 1. Description

### 1.1 Name of society, language, and language family

- Kele, Ekele, Kili, Likelo, Lokele, Yakusu

### 1.2 ISO 639-3: khy

### 1.3 Location :

- 0° 48' N 24° 11' 59.9994" E (Former Orientale Province, Isangi Territory, on Lomami and Congo Rivers) Democratic Republic of the Congo

### 1.4 Brief history:

- “Little is known of the history of the tribe. But, of recent events we may note that Stanley passed through Kele territory in 1877 while on his journey across Africa. He notes the warlike habits of this riverine people and their use of large signal drums. Stanley returned in 1883 to Kele country and found the tribe scattered by Arab slave-traders. Twelve years later missionaries of the English Baptist Missionary Society prospected for a site among the Kele people and finally chose a position at the extreme corner of the Kele territory, near the village of Yakusu (more accurately written *Yakoso*). The early Yakusu missionaries reduced the Kele language to writing and began to use this tongue as a medium for evangelistic and educational work.” (4p193)

### 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

- “The freely-moving, freedom-loving Lokele can have regarded with very little pleasure the assumption of supreme authority by the white man; but he soon learned that he had no need to fear it as he feared the Arab. He stood in awe, and had the wisdom to make obeisance. That act secured him his continued freedom amid the conditions he loved so well, and he has not known trouble so long as he has paid his taxes in fish or iron (the currency of the district) to the central authority. While not well-off, he has generally found the Government demands not above his means to pay. In any case, whatever taxes he had to pay he knew that he was a hundred times better off than under the Arab.” (2p5)

### 1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

- “The Lokele world is a section of river seventy-five miles long, called by them “liyande,” called by us the Congo.” (2p1)

### 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:

- “In the unrecorded past there was a split in the tribe which accounts for a slight variation in dialect to-day, and for the division of districts. The Yawembe district centring in Isang at the embouchure of the Lomami tributary, and reaching almost to Yalamba, is the most western. It has some thirteen villages, with a minimum population of 10,000. The Yaokanja district is next in importance, stretching from the Lomami to the Ile Bertha with its sixteen villages and a minimum population of 13,000; and then there is the “Liyande Likolo” (upper reach of the river) which includes the three parts of Yakusu and the broken village of Yatumbu, in all perhaps 2,500 souls.” (2p1)
- “From the main portion of the tribe, which numbers about 26,000 people, small groups have broken away from time to time and have taken up permanent residence as traders or fishers at points as far away as Kongolo (up-river) and Léopoldville (down-river).” (4p193)
- Population: 160,000 (1980 UBS). 7,000 Yalikoka (Voegelin and Voegelin 1977). (3)

## 2. Economy

### 2.1 Main carbohydrate staples(s):

- Plantain, bread root

## 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

- Fish
- “Occasionally meat is obtained on the market...Some land snails are eaten and some kinds of ants; the caterpillar delicacy gives its name to a season, near to July each year.” (2p20)

## 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?

- “Multitudes of the people flocked down to the beach as he (Stanley) passed, and each mile of the journey his party were in constant jeopardy of their lives from the excited savages, who paddled out in their huge canoes to obstruct their passage with menace of spear and arrow.” (2p2)

## 2.5 Sexual division of production:

- “[Lokele men spend their days] making or mending nets, for which every yard of string has been laboriously prepared from banana fibre; constructing fish-traps; building a hut with upright poles and long shutters made of bamboos and leaves securely tied together; cutting poles or scraping cane string; sitting with others at a village council listening for hours to the long rigmarole of defendant and plaintiff; evolving some scheme for the benefit of the community...” (2p13-14)
- “Two interests prompt him to make frequent journeys, that of trading and that of fishing.” (2p14)
- “As the Lokele man must make his string from the fibrous material of the forest, so the woman must make her pots in which she cooks her food.” (2p21)
- “The Lokele woman makes a good mother.” (2p21)
- “She is the barber of the village...Her services are also required with her sharp little instrument whenever the facial markings need recutting...If a man has a pain in any of his limbs it is to a woman he goes...She is the professional wailer...” (2p23)

## 2.7 Ceramics:

- “It is hard to find a Lokele woman who is not deft at pottery. Such simple utensils as they make have a ready sale on the market, being always needed, for they are very brittle, and do not last long. Four large pots can be purchased at a penny apiece.” (2p21)
- “For the purpose of pot-making a couple of journeys must be made by canoe to the spot where the white clay is to be found. The lumps are dumped down outside the hut to weather for weeks. One day she begins to pound it in the broken nose of a canoe, adding sand as she labours it to the right consistency. Then taking the broken fragment of an old pot, she begins deftly to add piece to piece of the new substance, turning it swiftly with her fingers while she shapes it, and pats it with a piece of thin flat wood or bamboo. It is wonderful how soon it takes shape and becomes an object of beauty under skillful management. You watch her as she fashions the top into an almost perfect circle, and rapidly makes a tooth edging with a flat bean that has been similarly edged. Some simple marking round the neck and it rests to dry in the sun a thing complete, beautiful. Thirty to fifty pots will be made before the burning. In the process of burning it is taken from the fire while red hot and daubed with an acid solution, which on the hot clay quickly turns it black. This closes the pores and makes it watertight.” (2p23)

## 2.9 Food taboos:

- “The Lokele will not touch an owl nor a snake, nor would he be prevailed upon to eat a lizard, however edible some tribes consider certain species to be. They never think of

milking a goat, nor could a Lokele woman ever be prevailed upon to drink milk under any conditions. Any form of invalid diet is unknown to them; when ill they starve and languidly hope for a day of better things.” (2p20)

- “It was not a question of what they wanted to eat, but of what they were permitted to eat. Some of the things were forbidden food, and all of it was taboo because of the uncertainty as to the manner of cooking.” (2p53)

#### 2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

- “Until the white man’s road was made, the only means of communication between village and village was by canoe, and the river is still the favoured route of the natives.” (2p1)

### 3. Anthropometry

#### 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

- “He (the Lokele man) is below the average height, thick set, with large limbs, well developed muscles, a bullet head, and square, massive jaws.” (2p10)

### 4. Life History, mating, marriage

#### 4.1 Age at menarche (f):

- “[U]ntil a certain time is ended the approach of a woman or girl is supposed to bring physical defilement and suffering... stalwart men [are] terrified at the approach of a maiden of nine summers.” (2p55)

#### 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

- “[T]he first baby was usually conceived when the mother was still young, often between the age of seventeen and twenty.” (1p93)

#### 4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

- “The women are not ambitious to have a large family... three is the usual number.” (2p21)
- “[T]hey often went on to have nine or ten children.” (1p93)

#### 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

- “Malia Winnie, the head African midwife, gave a personal performance (gave birth) every other year.” (1p93)

#### 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

- “Any number (of wives) from two to six per husband is the proper thing. There is no limit to the number a chief will have.” (2p41)
- “Saidi has seven wives, and the happiness of the home, which a polygamous state of existence destroys, has long been unknown to this chief.” (2p25)

#### 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

- “Around the rite of marriage there has grown up with the Lokele a most elaborate, burdensome system of guarantees. It is not purchase-money, it is a financial advance as a *bonâ fide* in claiming the privilege of marriage. It is no fixed amount; the parents of the girl get as much as they possibly can, and make the most of it while they can hold it.” (2p42)
- The parents of the girl will take “gifts” from several suitors at the same time, if offered. They will put the items to use until one bridegroom is chosen; then the “gifts” must be returned to the rejected suitors, and the remaining funds are given to the married couple.

- “The tribal laws about marriage were very strict. A girl could be pledged to her future husband’s family when she was just a child, and her parents would begin to receive gifts and money to secure the marriage. If the girl wanted to cancel the engagement, all these would have to be returned. Usually she had to go through with the wedding because her family had spent all the money on food.” (1p67)

#### 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

- “Parents make no attempt to properly discipline their children; they do not punish them for breaking things, however chagrined they may be and disappointed at the loss of something they treasured.” (2p12)

#### 4.20 If mother dies, who raises children?

- “In the tribes round Yakusu, the orphan babe was usually cared for by relatives, who were glad that a new life had come into the family, and someone, quite often the grandmother, could suckle the child.” (1p37)
- “[I]n some corners of the forest, children whose mothers died in giving birth were themselves killed for their “crime” or left to die. The mother was more valuable, she could work.” (1p37)

#### 4.26 Incest avoidance rules

- “Custom forbids that he (the Lokele male) should contract too close a liaison with his own people. He must obey the unwritten laws of his primitive society...Dire is the wrath of the elders should a young fellow dishonor the code of morals which exists in the tribe. Instinct has kept them through long centuries from violating the laws of nature in respect to the dangers of consanguinity. Marriage between members of the same community, i.e. the same village, is strongly discouraged, and only permitted when the family relationship is distant.” (2p41-42)

#### 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

- “[T]here comes a moment when the blushing maiden is taken down to the canoe and formally handed over to the happy bridegroom and his friends; then, though there be no rice and confetti, the bridal procession takes place with ridiculous solemnity on the part of the two lovers. As soon as the canoe is boarded the bride and bridegroom take their places, standing at one side of the canoe in full view of the village folk, while their friends, gaily bedecked for the occasion, fill the canoe and parade them up and down from end to end of the village with much shouting and laughter. With some bundles of long “ngbele” and other things from the marriage money returned to them, the bride and bridegroom stand throughout the whole performance, looking for all the world as though they were going to be hanged. They seem heartily glad when it is over.” (2p47-48)

#### 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

- “A love-match among the Lokele is very rare. There is too much bargaining in connection with marriage.” (2p41)
- Parents usually arrange marriages.

## **Warfare/homicide**

#### 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

- “The Lokele world has wider boundaries than we may have thought ... There are four tribes on its borders, with whom the Lokele live on most intimate terms, encouraged by daily commercial and domestic relations.... Let it suffice here to say that the south bank Lokele villages have frequent intercourse with the very numerous Tovokey, or Foma, people of the bush villages, running parallel with the river, and at only short distances from its banks; the Ba-Olumbu bush people of the north bank are likewise in constant touch with their nearest Lokele neighbours; at Stanley Falls exist 3,000 Ba-Genya folk, who also have been looked up and chosen by the Lokele as close friends; lastly, and least, the Lindi tribe of Bamanga people have sometimes intermarried, but more often squabbled with Lokele traders.” (2p7-8)
- “Into this world of five tribes a semi-nomadic race of people has entered who have scarcely any points in common with any one of their neighbours. Wild and wiry, the Bakumu are great hunters and agriculturists... But intercourse with them is purely commercial. The Lokele is shy of their wildness, their medicine, their fierce moods and treacherous ways. Their code of morals is looser than that of any of their neighbours; their dances more frequently obscene.” (2p8-9)
- “Into this Lokele world the Arab came to stay, not as the ruthless destroyer he intended to be, but as a peaceful cultivator and unrivalled trader... The Arabs and their miscellaneous following of domestic slaves, gathered from many tribes in past raids...” (2p9)
- “Protestant missions are represented solely by the Yakusu staff of the Baptist Missionary Society.” (2p9)
- “The Roman Catholic Church is represented by “La Mission du Sacre Cœur de Jesus” with their headquarters at Ste. Gabrielle, about three miles west of the [Stanley] Falls, and more recently at the Falls itself.” (2p9)

#### 4.18 Cannibalism?

- “It is saying much for the ex-cannibal Lokele...” (2p18)

### 5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

#### 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

- “A Lokele village is self-contained. Each man is a member of a little community called a “bokulu” or square; there will be from eight to fifteen or more squares in a village. Each “bokulu” has its headman, who maintains order in the square, arranges the work of the members, and settles the disputes... Each square has its name, and when the missionary knows these he can describe exactly the part of the village he wishes to send to... The chief’s square is the centre of the village, the “liso lia bokene” – “the eye of the town,” and usually contains the neatest huts, the most cleanly exteriors and the largest “ngwaka,” or council-house.” (2p5-6)

#### 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality)

- Permanent

#### 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

- “The point must remain in doubt as to whether there was ever one chief over all the Lokele. It seems extremely probable that the paramount authority was in the hands of one family perhaps not more than a century and a half ago. As a people they are exceedingly clannish, and in our thirteen years’ experience of them we have not known a serious fight between two Lokele villages. Jealousies there are, of course; and these have led to splits. Various forces have been at work breaking up the village chief’s authority

and alienating his people from him. But this disintegrating process has been going on longer than the presence of the white man in his district. It is the Arab, I think, who is primarily responsible for beginning it. It is certainly true that the corporate life of the tribe has not gained by this waning authority of her chiefs. The villages where the chief's voice is still a power contain young people who are much more amenable to discipline than the average Lokele." (2p4)

#### 5.4 Post marital residence:

- "[I]t is not often a Lokele girl goes to make her home in a Foma village." (2p127-128)

#### 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

- "But the ngwaka (council-house) is oftenest built on the cliff front, and the chief's drum placed on a platform at one end of it. This building is of the simplest construction, being like a long, low shed, with open ends. Purposely built in this fashion, and placed parallel with the river, the deep notes of the drum are carried far over the water in both directions." (2p6)

#### 5.12 Trade:

- "There are three grades of money: the small shoka (iron), the long "ngbele" (iron), and the living woman. Brass and copper ornaments are also valuables, but iron holds the chief place of value amongst his inanimate possessions. It is more correct to speak of women as "possessions" than as money, for though there seems to be no rule against their being transferred, we cannot say that it is a regular practice of the Lokele." (2p16)

## **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

### 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

- "Kanga (the witch-doctor) was their prophet and their priest. He treated their sickness with his own potions, distilled from herbs and roots... When they were in trouble, then, for a fee the witch-doctor would make a charm to destroy a spell cast by an enemy. If someone in the village was suspected of a crime, then the witch-doctor would be called in to find the guilty person, by chance rather than skill. Did they want luck with their crops or on a fishing expedition, then, at a price, the witch doctor would bless the venture." (1p15)

### 6.4 Other rituals:

- "In this land the spirits of the departed are to be feared. In this immediate district the belief is strong that they can, and do, at stated intervals, communicate with the living. It is the living who make the opportunity by creating the charmed circle in the forest. It is made for the purpose of introducing a number of acolytes, who are usually quite young boys, into the mysteries of the [libéli] rite." (2p65)

### 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

- "A wrestling match is to the Lokele what a football match is to the Lancashire man. A canoe race comes never amiss. The village dances are a great institution, some of them quite innocent; but in others, working themselves up into a frenzy, they give themselves over to practices which, in their calmer moments, they frankly condemn." (2p18)

### 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

- “The details of a funeral are not pleasant to dwell upon. The Lokele bury their dead beneath their own roof, scarcely more than four feet below the surface. The space covered by the roof of a poor man’s hut is seldom more than 18 ft. by 10 ft., and hence the unsanitary nature of this custom is very apparent.” (2p178)
- “Great display is made of the possessions of the dead man, which are either passed on to his nearest of kin, or else collected and allowed to rot in the open, doubtless with some idea of benefiting the deceased.” (2p179)
- A child in the hospital died. Her relatives were wailing over her death because “[t]hey believe her soul is collected by her dead ancestors, joins a host of those who died before, and hovers very near for a few days... That is why they want to show they are sad. There is another reason... [t]hey think that if they moan and show distress, they won’t be blamed for causing the death.” (1p 33)

## 7. Adornment

### 7.1 Body paint:

- “His (the Lokele man’s) body [is] smeared with a mixture of charcoal and palm oil, or else, and more frequently with the choicer ointment of palm oil and camwood powder.” (2p10)

### 7.2 Piercings:

- “[Lokele girls,] being fond of the ornaments permitted them, they gladly submit to the piercing of the upper lip and the cartilage of the nose. Through the latter a porcupine quill is fixed on some occasions, and it would appear to have a special significance. In the hole of the upper lip a little piece of cane is kept... The small incisor tooth of some animal, or even a feather, is used as an ornament.” (2p38)

### 7.4 Scarification:

- “His (the Lokele man’s) forehead, eyebrows, bridge of nose, and chin are freely scored with the Lokele pattern of tribal marking. His shoulders, arms, and abdomen have also a few cuts. His upper incisor teeth are invariably filed to a point...” (2p10)
- “As the years go on the Lokele girl becomes a much cut-about creature... Across the shoulders there is an elaborate embossed pattern, which feels like raised fingers of flesh to the touch... She well knows that no young man will look at her unless she has these signs of beauty, these hall-marks of a Lokele belle, at the time of life when above all others she wishes to be admired. Some of the strong opposition to the wearing of clothing is to be traced to the objection to hide what they have been at so much pain to obtain.” (2p38)

### 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

- “He wears a cheap white twill towel suspended from a handsome belt of okapi or antelope skin. This loin cloth is his sole covering. Sometimes, however, he will wear two or three yards of blue drill or unbleached calico suspended from the belt and hanging in folds, tucked through the legs and attached to the belt again at the back.” (2p10)
- “In the case of one of princely descent, the costume will include a necklace of beads and leopards’ teeth, some brass or iron coils as a wristlet, and a strap of antelope skin round the shoulder supporting a knife-sheath under the arm, from which the heavy-worked iron handle can be seen protruding.” (2p10-11)
- “[On Lokele girls,] before the frontal bone has hardened and properly joined, a strong band is tied round the upper part of the forehead to force the bone backward. This gives

it a flat appearance in adult females, and enables them the better to support by a strong forehead band the very heavy bundles of plantain and firewood which they carry long distances. At the tender age of eight or nine they may often be seen helping mother by bending beneath their own little burden of food or fuel as they trudge at her side.” (2p37)

## 9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

### [4. Warfare/homicide]

- “When a man, being greatly provoked, is very anxious to fight, his friends come round him and gently persuade him to calm his temper; they “limbese inde bokongo” (make his back weak) assuaging his anger by bringing a leopard’s skin cap and belt and putting them on him, patting him the while and saying, “Now you can sit quiet.” Presumably it ill becomes the dignity of a chief to fash himself about little things, therefore the insignia of chieftainship should help him to act in a dignified way.” (2p14)

## Numbered references

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