Friday was a day of celebration at the Odwira Festival. This was the day of the durbar and sheep sacrificing. The sacrifice of this animal began at about 8:50 in the morning, and was announced with loud drumming. Once these instruments caught our attention, the Calvin group walked over to the large tree in the middle of the square, a tree that is told to be home of an important deity who protects the people in the village. As a crowd of about 40 people gathered, a number of priest began to pour libation (in the form of schnapps) onto the tree, while reciting words appropriate for the occasion. From this point in the ceremony, it was clear that this particular event was not as revered or important as other events were, evident in the small attendance, and absence of many important priests and executioners. In any light, this seemed to be a sacred ceremony, and was believed to be an important part of the Odwira cleansing.

After a few minutes of schnapps pouring at the base of the tree, the clerics of this ceremony grabbed hold of the confused and quiet sheep and with a swift movement of their knife, the lamb’s throat was spilled open. Once the bleeding process began, the priests picked up the feet of the lamb and began waving it in the direction of the tree and surrounding plants. It was their task to spread the blood as a sacrifice to the deity in the tree. As the thick, red blood oozed out of the animals neck, the priest decided that they were done with this process of the ceremony and, in a very undignified manor, they tossed the lamb to the center of the cement platform, adjacent to the tree.

The lamb lay on the ground for a few minutes, quietly and uncomfortably gasping for air. When it seemed as if the sacrificial animal had finally breathed its last breath, it, in a burst of terrified adrenaline, began to shake and kick on the ground, as if to regain its balance and run away from these men with knives. This short and pathetic attempt to save itself only resulted in the hurried death the sheep, as it began to seep out more blood from the gaping wound on its throat. This struggle had also attracted the attention of one priest who seemed to take notice of the animal’s plight; and in a moment of compassion (or boredom), he commenced to further sever the head from the body, while keeping the two intact by a small piece of skin.

The group of priests performed a few more unrecognizable ceremonial rites to honor the tree, and then continued in closing the ceremony. By now, the entirety of any life left in the animal had been lost to some other realm of being; evident by the listless corpse laying still on the concrete. The clerics wasted no time in further mutilating this lifeless body, by promptly cutting off the gentiles for the ram and placing them under the tree. This act was to further honor the tree deity, and leave something of a reminder of the sacrifice that was performed. Once this final act was performed, the procession of priests, drummers and followers continued out of the compound.
It was unclear to us what the people did with this animal after a sacrifice had been performed on it. The animal was dead, that much was certain, but was it appropriate to eat such a sacred corpse? These questions sat with us only briefly, as a group of men skillfully began to skin the beast in order to more easily access the meat of the muscular legs and side. Something about this process was less repulsive than before, perhaps because the animal was distinctly dead now, and any suffering or pain it experienced was no longer felt. Shortly after the skinning process began, our interest and curiosity was lost with this monotonous form of food processing. We had had our fill of violence and gore for the day, and decided to head back to the institute, to enjoy a snack of soda and meat pasties.