

The Role of Death and Burial Rituals in Inculcating Moral and Cultural Values in Abagusii Community of Western Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate the role of death and burial rituals in inculcating moral and cultural values in abagusii community of western Kenya. Members of the Abagusii community are careful to follow all the funeral rites to promote obedience. Members of the deceased mourn and have to come to grips with their grief, promoting perseverance. By following all the wishes of the death person, death encourages respect. The death body is carefully disposed of to avoid any haunting and the grave is protected which promotes respect. When the society takes care of the widows and orphans, they show love. Children, pregnant women and witches are not allowed near the grave and this promotes responsibility. Death creates co-operation since the whole family is involved. All mourners are given food supplied by the family of the deceased or outsiders. This encourages hospitality and sharing. Rituals such as handling of the corpse, selection of the burial sites, preparation of the grave, mourning rites, cleansing ceremonies, among others, are carefully conducted. The importance of death and burial rituals relates to the fact that besides the role played by the ancestors on behalf of the living, there is enrichment of moral and cultural values, knowledge, and a positive regard of death not just as a community occurrence, but a long process which requires prior preparations. Apart from undertaking a forensic review of related literature to the subject under discussion, the study used story-telling as the method of inquiry into rituals accompanying death and burial among the Abagusii community. Snow-balling and purposive sampling was used to identify the informants. The outcome of the study indicated that when a person dies among Abagusii, the community is notified through the wailing of women in a stylized singsong. Death creates a sense of mutual obligation, reciprocity, co-operation, and communal living since the whole family is involved. All mourners are given food supplied by the family of the deceased or outsiders. This encourages hospitality and sharing. Life is meaningless if it's full of suffering. However, Abagusii community believes that life is sacred and that no one is allowed to take it.

Key Words: Moral, Cultural, Values, Death, Burial, Rituals, Community

INTRODUCTION

The argument of this study is that rituals accompanying death and burial in Abagusii community have a positive impact on the lives of the living due to the fact that death is a long process. This process entails preparation so much so that the living does his/her best in terms of moral uprightness to determine considerable burial rites at death. In support of this, King (2013) explained, "Death as a natural transition from the visible to the invisible or spiritual ontology where the spirit, the essence of the person, is not destroyed but moves to live in the spirit ancestors' realm". In this way, death is perceived as a subjective phenomenon in the sense that it is part of human life and that there are positive aspects of death to the living including the remaining of the ancestors as part of everyday life. Moral and cultural values in Abagusii community are preserved in traditions. Magesa (1995) commented on the same that tradition contains the moral code and prescription for ethical life. Morality which helps to make people conform to the norms of society is geared toward the maintenance of life. The spate of immorality and nonconformance to the traditions handed to Abagusii by their ancestors weaken the life of the community. Moral and cultural values in Abagusii community, according to Gyekye (1998), are based on the common good of the community and not of the individual. In addition, seeking for the interest of others is central to the meaning and practices of morality in

Abagusii community. Kollman (1988) concurs with Gyekye on the nature of traditional African morality and ethics which cannot be conceived outside the community. Accordingly, to Abagusii proverb, “Bwanchi mbwamweri kiomosunte bwabora” (people will love you during moonlight, but not in the darkness) to imply that during the death of a loved one (darkness), friends will desert you unlike when all is well with you (moonlight) (Otiso, 2016). Death causes fear, coldness and darkness to families and the community of the deceased person. However, at the death of the loved one, Abagusii community shows a feeling of warmth, affection, liking and devotion to the bereaving family. Abagusii have a strong sense of devotion to one another in the spirit of brotherhood especially during difficult times such as eulogizing the departed.

In their study, Baloyi & Makobe (2014) explained the conception of death by pointing out distinct African perspective as opposed to Euro-American perspectives. The two scholars compared Western perspectives with African perspectives in relation to the definition of life. Accordingly, the Western perspectives see life as consisting of discrete stages, starting with conception and ending with death. Death therefore marks the end stage of life. On dying, the dead person literally ceases to exist. On the contrary, an African worldview understands death as an integrated and continuous developmental life process which is inseparable from the interwoven connections between the visible and invisible ontologies.

Many books and articles about death and burial ceremonies in Africa, as Mbiti (1990) argues, have been written by outsiders and in these writings a number of many derogate things have been said. Mbiti complained that even many modern Africans have been led to use the same wrong terms and hold the same ideas. For example, the notion held by modern Abagusii community in the sense that traditionalist members of the community worshipped their departed relatives was erroneous. Accordingly, Mbiti (1990) wrote:

It is true that departed relatives are believed to continue to live and to show interest in their surviving families. These families may show their belief by building shrines for the departed and placing bits of food or drink there or on the graves, and sometimes mentioning them in their prayers. But these acts of respect for the departed do not amount to worshipping them; they show people’s belief that the departed of up to four or five generations should not forgotten.

Physical life is universally understood as always ending at death. In support of this, Idowu (1973) and Muchemwa (2002) remarked, “the purpose of death is to recall any person whose time on earth is fulfilled and that although death is a dire event, it’s perceived as the beginning of a person’s deeper relationship with all of creation”. A similar view is held by Labeodan (2008) who saw death as the complementing of life and the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds. According to Mbiti (1977), “Africans believe that death removes a person gradually from the time of physical existence on earth to the period after death within which the departed is remembered by relatives and friends who knew him”.

Generally, in every society, there is a strong need to cope with death. Malinowski 1948; Gennep 1960; Ichuloi, 2018) argue that since the awareness of death, a knowledge specific to humankind, and the fact of death, can underpin the meaning of society as a whole. Therefore, in most societies, death is a highly ritualized event, accompanied by certain rites that take place while a person is dying, and often more elaborate ones taking place after death. Last rites rank among the so-called rites of passage together with birth, initiation and marriage, which give structure to human life, and during which the new social stage that the key actors are in acquires social acceptance, secured from the collective character of the rites or their parts.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Africa, people do not cease to exist once they are physically dead, instead, they transcend to the spiritual world to live in the community of the living dead (Mbiti, 1990, Ramose, 2002a & Bujo, 1998). For indigenous African people including Abagusii, dying marks a further developmental milestone which is not separate from life developmental processes and stages. For Abagusii community, dying is a transition to, or ‘growing’ to a different phase of being. The dead transcends to the state of collective immortality and exists in the company of the spirits (Nobles, 2006). Death is perceived as a subjective phenomenon in the sense that it is part of human life and that there are positive aspects of death to the living including the remaining of the ancestors as part of everyday life. However, today, Abagusii community (Westernized) approach death with objectivity; an

issue that implies fear that death is cosmic and thus alien in human life. This perspective tends to undermine positive traditional moral and cultural values that are acquired or transmitted during rituals accompanying death and burial among Abagusii community. It is on this basis this study sought to investigate moral and cultural values in rituals accompanying death and burial among Abagusii community of Western Kenya.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was informed by cultural sustainability theory that relates to the maintaining of cultural beliefs, cultural practices, heritage conservation, and culture as its own entity that attempts to answer the question of whether or not any given cultures will exist in the context of the future. In this study, culture entails a totality of traits and characters that are peculiar to a people to the extent that it marks them out from other peoples or societies. These peculiar traits go on to include the people's language, dressing, music, work, arts, religion, dancing and so on. It also goes on to include a people's social norms, taboos and values. Values here are to be understood as beliefs that are held about what is right and wrong and what is important in life (Aziza, 2001). The fact that people's belief system and values are preserved and perpetuated to next generations, cultural sustainability finds relevance as a substantive theory that informed the study in the sense that the Abagusii community maintains her culture in rituals, specifically rituals accompanying death and burial that are the major concern of this article. The proponents of this theory include Soini & Inger (2014) who hold the view that the importance of cultural sustainability lies within its influential power over the people, as decisions that are made within the context of society are heavily weighed by the beliefs of that society. The fact that death and burial rituals are resources belonging to the community, Abagusii community gets involved in making decisions in relations to the beliefs of their society.

METHODOLOGY

Apart from undertaking a forensic review of related literature to the subject under discussion, the study used story-telling as the method of inquiry into rituals accompanying death and burial among the Abagusii community. Snow-balling and purposive sampling was used to identify the informants. In this case, ten elders that were members of the Abagusii Cultural and Development Council were identified to inform the study. Studies by Oluwole (1992) validated, "Oral traditions play an important role in knowledge production, preservation and dissemination, and are not less important than written texts." In support of this, studies by Stake (2000) and Lee (2009) affirmed that story-telling as a cultural representation in research contexts is usually referred to as narrative inquiry. Owosho (2020) observed that through story-telling, knowledge is produced, preserved and disseminated from one generation to the other. Further, story-telling has been one of the key cultural ways knowledge areas was explored, sustained and protected within indigenous communities. Further, story-telling is embodied within the oral traditions which reflects the memory of indigenous people and encompasses their cultural values. In relation to the above, Kovach (2010) opined, "Indigenous researchers have the responsibility to assist others to understand and know indigenous worldviews in a responsible and respectful way".

Kovach (2010) verified that stories remind us as Africans of whom we are and where we belong. The line of argument here is that stories are an inextricable part of our identity and being. Emphasis here is on the interconnectedness between the value of knowledge and relationships. Therefore, the act of listening to people's stories is in itself a knowledge seeking method. Similarly, stories as indigenous inquiry is grounded within a relationship-based approach to research. Inherent in these narratives, ways of knowing and doing are the different non-linear methodologies which contain African philosophical thought, epistemologies, narratives, rituals and performances which are fundamental to the African identity. The qualitative nature of these narratives and conversations provide meaning and, by implication very useful sites of knowledge. Lyons, et al. (2012), pointed to the "potential congruence that may exist between qualitative research and African cultural values". On this reasoning, these authors argue for the relevance of qualitative research to the life experiences of people of African descent. In support of the qualitative-relationship nature of the-being-of-Africans, Lee (2009) maintained, "Within each indigenous group there are multiple sites from which to intervene that require a range of research projects that are ethical, respectful for, by and with indigenous people's qualitative approaches".

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Anthropological and Cultural Implications of Death and Burial Rituals on Abagusii Community

Death in Abagusii community is believed to be caused by witchcraft, curses, diseases and old age. After death, funeral and burial rites are performed as per the beliefs of the community. This study describes what happens among the Abagusii community before death, at death and after death, and the implications involved. When a person was thought to be near death, he was put into eero (right side of the house) if a man and left in enyomba if a woman; in both cases on the floor so that the dead would not contaminate the bed and make it suitable for later use." Levine (1982) concurred with the above findings, "Deathbed confessions are expected from persons suspected of witchcraft, theft, or other serious offenses that might bring afflictions to survivors if restitution is not made." A similar view was held by Okari (2021:80) that the dying person, especially if they are old (grandfather, grandmother, father or mother) calls his/her kinsmen on the day he/she "prepares to die" and when they are all gathered, the dying person speaks his/her last words to the family. Hence, among the last words are apologies, how the family should be managed and sharing of properties, the issue of debts, and his will and wish for his/her family.

When a person dies among Abagusii, the community is notified through the wailing of women in a stylized singsong. In support of this, Horowitz (1991) acknowledged, "Grieving and mourning the death of a loved one is seen as a process and not a single emotional event." Additionally, in wailing louder at the death of a person, Abagusii community perceives the mourners as those who only make noise, since the real person in affliction is the deceased person's immediate family members hence the proverb "bororo mbwamonyene ko eamate achana bosaigo." Usually, the mourners claim that the dead person is assassinated. This is in line with the Abagusii proverb, "tianyagokwa etaberegeti getondo" (no one dies without a cause). In their wailing, women say, "ninki gose mwakorera iga?" ("Why have you done this?") -meaning that the dead person's death was caused prematurely by his/her enemies. The funeral accusations echo the traditional theme of martyrdom. Levine points out that in an attempt to portray the deceased as a victim, women in the Abagusii community invoke actual names. In addition, the women taking advantage of their low status and low credibility, feel freer to sing openly what everyone suspects, leaving those in authority with the task of assessing the validity of these claims and acting upon them.

Scholars have demonstrated that, "Variations in treatment of the corpse and burial by age and reproductive maturity are particularly revealing of the Abagusii expectancies concerning life goals of adult men and women". For instance, Levine (1982) indicated that every deceased person is represented as deprived and vengeful. But those who had not achieved parenthood are given symbolic substitutes to compensate for what is believed to be their greatest deprivation; in response to the imagined disappointment of the dead person, he/she was awarded in burial a state of social maturity higher than that actually achieved; the unmarried woman was buried away (to symbolize her husband's home), the pregnant woman was buried with the fetus beside her like a child, the person without a house was built a hut (egesamo) to be buried by.

When an adult person died without a house among the Abagusii community, as already been mentioned above, a ritual hut (egesamo) must be constructed on the spot where the house was or would have been; the corpse placed in it before burial, and rituals of fire and sacrifice performed to consecrate the hut as a symbolic house. Studies by Levine (1982) informed that this rule was invariant in its application and could not be abrogated even when, as in the case described, the deceased is considered a witch and had been the object of her children's affection. In that case, a good deal of money and effort were expended to give her a proper burial. The study continued to unveil that without the construction of the hut (egesamo) there would be no point of reference from which to position the grave which among Abagusii made burial impossible or at least hopelessly improper. Furthermore, without the egesamo, (hut) it's impossible to place the grave and the corpse on its way to the grave, in its "right" position appropriate for the man or "left" position appropriate for the wife. It's necessary that each adult has a unique location at burial that is not shared with any other adult of the same sex. Thus, each man must have a house that is built for him and each woman a house in which she has cooked as his wife. There's no any other available house in the homestead can serve as a substitute point of reference for their graves.

The spot of the grave where a man is to be buried was marked (goaka egekamago) using a hoe by the eldest son of the deceased's oldest son, who was to be given a cow (Eng'ombe yogo tindeka -burial cow) from the stock of the deceased. Further, Omochokoro omotangi (grandson the eldest son of the deceased's son) was also given land (emonga) of his grandfather after the burial. Consequently, the husband's burial site is to the right-hand side of the family house (bweri); the mother's burial site is to the left-hand side of the family house (isiko); unmarried man's burial site is isiko maate (some yards south of the family house); and the unmarried woman is buried isiko nyuma (some yards north of the house).

In relation to the above, Ayuka (2018) summarized on the meaning of the stated burial sites in Abagusii community and what they symbolize. Thus, children (both male and female) did not attract a lot of funeral and burial ceremonies. Like adults, children too are buried outside their mother's old hut but a boy was buried a thought nearer the hut than a girl; for had the boy lived he would have spent his life in the homestead but a girl would have married and gone away to her husband. No animal was slaughtered or given upon the burial of unmarried men or women. Unmarried girl is buried on the land of her father but at a distance away from the homestead. An unmarried man is buried near a hut and if he had none, near the gate of the cattle kraal. However, Ayuka lamented that nowadays, this is not strictly adhered to especially, among wealthy families or families with well-educated members and that Christianity has affected the observance of these customs.

The study confirmed that rituals accompanying death and burial were conducted at home. Imagery derived from domestic architecture and domestic kinship, which retains many of the meanings it has in everyday life. In funeral narrative, relationships with deceased persons are represented as though they were living kin with emphasis given to the attributes associated with their social positions (Levine, 1982). As soon as a person is defined as dying, his/her positional identity (as a man or woman of a particular stage of social maturity, identified with a particular house in a particular homestead and in a certain kin relationships) becomes the salient focus of attention, determining location of dying, placement and treatment of the corpse, location of the grave and who digs it, and who attends the funeral. The drama of social identity, largely predictable from background facts about the deceased, constitutes the setting in which many more variable themes and feelings are expressed. This is consistent with the findings of Levine who argues, "Contemporary Abagusii community members feel strong about dying at home in the proper place with a proper house and with grandsons to dig the grave, they go to great lengths and considerable expense to locate their deaths and funerals in the appropriate social space." Large numbers of people come to pay their respects in conventional ways, stay for a while and leave. Those with closer relations to the deceased or the immediate surviving kin stayed throughout the day.

After the burial, the grave diggers wash their feet at the grave site due to the instructions given to them by the elders. The family of the deceased person is made to sit at the grave site and get all their hair shaved. They are going to start a new life without their loved one! It is a very special emotional moment! All the relatives, friends, and neighbors are soon leaving without coming back again. All that had been wailing and mourning the loudest will leave and maybe never come back. Hence, Bororo Maimonian ko eamate ehana bosaigo (death deeply affects the family of the deceased, but not the neighbor's); to mean that it's only the family of the deceased person that can feel the pain and the loss. Today, elders play a critical role in the rituals accompanying death and burial among Abagusii community. In support of this, Kanu (2010) wrote, "He who listens to an elder is like one who consults an oracle". The oracles are believed to give the infallible truths; thus, the elders are also believed to say the truth and the words and instructions are heeded to for the promotion of good Behaviour among the young. In Abagusii community, elders occupy a revered position, serving as custodians of wisdom, experience, and tradition. According to The Sudan Times (2024), the elders' invaluable knowledge is passed down through generations, enriching communities and preserving cultural heritage. In this case, elders are respected for their accumulated wisdom, gained through a lifetime of experiences. Their guidance and counsel are sought after in matters ranging from family disputes to community decisions. Myer & Shihn (2010) believed that in our present situation, elders often play pivotal roles in mediating conflicts, offering sage advice, and upholding traditional values. In addition to their role as advisors, elders serve as living repositories of cultural knowledge and heritage. Owosho (2020) complimented that through oral traditions; storytelling, and rituals, elders transmit ancient wisdom, myths, and traditions to younger

generations. This passing down of knowledge not only fosters a sense of identity and belonging but also ensures the continuity of cultural practices and values.

Studies by Oduor (2022) stipulated that in many African cultures, including Abagusii, rituals and ceremonies are presided over by elders, who perform rites of passage, blessings, and other important ceremonies. Their presence lends these occasions a sense of authenticity and reverence, reinforcing the importance of tradition and community cohesion. Moreover, elders often hold positions of leadership and authority within their communities, with their opinions carrying significant weight in decision-making processes. Their leadership is grounded in years of experience, integrity, and a deep understanding of communal dynamics. The respect for elders extends beyond familial and community boundaries, with societies at large recognizing the contributions and wisdom of older individuals. Elders are seen as pillars of strength and stability, embodying the collective memory and aspirations of their people. The Sudan Times (2024) unveiled that in contemporary African societies, the role of elders remains crucial, albeit evolving with changing times. While modernization and globalization may pose challenges to traditional practices, the wisdom and values imparted by elders continue to guide and inspire younger generations. In essence, the reverence for elders in Abagusii community reflects a deep-seated appreciation for wisdom, experience, and tradition. Their enduring influence shapes the fabric of African communities, fostering resilience, unity, and cultural richness for generations to come. In this respect, the young are always looking forward to being elders and they are often told that if a child respects an elder, he would be respected by the young when he becomes an elder (Kanu, 2010).

Moral Implications of Death and Burial Rituals on Abagusii Community

Death creates a sense of mutual obligation, reciprocity, co-operation, and communal living since the whole family is involved. All mourners are given food supplied by the family of the deceased or outsiders. This encourages hospitality and sharing. Research by Ifemesia (1979) and Schopenhauer (2005) informed how important it is for members of the Abagusii community to demonstrate a sense of compassion and empathy toward suffering families, especially the bereaving ones. This is demonstrated through the involvement of the members of the community in sharing their porridge (erongori) with the family of the deceased person. Erongori (porridge) represents all forms of gifts and support for the bereaved family to motivate them to start over again and carry on with life despite the loss of their loved one. Funeral donations were ways that ensured bereaved lineages were not left with debts upon the death of a member. Today, social media such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp are being used to make contributions in support of the deceased person's family.

Abagusii community is careful to follow all the funeral rites to promote obedience. Members of the deceased mourn and have to come to grips with their grief, promoting perseverance (Smith, et al. 2018). By following all the wishes of the death person, death encourages respect. The death body is carefully disposed of to avoid any haunting and the grave is protected which promotes respect. When the society takes care of the widows and orphans, they show love. Children, pregnant women and witches are not allowed near the grave and this promotes responsibility.

Abagusii culture is embedded in strong moral considerations. It has a system of various beliefs and customs which every individual ought to keep in order to live long and to avoid bringing curses on them and others. Supporting this view, Awoniyi (2015) believed that adultery, stealing and other forms of immoral Behaviour are strongly discouraged and whenever a suspected offender denies a charge brought against him, he would be taken to a soothsayer or made to take an oath for proof of innocence. In indigenous Abagusii community for instance, obomera (ordeal) was very popular as a method of crime detection. The murderer could try to eascape, but was brought back by amarimu (supernatural forces that expose the guilt) and the culprit was always brought to book. Consequently, the family of the deceased person or anybody else was not allowed to take revenge on the murderer.

The study recorded reports on why children were taught to be honest and truthful as they grew up; it was done to ensure they became dependable people who always told the truth. Even during death and burial ceremonies, the elders and older members of the community eulogized the deceased person by pointing out to his or her good works to be emulated by the young members of the community. This became an inspiration for young people to live lives of honesty and integrity. Today, moral qualities are acquired and internalized by the

children whose traits, habits and skills get shaped as they observe and get involved in rituals accompanying death and burial among Abagusii community. Values such as perseverance, honesty, kindness and obedience among others are encouraged to be embraced by all in the society. Etuk (2002:2) opined that no group of people can survive without a set of values which hold them together and guarantees their continued existence, specially, during sad times such as at the death of a loved one.

Acquisition of culture among Abagusii community is as a result of the socialization process, which Fafunwa (1974) expounded on how it is transmitted as a generational heritage:

The child just grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people. He imbibes it. Culture, in traditional society, is not taught; it is caught. The child observes, imbibes and mimics the action of his elders and siblings. He watches the naming ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, funeral obsequies. He witnesses the coronation of a king or chief, the annual yam festival, the annual dance and the acrobatic displays of guilds and age groups or his relations in the activities. The children in traditional society cannot escape his cultural and physical environment.

The study noted that today, young people who have reached maturity are entitled to a house that will imply a proper burial at death. Relevantly, The Sudan Times (2024) pointed out that parents and elders in the Abagusii community don't keep aloof and silent from encouraging the youth to live responsibly, for instance, building houses, getting married and raising successful families – things that count on receiving a proper burial. During the burial many people assemble and if the deceased was a prominent person, good things are said about him/her when the eulogy is being read. Different categories of people speak to praise the deceased person and such speeches end up challenging the living to aim at dying a good death and attaining a proper burial. Many children are named after the deceased person with the belief that the dead person's good qualities will be manifested in the children named after him/her. If the deceased was a mother, her children will bear children and name them after their grandma and the deceased's children will exclaim, "Baba oiborwe" (mother is born) or if the deceased person was a father, they will say, "Tata oiborwe" (father is born). Family members and relatives will want to name their children after their deceased person who had a good character and seemed successful in life because African religion is cyclical (Mbiti, 1977). However, a bad person such as a witch, a thief, a murderer or the one that committed suicide, he/she was not named after children. This is because Abagusii community believed that children who were named after an evil person would become evil just like the deceased person.

In "A Philosophical Reflection on the Relevance of Death in the Medical and Technological Frame," Anthony Ichuloi, (Ichuloi, 2018) revealed the essence of death to humans as opposed to the animals. He states, "Humans, because of their openness to themselves, make of their whole life a self-philosophical project in the sense that they are concerned with their life and death to a greater extent than are their animal counterparts." This stresses the fact that death is necessary to the living humans among the Abagusii who must strive a successful and responsible life as they look forward to a reward – a decent burial. However, where the person refuses to lead a responsible life, he/she is punished at death by being denied a decent burial. For example, if a man of a marriageable age deliberately refuses to get married and bear children to the community, he is denied a decent burial. Like many Africans, Abagusii community thinks that there is some strong moral reason to extend familial relationships by finding a (heterosexual) spouse and having children (Dzobo, 1992; Bujo, 2001). The purpose of this is to sensitize the community, especially the youth that bearing of children responsibly determines the continuity of their community and culture. In Abagusii community, normally, beside the corpse in the grave, a log is put to represent the wife who never was. This ritual is referred to as (korutwa omwaro) - derogative. In addition, the testicles are pierced using a thorn of a poisonous tree called omosogwa. This person is never remembered nor the children named after him. After his burial, his siblings especially, the sisters lament, "Omwan' ominto nigo atindekwa buna esese" (our brother has been buried as a dog). "A dog" is used here metaphorically to mean someone who does not have value. Therefore, when a dog dies, there is no burial (ogatindeka), no ceremonies (ebirero/amabe); instead, a hole (not a grave) is dug in the bush and the dead dog is thrown inside (gotuguta). He is denied the value of being a human being (Wiredu, 2010; Amoah, & Peparah, 2022). Therefore, death becomes an important process that inculcates discipline and a sense of responsibility to the living who anticipate for a decent burial at death.

The study uncovered the importance of putting aside differences during the death of a loved one. Furthermore, during death and burial ceremonies in Abagusii, it is a time for people to put away differences; it is a time for reconciliation. However, the study discovered that if one party refused to participate in this ritual, death might claim more persons in the family. On this note, Otiso (2016) complimented the above claims by use of the proverb “chaga mwanane komwanchanere matati” (your enmity must come to an end at the funeral). This means that funeral activities provide the basis for sustaining family bond. These activities are the final send-forth activities that should be properly done as a mark of respect for the deceased. Today, rituals accompanying death and burial in Abagusii community do facilitate the offering of emotional, informative, or concrete support, while giving the bereaved an opportunity to talk about the deceased and their relationships with the deceased (Collins & Doolittle, 2006; Rushing, 2006). Consequently, Maboea (2002:108) upheld the same understanding when he indicates that, whilst the immediate family members of the deceased are regarded as having no strength to do anything, other members of the community, neighbors, distant family members, friends and relatives must help make the necessary arrangements for the burial.

As regards to this study, sacrifices were offered for the purpose of averting evil and seeking forgiveness for wrongs committed against God. Libations were offered during death and burial ceremonies in Abagusii community. Grains, pieces of meat, milk, honey or beer were placed in shrines in the belief that spirits would consume them. In some cases, libations were accompanied by invocations to show for which the food stuffs were intended. Ancestors were also welcomed to participate in the ceremonies accompanying death and burial. Abagusii community venerated the ancestors through naming new-born babies after them. By taking care of graves of the dead ones and performing all rituals related to it guaranteed protection from evil.

Philosophical Implications of Death and Burial Rituals on Abagusii Community

Philosophers have indicated that there is only one truly philosophical question and that is suicide. Life is meaningless if it's full of suffering. However, Abagusii community believes that life is sacred and that no one is allowed to take it. Objectively, death is not an occurrence, but a life time process. Ichuloi (2018) referred death as basic human fact. Accordingly, in thinking of death as a constitutive possibility of life, Abagusii community attempts to correct the conventional, negative scientific and technological connotations associated with it. Furthermore, “Humans relate to themselves as subjects to death; death constitutes an ineliminable aspect of their self-definition, which cannot be reduced to a mere medical event. It makes them understand themselves as relating with their own future completion.” This relates to being given a proper and decent burial among modern Abagusii who say in admiration, “rosia ebirero biao kore moyo” (live a good life that deserves a decent burial at the end). While living, Abagusii people look forward to a proper burial which is determined by living a purposeful life.

Ekegusii language and literature is full of wisdom pointing to the importance of process of death and giving it a meaning to the living. Accordingly, Otiso (2016) discovered that this wisdom contained in Abagusii proverbs do preserve moral and cultural values found in rituals accompanying death and burial. For example, “Amakweri tari getare getasuke” (death is not an immovable rock which cannot move). It is something that people wished that it should not exist. It is a mobile phenomenon; it gives the bereaved hope that even those who caused death will eventually die. In giving the mourners hope, Otiso says, “Maino nseki na ntondo kerense” (teeth show in laughter even when there's a corpse on the ground). Although death is a painful experience, it's possible for people to laugh during preparation for funeral or burial itself. There are people who make jokes during funerals to lighten the somber mood and to try lessening pain. There are emotions such as anger and laughter which have to be expressed even in the midst of pain. The implied meaning is that life must continue in the midst of loss and pain otherwise more pain may result.

Another proverb, “Makweri makoro” (death has been in existence) (Nyamwaka, 2011:65), consoles the mourners and encourages them remain confident that death is an old thing. Otiso gives the meaning of the above, “This expression means when death strikes, it's usually painful to all however, this proverb encourages people that death is not anything new or strange. People should therefore be courageous even in misfortunes of death.” Abai (2013) saw death as the worst fear that people have, but explained that in such contexts, they use the proverb so that they encourage themselves that whatever may befall them in a certain situation is not uncommon to people. The presentation of death in this proverb is viewed as a sad experience, but which at the

same time should not bring life to a standstill. It is an ultimate misfortune, but it also implies in situations that require courage (Nyamwaka, 2011:66).

In response to the benefits of rituals associated with death and burial in modern Abagusii community, the study conceded that people participate in such rituals because they serve as avenues for social get-together, channels for uniting with old friends and viable outlets for making new social contacts (Gyekye, 2004; Matolino, 2009). As the family members of the deceased and the neighbors (abaamate) gather to begin making burial arrangements, Christians arrive and begin to order everybody to keep quiet. In most cases, the church gets involved in offering prayers, scripture reading from the Bible, a sermon, homily, or eulogy, and music. Counseling the community in the form of speeches from relatives and older members of society are limited to capturing of pictures. Today, during the burial, the master of ceremony uses a printed program that must be strictly observed. Different groups, for instance, all the cousins to the deceased person may be called upon to stand for either a video shoot or a group photo. However, if the deceased person was a Christian or purported to be a Christian, his/her denomination dominates over the burial session. Sometimes the church might preside over burial of a deceased member to undermine the family's emotional needs. It's also worth noting that today, in Abagusii community rituals accompanying death and burial are conducted in a Westernized or Christianized way more than African. The mourners are identified as they wear on black clothes that are sometimes printed the image of the deceased person with some message. For instance, "Rest in Peace Grandpa" ... and so on. Technological gadgets such as video cameras, laptops, and smartphones, among others are commonly and rampantly used during death and burial rituals.

Ichuloi (2018) regarded death as "a condition for life's meaningfulness" and that life is meaningless without death:

Almost every aspect of our life experience is marked by the fact of death, so much so, that it is hard to imagine what a life experience would be like without an attempt or desire to eschew death. The challenge comes with the attempt to embrace it as an intimate part of life. We constantly perceive death as a challenge to a meaningful life and as something that one needs to come into terms with if he hopes to live fully. However, to think about our life as a whole requires us to think about our death. We can only say that our life as a whole is a meaningful life if we can recognize that at some point our physical life will come to its halt. With this awareness, from the moment of my birth, death is an impending possibility of my being that I will inevitably experience (p.861).

Studies by Douglas (2005), Parrinder (1962), and Mbiti (1977) argue that the dead strengthen the living and hence conducting death and burial rituals appropriately becomes a guarantee of protection for the living. When death and burial rituals are not done the dead person may become a wandering ghost, unable to live properly after death and therefore a danger to those who remain alive (Ray, 1976; Pillari & Newsome, 1998). In this regard, Hecht (1978) argued that if ritual accompanying death and burial are for the living, it follows that a well-designed funeral service should be a relatively satisfying experience for those attending and more particularly the family and relatives among the Abagusii. Hecht concludes, "This does not imply the service would necessarily be enjoyable, but that the relatively positive expectations of participant would be fulfilled."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Rituals accompanying death and burial among the Abagusii might include some beliefs that are anti-Christian, but at the same time, they have positive elements that are helpful to the community at large. These rituals though complex and varied from one place to another are a significant transition of one's life. Abagusii community sees death as a long process which requires prior preparations. Among the key areas that facilitate this process is being in good terms with fellow community members, being enterprising and law-abiding, helping others and observing customary regulations including: building own house, where one is laid at death before the burial takes place. The rituals also assist the mourners to ventilate and adapt to the situation since death can be devastating to the affected persons.

Recommendation

It was recommended that in spite of many challenges due to modernization, Abagusii Culture and Development Council should sensitize the youth on the importance of upholding cultural beliefs and values by youth in the elders' council. The council whose members are the majorly are aged persons among the Abagusii community have the opportunity to pass relevant cultural and moral values, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences to young people whose responsibility will be to preserve and perpetuate these values. Therefore, these rituals should not be just wished off, but instead be digitalized and passed on to coming generations, while emphasizing the important lessons contained in them. It was also established that this is an area that has not been extensively researched, therefore, the need for more research and documentation to be done for future reference.

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