

Juxtaposing Traditional African Death and Burial Rites with Christian Practices, among the Maragoli of Western Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

This article evaluates the juxtaposition of traditional African religion in the death and burial rituals of the Maragoli community, with those of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) church that many of the community members ascribe to. This is with an aim of showing the interconnectedness between the traditional death rituals of the Maragoli people and the teachings and practices of the PAG church with regard to death while juxtaposing the two cultures, the article will examine the rituals that accompany various stages of death. It will show existence of the many traditional death rituals of the Maragoli, embedded in African traditional religion that have remained persistent and still find expression in the practices of the PAG converts. These practices are an expression of their innermost beliefs about death, the condition of the soul of the dead, the world of the spirits and the life hereafter. The PAG church has allowed its adherents to continue with these practices because they are significant to them and they don't appear to be interfering with the programs of the church. This article is part of a larger study that was conducted between 2019 and 2020 in Sabatia and Vihiga sub counties of Vihiga County, Kenya.

Key words: Traditional death rituals of the Maragoli, Teachings and practices of the PAG church, Juxtaposition, Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG), Veneration of ancestors.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to explore the dichotomy between the traditional death rituals of the Maragoli and Christian teachings and practices of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) church. This article establishes why these rites have remained persistent in the midst of Christianity yet they are deeply rooted in the traditional world view of the community that is embedded in Traditional African Religion. According to Wepukhulu (2024), traditional burial practices of African communities prior to the coming of Christianity were deeply rooted in their understanding of the supernatural world, the role of the ancestors, and the continuity of life beyond death. The arrival of Christianity in general and the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) church in particular during the 19th century in Maragoli land led to an interaction between two different worldviews and cultural practices. Langley & Kiggins (1974) observes that a society will only accept something new if it supports the value system of its culture in a positive way and does not militate against its major culture themes. The arrival of the church among the Maragoli with its different culture themes initially posed a threat to the existence of the Maragoli culture but later on led to development of a blend of traditional and Christian practices. According to Turaki (2006), African communities had developed elaborate sacred burial ceremonies that facilitated smooth transition of the dead into the ancestral land. Liyongo (1972) pointed out that, by the time the Maragoli people settled in their present homeland, their customs and beliefs had already been formulated. They worshipped a supreme deity, Nyasaye and had their own unique death and burial rites. The article therefore centers on members of the PAG clergy, widows, widowers, and orphans to examine those aspects of the traditional Maragoli death culture that have remained persistent and still find expression and continuity in funeral and burial practices of the Maragoli PAG Christians.

Prior to the coming of Christianity and western ideas, African people lived and understood their existence mainly in terms of the beliefs and ideas of the communities to which they belonged. According to Mugambi (1989), the traditional beliefs of a people form the basis upon which new ideas and innovations are either accepted or

rejected. Alongside Christianity, the missionaries introduced a tri sectional world view (with heaven, earth and hell) which was strange to the traditional African thought whose world view is mono-sectional, with no concept of heaven and hell. Africans and Maragolis in particular, believe that when a person dies, their mode of existence changes to a spiritual or ghostly one and continues to live in this world and occasionally visit his/her family/community. Besides the worship of Nyasaye, they venerate their ancestors who are believed to have tremendous influence on their lives. O'Donovan (1996) argues that many groups of people in Africa have strong beliefs concerning the spirits of their ancestors and this calls for a necessary relationship that must exist between the living and the dead. The Maragoli people are not an exception, and this shapes their thinking and practices regarding death and the way they handle bodies of their dead relatives.

The PAG church was introduced in Kenya by Reverend Otto Keller and Marion Keller in 1909 at Nyang'ori in Vihiga County. Its key teachings and practices were inspired by the tri sectional world view embedded in the Christian scriptures which emphasizes that once a person dies, he/she goes to either live with God in heaven or Satan in hell depending on how he/she lived his/her life while still on earth. However, paucity of knowledge exists on how, while serving the Maragoli people, the PAG allows for continuity of African beliefs and practices around death and burial rites, but also some variances in the practices. This article aims to fill this gap, by juxtaposing the two cultures.

This study is part of a larger study carried out between 2019 and 2024. Data was drawn from 356 PAG churches, members of Maragoli cultural council of elders, widows, widowers, orphans, Pastors and Women Directors/leaders of PAG churches. Through ballot, a random sample of 10% of churches in each of the nine PAG districts in the two sub counties of Vihiga and Sabatia was obtained. The pastor of each sampled church and the women leader were purposively sampled for the study. A total of 36 pastors and 36 women leaders were sampled. Twelve elders who make up the cultural council were purposively sampled. Qualitative methods of data collection, which included in depth oral interviews and Focus Group Discussions, were employed. The study also utilized secondary sources derived from published books, journals and unpublished dissertations. Data collected was coded manually and organized under different themes and analyzed using thematic and content analysis approach.

To show the fusion and interconnectedness of the practices, the article evaluates the interaction between the traditional world view of the Maragoli which is mono sectional and that of the PAG church which is tri sectional with its accompanying practices and teachings. Effort is made to establish why the traditional death rituals of the Maragoli have persisted into the 21st century, thus establishing the religious co-existence of two worldviews. The article begins by explaining how the two worldviews understand death.

UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH

Maragoli people lived and understood their existence in terms of beliefs and ideas of their traditional community guided by their traditional culture and religion. This influenced much of their thinking about death and the life hereafter. Prior to the coming of the church, the community already had the concept of a supreme being, *Nyasaye* whom they worshipped besides veneration of their ancestors. The church failed in completely changing the core aspects of the traditional cultural practices of the people. The Maragoli PAG converts embraced Christianity with its tri sectional world view but carried with them aspects of their traditional death culture that are grounded in African traditional religion. This makes sense to them in their world and they are in a way guided by the mono-sectional world view of the traditional Africans. As Turaki (2006) points out, the world view of traditional religious systems has an enduring and persistent influence on the lives of the Africans. Becoming a Christian does not automatically change all of one's world view nor does it need to change completely. The Maragoli PAG Christians did not abandon their death rituals. They have continued to observe their cultural beliefs alongside Christian teachings and practices. This resonates with Wepukhulu's (2024)

Observation that, introduction of Christianity among the Bukusu led to a syncretic blend of traditional and Christian practices with some indigenous elements persisting alongside new Christian rituals. This study focused on how such indigenous elements of the Maragoli have coexisted with teachings and practices of the PAG church that are rooted in a tri sectional world view.

Most Maragoli PAG Christians understand and interpret death in terms of the traditional African world view despite their belief in the existence of heaven, hell and earth. The terminologies used by the PAG clergy describe death as a transitional process rather than an end. It is understood as a departure, disappearance, eternal rest/sleep just like in the traditional Maragoli culture. According to them, spirits of the deceased go to *Imagombe*, the land of the spirits to rest amongst their ancestors. They however hover around in the community for some time until certain rituals are performed to release them to join the ancestral world. To ensure continuity therefore, in their eulogies, these Christians declare that they have committed these spirits into the hands of God but still find a way of cultivating and maintaining some relationship with them to imply that they are still within the community. According to majority of the women leaders interviewed, this is accomplished through some rituals that are meant to appease them.

Often, any misfortunes befalling bereaved families in the post burial period are attributed to rituals that were either omitted or performed wrongly. Such an occurrence is deemed as the spirits' way of expressing displeasure or even revenge on the living for not having been treated well. It is the Researcher's view that, even as the dead person is being ushered into his/her new phase of existence, the PAG Christians try to perform all the prerequisite traditional rituals to clear him/her from the community before handing him/her over to God from the Christian point of view and to the ancestral spirits from the traditional Maragoli point of view.

According to one of the elders, whereas the living are concerned with life here on earth with all its struggles and temptations, the ancestors are free from struggles of physical life and are more concerned with keeping their families within the traditions of their culture and within any stipulations and rules that they laid down for them while they were still alive. This sense of control by the ancestors is so strong that even Christian converts find it difficult to ignore. An extended family head (*Musakuru wi ihiri*) serves as a priest and a direct link between the living family members and the departed. He exercises his authority over both Christian and non-Christian members of the family irrespective of their positions in the society. He prescribes most of the rituals to be undertaken in the event of occurrence of death irrespective of whether the departed member is a Christian or not. Most of the pastors attested to this fact when it came to key rituals like determining and marking burial sites, lighting ritual fires, commissioning those to take the spirit of the deceased to various destinations et cetera. In recognition of the fact that majority of his subjects are Christians, the family head gives directions but allows the clergy to infuse his instructions into their teachings and practices. They, however, maintain a watchful eye over them to ensure that all the prerequisite rituals are observed to the later according to one key respondent.

Respect for the Dying among the Maragoli PAG Christians

On preparation for death, it emerged that most dying persons desire to leave behind united and harmonious homes and families. Words of a dying person are highly respected by the living. Most of the PAG clergy pointed out that Maragoli PAG Christians strive to ensure that close relatives are summoned back home to get the last words of blessings as well as forgiveness for those who might have wronged them. In case a member fails to show up in good time and the ailing person dies, in case they had some differences, reconciliation is conducted post humously by the graveside. A clan elder takes the affected member by the grave side and beseeches the spirit to pardon him/her. It is clear from the findings of the study that this is a traditional practice that has been embraced by PAG Christians. That as much as the spirit of the dead is assumed to have been released into the hands of God at burial by the PAG Christians, the traditional belief that the spirit is still within the community is allowed by the clergy because it is important to their adherents. This belief is at the core of their post burial rituals. After reconciliation at the graveside a prayer is made by a clergyman in a Christian context though he addresses the spirit of the departed to pardon the affected individual. This is also a clear case of intersection between the Traditional culture of the Maragoli people and the Christian culture.

For families faced with death, they need to prepare for the eventuality so that in case it occurs, transitioning to funeral arrangement is made easy. Most of the preparations done by the PAG Christians are heavily influenced by the traditional religious thinking of the Maragoli people. Children are encouraged to be by their parents' deathbeds to tap blessings instead of curses. In case there is a conflict or misunderstanding, it gives them an opportunity for reconciliation. Should one arrive after death has already occurred, an uncle or aunt has to take him/her before the body of the deceased to plead for forgiveness. This assumes that people do not die but they just transit into the spiritual world where they are able to monitor whatever is happening around their bodies. A

pastor would then pray for them to effect the forgiveness. The clergy have a responsibility to ensure that reconciliation takes place before death and that their dying members speak blessings instead of curses to those being left behind. The family elder likewise has a responsibility to plead with the dead on behalf of the living for forgiveness. This is rooted in Traditional religious beliefs of the Maragoli but blended with Christianity through prayers. There is therefore shared belief in forgiveness which supposedly paves way for the deceased to enter heaven for Christians and ancestral land for the traditional Maragoli. According to one key respondent, efforts are made to ensure that all conflicts are resolved before death and burial. This is a shared view by both members of the clergy and the elders of the community.

The Maragoli people believe that a person who dies with grudges experiences difficulties transiting to the land of the spirits hence their spirits fail to get the so much desired rest and they become a source of misfortunes to the living. Assisting a dying person to confess their misdeeds and seek forgiveness makes their transition to the life hereafter smoother. That is heaven for the Christians and the ancestral land (*Imagombe*) for the traditional Maragoli people. For example, it is believed that a witchdoctor would not die easily until he/she has confessed his/her actions. The church strives to ensure that their members do not die in sin while the family/community ensures that their spirits transit peacefully into the ancestral land. This commonality is seen in Genesis 27, when Isaac asked his son Esau to prepare for him a sumptuous meal that he may bless him before dying. In chapter 49, Jacob who cheated his twin brother Esau out of his blessings gathered all his sons before his death and blessed each one of them with a blessing suitable to each. He also pronounced curses like in the case of his eldest son, Reuben who had slept with his concubine. He also charged his sons to ensure that they bury him amongst his fore fathers in a cave in the field at Machpelah to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan which Abraham had bought from Ephron the Hitite as a burial site.

As part of their preparation for death, dying persons are also talked to, to declare and share their wealth to avoid wrangles after death. The Maragoli people respect wishes of dying persons. PAG Christians are encouraged to write wills to avert any wrangles in their families. Apart from stating what each child should inherit, some also indicate where they would wish to be buried and which animal from their herd should be used to feed their mourners. Some also assign their children/relatives duties to fulfill during their funerals. Both the church and the family strive to honor the wishes of the dead to avoid offending their spirits.

Findings of the study revealed that, PAG Christians have also stuck to the Maragoli tradition that a man should die from his sitting room and a woman from the bedroom. Elders interviewed and members of the clergy indicated that, allowing a man to die away from his sitting room undermines his masculinity and authority as the head of his home. They all concurred that polygamous man must be taken to the sitting room of his first wife's house to die from there and be buried in front of it as demanded by the Maragoli culture. This is a practice that has no Christian basis but has been infused in to the practices of the PAG Church. Members of the clergy who participated in this study confirmed that they always strive to ensure that this is done in collaboration with the family elders to avoid any offence to the spirits of the dead.

Traditional and Christian observances during death of a Maragoli

According to most ritual elders, the intensity of pain felt by a traditional/nominal Maragoli when a loved one dies cuts across the beliefs and practices of both the traditional Maragoli and the PAG Christians. The fact that it can strike a family at any time without choice or warning makes it an event to dread. Mbiti (1969) points out that, it tears people away from all that they love and know in this world. The fact that the traditional Maragoli look at it as transition of life to a different and supernatural state, the beginning of a journey to the land of the ancestors, it does not make it less painful. The scriptural view that the spirit of the dead transits to heaven does not make it any better for the Christians. Just as prescribed by the traditional Maragoli culture, occurrence of death among the PAG Christians is announced through an outburst of wailing, sobbing and weeping. This is blended with high shrieks, screams and lamentations from the immediate family members and neighbors. Among the Luos, people come to know of death through women's long quivering wails followed by sounds of drums (Kodia, 2021). It was observed that, early Christian missionaries attempted to portray this style of announcing death as weakness and lack of faith and attempted to dissuade their early converts from such practices. Grudem (1994) however points out that, it is not wrong to express sorrow when a loved one dies through crying, wailing, and mourning. All the pastors observed that this system of announcing death has persisted into the practices of

Maragoli PAG Christians. The elders interviewed pointed out that, relatives who arrive long after death has occurred announce their arrival in the bereaved home through an outburst of wailing. This then culminates into deep sobbing as they head straight to where the body is lying, mostly under the eaves of the family house to pay respect to the deceased. Family members present and other close relatives then join them as they view the body and sing chosen hymns/dirges. According to the pastors, the songs sang during such an occasion emphasize the theme of resurrection and are meant to communicate the fact that death is transitional and that the deceased is headed to a more glorious form of existence. Apart from strengthening and comforting the bereaved, these songs are also meant to appease the spirit of the deceased. This is a blend of Christian and traditional Maragoli culture. According to one key respondent, a relative who fails to view the body to pay last respect to the deceased can be haunted by the spirit of the deceased which is believed to be around and watching.

Whenever death occurs, the first people to be notified are pastors and senior members of the extended family, who may include elder brothers and sisters to the deceased. This is in recognition of the traditional authority commanded by the extended family, and that of the church in the entire funeral arrangements. The funeral therefore becomes a convergence zone for the traditional/cultural and Christian world views and practices. The PAG pastors team up with members of the extended family for burial arrangements to be successful. Members of the clergy and clan elders have a responsibility to rally church members and kinsmen to support and demonstrate their care for the bereaved.

Findings from widows' Focus Group Discussion revealed that, in case the deceased died with his legs or arms folded, the pastor allows the extended family elders to speak to the dead and more often than not the dead would respond and allow their limbs to be straightened and even their mouth and eyes to be shut in case they were open. The pastors don't pray for this to be achieved; they leave it to the elders because the spirits of the dead listen to them. This is irrespective of whether the deceased is a member of their church or not.

The cultural practice of cleaning the body and dressing it neatly before burial is adhered to by the PAG Christians. Before a bereaved family can be allowed to announce the passing on of one of their own through an outburst of wailing, the pastor and the family elder ensures that the body is well groomed and presentable. A decision is then made as to whether the body should be taken to the mortuary to allow time for burial arrangements, or it should be placed under the eaves of the house to await burial. The kind of prayers that are made before the body is moved from the house depends on the immediate destination of the body. That is, whether it is being taken to the mortuary or it is being placed outside the house in preparation for burial. This has to be made clear to the spirit before the body leaves the house. By doing so, the clergy is acknowledging the fact that the spirit of the dead is in their midst and is conscious of the happenings around them. Tradition is also strictly adhered to when it comes to positioning of the body outside, under the eaves of the house (*kurusimbu*). A man's body is laid on the right-hand side while a woman's is laid on the left-hand side. The Maragoli PAG Christians follow these procedures meticulously in order to avoid any offence to the spirits of the dead. This is a Maragoli traditional cultural practice that has been infused into the practices of the PAG church.

RECONCILING THE PRE BURIAL PRACTICES

The Researcher sought to know from the PAG clergy, some of the traditional Maragoli death rituals that PAG Christians engage in during the pre-burial period. This begins with positioning of the body outside the house; all the pastors agreed that for a man the body is positioned on the right-hand side eave of the house and the left-hand side for the woman. This applies also to the positioning of the grave in the front yard of the bereaved homestead. Men are buried on the right-hand side while women are buried on the left-hand side of the front yard. Whereas this practice has been infused into the burial practices of the PAG Christians, the PAG clergy could not find any biblical or Christian explanation for the same. They agreed that it is a practice prescribed by the Maragoli traditional culture but embraced by the PAG church.

This study revealed that the Maragoli people bury their dead facing north. This is not a practice prescribed by the PAG church but by the traditional Maragoli culture as a way of honoring their ancestors and making it easier for the spirits of the dead to join their company in the ancestral land located north. The PAG church is not objected to this practice because it does not have a clear policy on where graves of their members should face. The bible too, does not give any guidelines on the same. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob were all buried at

Machpelah, a burial field bought by Abraham but we are not told the direction that their bodies faced at burial. In the book of Luke 23:53, Joseph of Arimathaea buried the body of Jesus in a sepulcher that was hewn in a stone but the bible does not specify the direction that his body faced. What therefore emerges is the fact that, regarding positioning of the bodies outside the house before burial and the direction the body faces during burial, the PAG church has no policy. The traditional culture of the Maragoli has been allowed to provide guidance. It is important to remember that the traditional Maragoli bury their dead facing north to make it easier for the spirit to journey to the ancestral land, *Imagombe* located in the north. It is paradoxical that a PAG Christian is buried facing north for the same reasons while the spirit is also expected to arrive in heaven believed to be located up beyond the skies. The Bukusu, the Abanyole and the Tiriki luhya sub tribes bury their dead facing east, the direction from which the sun rises (Wepukhulu, 2024 and Alembe, 2002). Lagat (2024) just like Mbiti (1969) give a contradictory view by stating that the Bukusu and all luhya bury their dead facing in a westerly direction.

On identification and marking of graves, the PAG pastors agreed that it is the responsibility of clan elders because they understand the history and traditions of the various families. These elders determine the location the grave should occupy within the compound and where it should face the deceased person's religious convictions notwithstanding. In determining the site, this elder is guided also by the gender and status of the deceased in the home or the circumstances under which the deceased might have died.

Tools to be used for excavation of the grave must be obtained by an elder from the house of the bereaved family and cannot be borrowed from a neighbor. The role of the Pastor is limited to praying before the elder marks the exact position of the grave and excavation work commences. The church also continues to be guided by the cultural practice of excavating the grave on the eve of the burial day in the evening or at night. This grave is usually positioned in the front yard of the homestead unless the circumstances surrounding the death of the deceased are questionable. Victims of suicide, murder, thunder strikes, epilepsy, leprosy et cetera, are buried in the backyards of their homesteads as dictated by the Maragoli traditional culture. Their graves are flattened to erase their memories from the community and homesteads. The PAG church respects the traditions of the community when it comes to such cases because of the belief that there are certain evil spirits behind such deaths and that community elders and customs play a key role in driving them away.

Excavators of graves are given maize flour and chicken depending on the gender of the deceased to prepare a meal for themselves from the ritual fire. As much as this meal serves to replenish their lost energy, it also serves as a sacrifice to the spirits of the dead. This is a practice that Maragoli PAG Christians have embraced from the traditional death rituals of the Maragoli. It does not matter whether the deceased is a clergyman/woman or an ordinary Christian, the procedure is the same. Excavation of graves has continued to be a predominantly male affair as dictated by the Maragoli culture. The PAG clergy argued that even in the bible there were no cases of women excavating graves or conducting burials (KII, OI:02/06/2020). Women and uncircumcised persons are not allowed to dig graves among the Bukusu (Lagat, 2024). Among the Abanyole it is also a predominantly male affair (Alembe, 2002). In Luo culture, graves are dug at night by men. Twins and men with pregnant wives are not allowed to participate in the exercise (Shiino, 1997). Mbiti (1969) also emphasizes that no woman or uncircumcised man should dig a grave among the luhya. A father cannot dig a grave for his son or daughter, or a husband for his wife. Positioning of these graves in the homesteads vary from one community to the other. But for the Maragoli it is in the front yard of the homestead.

On where the dead should be buried, all the pastors, women leaders and elders interviewed were in agreement that it must be in one's ancestral land. Maragoli PAG Christians will always ensure that their dead relatives are taken back to their ancestral homes for burial because this makes it easier for the spirit of the dead to be received by his/her ancestral spirits who are very territorial. The teachings of the PAG church do not give any specific instructions on where the dead should be buried. There is however an indication that most of the patriarchs of the nation of Israel expressed their wish to be buried amongst their ancestors. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob were all buried at Machpelah in Canaan. Jacob made Joseph and his brothers to swear that they will not bury him in Egypt when he dies (Genesis 49:29). When Joseph was about to die, he also asked the Israelites to ensure that when their time to live Egypt comes, they will not live his bones behind. When he died, they embalmed his body and preserved it in a coffin (Genesis 50:25-26) until the time of the Exodus when Moses remembered to carry it as the Israelites journeyed out of Egypt (Exodus 13:19). Joseph had expressed his desire to be buried in the Promised Land amongst his forefathers. It is only Moses whom the bible states that he was buried by God

Himself in the land of Moab at a spot that is not known (Deuteronomy 34:6). Jesus on the other hand was buried by Joseph of Arimathaea in a tomb not far from the place of crucifixion (Mark 15:46-47) which was not in their homestead.

The insistence by PAG Christians to bury their dead relatives home is driven more by fear of offending the spirits of the dead. According to one of the ritual elders, it is a taboo to bury a Maragoli person whose home is known in a foreign land. Just like the patriarchs there is an indication that the Maragoli people also desire to be buried amongst their forefathers to make it easier for them to be received in the land of the spirits. There is therefore convergence of Maragoli cultural practices and the Old Testament practices regarding to venue of burial. In the New Testament, apart from the burial of Jesus away from his home, Lazarus was buried in their home before Jesus resurrected him (John 11).

Many African communities desire to bury their dead in their ancestral land to appease their spirits. According to Gehman (1989), Kodia (2021) and Shiino (1997), a dead Luo must be buried in his/her ancestral land irrespective of where he/she lived or worked. The many funeral and burial rituals that the community engages in can only be effectively performed in their rural homeland. The Abanyole of Western Kenya also insist on burying their dead in their ancestral homes just like their Maragoli neighbors (Alembi, 2002).

The PAG clergy play a key role in assisting bereaved families of their members to mobilize resources to enable them ferry home bodies of their loved ones who die away from home so that they can be buried amongst their ancestors. Not even devout Maragoli PAG pastors would allow their family members to be buried away from home in cemeteries or even in overseas countries. It is believed that their spirits would become restless and feel abandoned by their families. Mbiti (1969) emphasizes that the Luhya bury their dead in their homesteads with the exact position of the grave being determined by the deceased's status in the homestead and the circumstances surrounding their death.

When a married person dies without having put up a house of his own, close family members and relatives build a makeshift hut known as *iridiri* so that their bodies can lie in there while awaiting burial. This is important as a way of consecrating their piece of land to the ancestral spirits and giving it identity. All the death and burial rites proceed from this hut and the body of the dead is buried in front of it. According to one of the ritual elders, a piece of land without a house on it remains a profane place unrecognized by the ancestral spirits. Maragoli PAG Christians have embraced this tradition, and they don't bury their dead on profane unoccupied pieces of land without houses. They keenly observe this tradition of constructing a hut for the dead before any funeral arrangements can commence. All funeral arrangements must be conducted from a house called by the name of the deceased.

Reading of the history of the dead person has become a key component of the burial programs for Maragoli PAG Christians. This is a practice that was borrowed from western culture and has been embraced by both the PAG church and the Maragoli traditional culture. It reminds the mourners that the deceased is a true Maragoli who deserves to be buried honorably with all the accompanying rituals. Their lineage of descent/ kindred is made clear to the mourners to remind them that the deceased truly deserves to be buried in that particular home or land, amongst his/her people. The church also uses the opportunity to highlight the deceased's journey of salvation to justify performance of Christian rites during the funeral. It was noted that the writing of a dead person's history is a collective event done in a special sitting of the extended family members, neighbors and the church. This ensures that no vital aspects of the history are left out. The writing ends with serving of a common meal of ugali and chicken to the participants. The type of chicken slaughtered must be gender appropriate, that is, a cock if the deceased is a man and a hen for a woman. This event becomes a major zone of convergence between Maragoli traditional culture and the PAG church. According to the pastors, this begins with and ends with a prayer from the clergy. The pastor ensures that the salvation history of the deceased is well captured.

On the eve of the burial, there is a ritual known as *kusiominya* in which the church, family and community members do a procession round the deceased's village and immediate neighborhood singing Christian songs. This ritual has its roots in the traditional Maragoli culture and it is a way of traditionally taking the spirit of the dead on a last tour of the places he/she used to visit before bidding him/her farewell. The PAG church has also allowed its members to continue with this practice. The procession begins from the homestead where the body

is lying with a prayer and ends with a prayer. Beginning the procession from home is a way of symbolically collecting the spirit of the dead to take him/her along on this last tour. Through this practice, the Maragoli PAG Christians express their beliefs regarding the spirits of the dead. That they are nostalgic about the places they used to visit while they were still alive. This ritual expresses this innermost belief by the PAG Christians their conversion to Christianity notwithstanding. This gives credence to Bell (1992) ritual theory that, rituals express people's innermost beliefs.

Burying the Dead among Maragoli Christians: Christian prayers, traditional rituals or both?

Death and burial practices may sometimes put a Maragoli Christian in a dilemma with both culture and Christianity pushing him/her from either side. Whereas culture demands continuity and performance of all the prerequisite rituals, the Church may be reluctant to embrace some of these rituals which may not be necessarily unbiblical. The clergy has an enormous task of coming up with clear standardized guidelines on how burials of Maragoli Christians should be conducted without alienating their world view which so close to their hearts.

In preparation for burial, Mbiti (1969) mentions cleaning of the body as a key component in many African communities. In some the body is even anointed with oil before burial. Among the Lugbara of Uganda, the corpse is washed before burial by lineage sisters selected from the same generation as the dead man (Mugambi and Kirima (1984). Nangoli (2007) concurs with Mbiti that in many African communities the body is washed, shaved, nails trimmed off and then anointed with special oils before burial. In the bible, Joseph of Arimathaea prepared the body of Jesus with spices before wrapping it in linen for burial as it was the custom of the Jews (John 19:38-42). Apart from John alluding to anointing of the body of Jesus we are not told that it was washed. In the book of Acts 9:36-43, the death of Tabitha of Joppa is described. Her body was washed and laid in a room upstairs before Peter resurrected her. This is an indication that washing of bodies was not totally unknown among the Jews. The PAG church has allowed its followers to continue with this practice that is common among the Maragoli people because it does not interfere with its teachings, and it appears to be having some basis in the bible. Both the pastors and the elders agreed that before burial, the dead must be cleaned and appropriately dressed. This is meant to usher the deceased into his/her next phase of existence in a neat manner. This has been intertwined with the Christian belief that the deceased is going to heaven, a place of purity and holiness. This therefore symbolizes afresh beginning in the spiritual realm. Wepukhulu (2024) observes that, the practice of washing, shaving and anointing the dead with oil is also common among the Bukusu Luhya subtribe.

There are special garments in which the dead are buried among the Maragoli. They must be loosely fitting and without buttons and zips. Accessories such as belts, neck ties, socks, wristwatches, necklaces, shoes, et cetera are prohibited since they are believed to hinder the deceased from transiting smoothly into the life hereafter. Burial with inner wears is discouraged for those whose spouses are still sexually active. This is meant to enable the surviving spouse to remarry and move on with his/her sexual life. It is believed that burying a dead spouse in his/her inner garments would render the surviving spouse impotent hence he/she may not be able to remarry. Maragoli PAG Christians faithfully follow the same procedures for similar reasons.

Before commencement of the burial program, members of the immediate family of the bereaved gather inside the family house to move out as one united family to join the rest of the mourners. Long before the arrival of Christianity in the community, an extended family head would lead the family out of the house with the body straight to the burial site. The PAG Christians have picked up this practice and continues to practice it except that they do not proceed to the graveside straight away. Before leaving the house, the pastor enquires from the family members whether there are any pending issues amongst themselves just to be sure that nothing negative would stand in the way of a smooth burial service for the dead. In case there are any differences, efforts are made to settle them first and then pray for the family to allow them to join the rest of the mourners for the main burial program. Unity of the family is displayed even as they prepare to lay their loved one to rest. Whereas the PAG church has allowed this practice of coming out of the house together, it is blended with the aspect of sorting out any differences amongst the bereaved and asking God to grant them favor and peace throughout the burial day. Whereas the PAG church focuses on the unity of the family, in the traditional Maragoli thinking the focus is more on smooth transition of the dead into the ancestral land free from any conflicts and grudges

Tributes and eulogies have become an important feature of Maragoli PAG Christian funerals. Kinsmen are given priority to reveal to the mourners who the relatives of the deceased are and the fact that he/she is being buried rightfully amongst his/her people. Those who give their tributes and eulogies include grandchildren, children, cousins, uncles, aunties, brothers, sisters, parents and grandparents. This practice just like reading of the deceased's history, was borrowed from the western culture and introduced by the church to the Maragoli culture. According to Mugambi and Kirima (1984), traditionally there would only be one ceremonial speech by the family elder addressed to the deceased imploring him/her not to bear any grudges against the living. This has now been expanded to allow more people to give their eulogies. The Maragoli PAG Christians have given this practice a cultural angle by ensuring that the prominence of the kindred is clearly brought out. This is geared towards bringing out the importance of the kinship ties so that the mourners can be able to know the people amongst whom the deceased was born and raised up. The Kinship system plays a very central role in the social organization of the Maragoli community. It was observed that, the eulogies are important because apart from appeasing the dead, there are pertinent issues that arise which form part of the agenda for the day of the grand memorial (*orovego*). Sometimes unknown children of the deceased who would have been left out of sharing of his/her inheritance emerge and the family and the clan get to know them. To the church, eulogies bring out the fact that he/she was a devout Christian and member of their church to justify performance of Christian burial rites. Most of the speakers strive to give glowing tributes and eulogies out of fear that the spirits of the dead would be offended and may hit back at them should they say things that are offensive. From the findings of the study it is clear that the belief that the spirits of the dead do not go very far away from their homes is maintained in the sub conscious minds, their conversion to Christianity notwithstanding. Their hidden beliefs in the existence of spirits and their influence on the living are made clear or acted out.

Another area of fusion was noted when it comes to handling those who arrive later after burial garments and coffins have been purchased. According to the elders interviewed, the living honor their deceased by purchasing for them burial garments and good coffins. This is meant to appease their spirits and evoke blessings. Those who miss out on such opportunities are given a chance to drape the coffins with garments especially white nets before burial. This honors and appeases the spirits of the dead. Sometimes they are allowed to lay wreaths of flowers on the caskets although these (flowers) are removed shortly before burial and then laid later on the grave. To the church these flowers are a symbol of the crown that awaits the righteous in heaven. Even though the practice of using coffins and garments for burial is a later inclusion into the funeral rites of the Maragoli, it has now been embraced as part of their funeral and burial culture. In both it is a way of honoring the dead as they are send off to their next phase of existence. Wepukhulu (2024) in his study of the traditional burial practices of the Bukusu looks at the use of coffins as a reflection of Christian burial customs .It is a fusion of the traditional world view that the dead are conscious of the happenings around them with the Christian world view that the dead go to heaven where they are crowned by God for their righteousness (James 2:12; Revelation 2:10). These are well expressed in the symbolic actions of the PAG Christians. Bell (1992) observes that, ritual expresses people's religious orientations in symbolic ways. These actions are of great importance to Maragoli PAG Christians just like they are to the teachings of the church because they express their innermost beliefs about death and the destiny of the soul.

Burials of Maragoli PAG Christians are also characterized by funeral processions that have a cultural connotation. They imply that the spirit of the deceased is being taken on a last tour of the homestead before he/she is buried. This procession is mounted right from the gate to appease and honor the spirit of the deceased by giving him/her a grant entry into the homestead. As the procession strolls through the homestead carrying the body, Christian hymns are sung as the presiding pastor reads scriptures that emphasize the theme of resurrection from the bible intermittently stressing that the deceased is headed to amore glorious destiny. A survey of the accounts of the deaths and burials of the patriarchs in the Old Testament do not give any indication of processions that were mounted except for Jacob in Genesis 50:1-21. The burial of Jesus was also devoid of such a practice (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42). It is however important to note that funeral processions were not completely unknown in the Jewish community. In Luke 7:11-17, Jesus together with his disciples encountered a funeral procession that was going to bury the only son of a widow in the village of Nain. He stopped the procession and raised the young man back to life. It is possible that such processions existed but were not mandatory during burials.

According to Mbiti (1969), the Ndebele mount funeral processions for their dead - the men first, carrying the corpse, with the women coming behind them. Mounting a funeral procession by Maragoli PAG Christians is a cultural practice that has been infused into the practices of the PAG church. The church insists that those who line up on the procession should as much as possible be dressed in pure white, the presumed color of heaven. Whereas the spirit of the dead is given a last tour of the compound before burial, the procession mimics the grand reception in heaven by angels dressed in dazzling white. The PAG church has allowed its adherents to continue with this practice since it is mimicry of what happens in heaven. In the book of Genesis 50:6-11, during the burial of Jacob, there was an impressive funeral procession, attended by Pharaoh's officials-the dignitaries of his court and the dignitaries of Egypt as well as chariots and horsemen.

Another age-old tradition that has found its way into PAG burial practices is one of allowing close family members and relatives to cast some soil into the grave before it is filled up during interment. This is a traditional practice that blends well with biblical scriptures such as Genesis 3:19b which states that, '*You were made from soil, and you will become soil again*'. Allowing relatives to cast soil into the grave is a way of bidding farewell to the spirit of the dead and is a final act of acceptance that indeed their loved one is dead and gone. The PAG church has allowed this practice to be continued by its adherents since it resonates well with scripture, that human body was molded from soil, and to the soil it returns during burial.

On the direction that the body should face during burial, the study revealed that the PAG church has no policy of its own on the matter. It has therefore allowed the Maragoli PAG Christians to continue with the traditional practice of burying the dead facing north, the direction from which their forefathers came. This honors and makes it easier for the spirits of the dead to join their ancestors. This has a lot of significance in their traditional world view and the PAG church has not found it offending to its teachings and practices. Mugambi and Kirima (1984), states that, a corpse must be laid in the grave facing the direction from which his/her clan came from. According to Mbiti (1969) the Luyia buried their dead facing west. However, this is not true of the Maragoli who believe that burying the dead facing in another direction other than north can have serious ramifications. This is because of their deeply rooted belief that their ancestral land, *Imagombe* is located somewhere in the north towards Mt. Elgon which is the destiny of the spirits of their dead. Bell (1992) pointed out that people express what they believe in symbolically through rituals. Whereas the Maragoli PAG Christians want to believe that the dead go to either heaven or hell, there is the deep rooted belief that their spirits travel north towards their ancestral land. The clergy offer prayers to crown that last important act of interment because they have no problem with it. From the literature available, many communities have various beliefs regarding the origin of their clans which dictates the direction that the graves of their dead face.

The graves of the dead should be heaped with enough soil to give them a dome-like shape. This makes the grave conspicuous enough to avoid any interference with it in future. It makes it easier for the living to remember the site of burial for a long time. This is with the exception of those who die from unusual causes like suicide, murder, lightning, leprosy, epilepsy, et cetera. For such people, their graves are flattened in order to erase their memories from the community. Graves of good people are planted with flowers and treated with a lot of reverence and care. According to elders interviewed, it is a taboo for anyone to plough down a grave or even scoop soil from it for any other purpose. This practice has been embraced by Maragoli PAG Christians who treat graves of the dead with a lot of respect akin to family shrines.

The PAG clergy is very keen on close family members attending funerals of close relatives. Those who fail to attend due to unavoidable circumstances, have to make arrangements to visit the grave later and pay homage in order to bid their spirit farewell. On their entry into the bereaved home, they have to go straight to the grave where they are joined by other family members and relatives to sing Christian hymns and pray. This practice has been given a Christian outlook although it is deeply rooted in Maragoli traditional culture. The PAG church has allowed its adherents to continue with it because it is of great importance to them. Mbiti (1969) opined that, death is something that concerns everybody and that it brings sorrow and loss to every family and community. All members of the community are therefore expected to attend and participate in all the arrangements. Funeral and burial arrangements among the Maragoli people is an elaborate communal affair that involves the entire clan and community. It brings out the strong sense of kinship and community in their culture.

Interfaith Dialogue in the Post Burial Rituals and Practices

From the findings of this study, it emerged that, the rituals that have posed the greatest challenge for PAG clergy are the various post burial rituals and practices that their members engage in. According to their training and the minister's handbook, rituals for the dead are supposed to end at the graveside immediately after the burial. However, there are several rituals and practices prescribed by the traditional Maragoli culture and which make sense in their world that PAG Christians find necessary to perform. These rituals are rooted in their traditional worldview and are meant to appease the spirits of the dead. Mbiti (1975) states that, "Even though the spirit leaves the body, it is thought in many parts of Africa that for a while it lingers on around the body or homestead. Proper funeral rites must be performed to send it off to the ancestral land. Most of the post burial rituals are meant to release and ensure safe passage of the spirits to the land of the dead, *imagombe*."

The first one among these rituals is the ritual of *magenga* which is observed for three days by close relatives and neighbors immediately after the burial of an adult member of the family/community. They keep night vigils for three consecutive days after burial. The ritual fire burns for the three days as an indication that the spirit of the deceased is still around. They argue that Moses in the bible was mourned by the Israelites for 30 days in the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy 34:8) before the Israelites resumed their normal activities. This practice has been intertwined with the theme of death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the bible where he resurrected three days after burial. At the end of the ritual of *a magenga* close family members and relatives are clean shaven and then prayed for by the clergy. It is also on this day that the ritual fire, *chotero* is extinguished and the ashes removed and scattered in the banana grove. This is done by a family/clan elder (*Musakuru wi ishiri*) who also provides the razor blade that is used for the ritual of hair shaving. This act symbolizes ritual cleansing from the defilement occasioned by death. Mbiti (1975) points out that this is a common practice in many African communities which symbolizes separation of the dead from the living. The living embarks on a new journey without the departed member. The growth of new hair signifies that death does not destroy life completely. That it continues to spring up. According to Nangoli (2007), the hair growing again is an indication that the dead relative had a good heart and he/she will continue to live in the next world. God in the book of Leviticus 19:27-28 however forbids the Israelites from cutting their hair, beards or tattooing themselves as a way of mourning their dead. This raises the question of whether to shave or not to shave. The PAG church has however allowed its members to continue with the practice on the premise that the three days taken before the shaving ritual are symbolic of the three days that Christ took in the tomb before resurrecting. The community also expects them to do so as a way of complying with its cultural requirements. They sing songs that emphasize the theme of resurrection and pray that God makes away for the soul of the deceased to enter into his presence. It is this ritual that marks the end of the mourning period and allows the relatives who had travelled from far off places to disperse back to their various homes and work places. According to Shiino (1997) this is what marks the beginning of the Mourning period among the Luo people.

The ritual of *kusiominya/ kuhira ichiriri* has also persisted in the post burial rituals of the Maragoli PAG Christians. It is based on the belief that the spirits of the dead are nostalgic about the places that they used to visit and must be appeased by being accorded a last chance to visit homes of close relatives and urban residences in case they used to reside in towns. This allows their spirits to peacefully depart to the land of the spirits and ensure that they keep off these places. The PAG church has allowed their members to continue with this practice because it is important to them. The clergy prays for the entourage before departing to visit such places. This practice is deeply rooted in African traditional religious belief that the spirits of the dead hover around their homesteads for sometimes until important rituals like *kuhira ichiriri/kusiominya* are performed to release them to go to the ancestral land. According to the ritual theory by Bell (1992), the Maragoli PAG Christians perform this ritual because they believe that it is an important way of helping their dead to move away from their homesteads to settle in their new abode. The Christian teaching that the spirit of the dead goes straight to heaven or hell seems to have no impact on this belief and practice.

The ritual of *orovego* which was initially a shaving ritual has evolved into a grand memorial ceremony for the dead and has been completely delinked from the hair shaving ritual. It is no longer confined to three days after burial as some families take as long as three years planning for this ceremony because of the enormous expenses involved. According to majority of the PAG pastors, the climax of the Maragoli post burial rituals is the ritual of *orovego* also known as *kwitsulitsa*, which means to remember. It is this ritual that establishes the spirit of the

deceased in the world of the spirits and enables him or her to join the company of the ancestors. Before this is done, the spirit remains in a state of limbo, desolation and solitude and keeps on disturbing the living as a way of calling attention to his/her status.

As much as the Minister's Service Book forbids any other services from being conducted after burial, *orovego* is a very elaborate ceremony held in the post burial period and one in which the PAG clergy and church play a significant role. The family members plan and organize for this ritual in collaboration with their presiding pastor and other church members. The animals to use for meat are carefully selected and slaughtered in front of the family house near the grave. The blood is allowed to flow freely to the ground as a way of allowing the spirits to partake of the same. The gender of the animal must be appropriate, that is a bull for men and a cow for women and it must be whole without any defects and of one plain color. Apart from the feasting, this ceremony still serves as a traditional court where debts of the deceased are declared and plans for their settlement outlined. Sharing of his inheritance is also discussed and executed.

One can only participate in *orovego* if they have been doing it for their departed relatives lest misfortunes befall them. That is, they should not have such rituals pending in their families. For a family to do *orovego*, an audit must be conducted first to ensure that all those who departed earlier from the family have already had their memorial ceremonies conducted. Failure to do that can easily agitate their spirits and provoke them into causing problems to the living members. According to one elder, it is performance of the ceremony of *orovego* that settles the spirit of the dead in the ancestral land knowing that all their pending issues have been sorted out. This ritual is based on the assumption that the spirit of the dead hangs around the community until it is properly released by the relatives to settle in the ancestral world. This is a ritual that the PAG Christians continue to observe religiously despite the teachings of the bible that the spirits of the dead go to either heaven or hell at death. All the PAG pastors and women leaders pointed out that this is not a practice prescribed by the PAG church administration, but one that the clergy have found to be extremely important to their congregants because it makes a lot of sense in their mono sectional world view. PAG Christians expect their Pastors to stand with them and help to preside over the rituals. A survey of the bible does not reveal any teachings with regard to memorial ceremonies for the dead. None of the Patriarchs of the Jewish community was commemorated through such a ceremony. According to Mbiti (1975), commemoration of the dead is a widespread practice in many African communities. It is done for heads of families, adults, and married people. Among the Luos, relatives get together in the dead person's home to remember, comfort and please the dead person. Neighbors are also invited and they enjoy a lot of food and dance (Shiino, 1997). The fact that Maragoli PAG Christians find this ritual to be important is an expression of the deeply held belief in the reality of the ancestral world and the fact that for one to gain admission he/she must be cleared by the living.

The ritual of widowhood (*kukunzakala*) is another prominent post burial ritual that PAG Christians have embraced from the traditional Maragoli culture. The Maragoli people believe that death of a spouse defiles the surviving spouse who becomes a source of danger to other community members. The widow/widower is confined to her home for about three months undergoing ritual cleansing before she/he can be re integrated back into the community. Not even his/her shadow should fall on other members of the community. A mature widow is assigned the responsibility of guiding and monitoring her. She is supposed to find out from her whether she intends to have another partner in future. If the answer is yes, she is advised to find a man to have sexual intercourse with just once in a ritual known as *kukara amakora*. This is meant to detach her sexually from the dead spouse. The man should make sure that he spills his seed (sperms) outside lest both of them die from a ritual disease, *orovo*. It is only after this that the widow can enter into a long-term relationship because the spirit of the late husband has been detached from her. The same applies to a widower, he can never settle for a long-term relationship with the first woman he sleeps with him after burying his wife. Such a woman is purely for ritual cleansing and cannot become his wife. This ritual is also found among the Bukusu of Western Kenya and the procedure is very similar (Lagat, 2024). To them this must be accomplished before the grand memorial ceremony, and it is meant to free the widow from the guilt of unfaithfulness.

Findings from the widow's Focus Group Discussion indicated that Upon completion of the seclusion period which can last up to three months, a widow is given special herbal medicine for cleansing so that she can be reintegrated back into the community. According to the pastors, the PAG church has allowed its members to continue with rituals of widowhood because they are important to them and the entire community. The church

however discourages ritual cleansing practices which involve sexual intercourse with unsuspecting partners. They are considered immoral and a health hazard. It is important that the church dialogues with the community to come up with alternative rituals of widowhood that are acceptable to either side.

The grave of the dead becomes a symbol of permanent separation of the departed from the living. Whereas some communities plant flowers/trees on the graves, others erect some structures/ mausoleums to mark them out. Some families make gravestones with epitaphs to keep memories of their dead alive. All these are meant to honor the spirits of the dead. In case a family wishes to cement the grave of their loved one or erect any structure on it, an extended family elder must be contacted to do the groundbreaking by digging out some soil from the grave before masons can embark on the task without inviting misfortunes unto themselves. The PAG church has allowed its members to continue with various ways of making the graves of their dead conspicuous and memorable. The bible does not give any guidelines on the kind of shapes and form that graves should assume. Jesus was buried in a rock-hewn tomb by Joseph of Arimathea (Luke:23:50-53). In John 11:38, Lazarus' tomb was a cave covered by a stone.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DEAD

Idowu (1973) opines that, thousands of men and women of every level of spiritual or intellectual attainment have the persistent notion that, the deceased still have a part to play, for better or for worse, in the lives of the living. He further points out that communion and communication are possible between the living and the deceased. The reality of the traditional worldview makes relationship and communication between the living and the dead necessary for Maragoli PAG Christians. Most of the death rituals engaged in are based on the assumption that the dead remain conscious of the happenings around them and are capable of influencing the lives of the living either negatively or positively. This is also out of the acknowledgement that their lives were derived from their departed relatives. Odetola and Ademola (1985) pointed out that, No African worthy of himself can deny that communication with ancestors is an essential ingredient of his life. They argue that this practice is not peculiar to African cultures as it was an important part of the ancient religions of Greece, Rome and China.

Maragoli PAG Christians have been brought up in a culture that is intricately intertwined with their traditional way of life, which includes traditional religion, of the Maragoli people. This dictates much of their thinking regarding death and the rituals that go with it. By allowing their members to continue with most of their traditional death rituals, the PAG church acknowledges their importance to them and the fact that it is not possible for them to dissociate themselves from the traditional practices into which they were born. These practices stem from their traditional worldview which is embedded in the Traditional religion of the Maragoli people. This religion cannot be detached from veneration of their ancestors, the founders of their clans. Miethie (1988) in his definition of veneration of saints looks at it as a way of honoring and imitating their virtues. This is based on the belief that they are living members of the body of Christ and that verbal communion with them is possible. Veneration of ancestors should therefore not be confused to mean that the Maragoli people worship their ancestors. Their deeply rooted belief that these ancestors are still part of their community calls for development and maintenance of a harmonious relationship with them.

This study revealed that becoming a PAG Christian does not automatically change a convert's traditional world view. Conversion to Christianity does not lead to a complete switch of allegiance, forsaking of ancestral veneration and severance of any dealings with the spirit world as pioneer missionaries would have wished. PAG Christians remain Maragoli at heart their conversion to Christianity notwithstanding.

UNUSUAL DEATHS

Rituals performed in a Maragoli funeral depends so much on the deceased's status in the community, gender, age their social lives and the circumstances surrounding their death. The rituals are therefore meant to honor and appease their spirits. Performance of these rituals becomes a challenge when circumstances surrounding their death raise questions. PAG allows its pastors to bury members of their church and also non-Christians whenever called upon to do so as long they don't treat them as though they were devout Christians. Burial processions are not mounted for non-Christians. There are strict traditional rules that govern the way unusual cases of death are handled. These includes victims of murder, suicide, epilepsy, leprosy, thunder strikes et cetera. Evil spirits are

believed to be behind such deaths and their victims cannot be accorded honorable funeral and burial rituals. The pastors allow the traditions of the community to guide such funerals. Their bodies are buried immediately by non-kinsmen and without burial services presided over by clergymen. They are buried in the backyards of their family houses and their graves flattened. The Pastors' role is limited to counseling the bereaved family and praying for them later on to be strengthened by God. Such burials are presided over by the extended family heads guided by the traditions of the community. It does not matter whether the victim is a Christian or not. With regard to the death of an expectant mother, the PAG church allows the Maragoli traditional practice of surgically removing the fetus to be buried in a separate grave.

According to one PAG pastor, there are times when the body of the dead goes missing. The PAG clergy allows the family to perform traditional rituals that would bring a sense of closure to them. He pointed out that, majority of them bury banana stems or plant suckers of bananas in the graves where the missing body would have been buried.

CONCLUSION

This article concludes that the traditional worldview of the Maragoli PAG Christians continues to have an enduring influence on their death rituals their conversion to Christianity notwithstanding. Maragoli Christians continue to interpret death and the life hereafter using the lens of African traditional religion. This dictates the rituals that are performed for their dead to facilitate their safe passage to the life hereafter.

The Maragoli PAG Christians seem not to see any contradiction between their traditional culture and their Christian faith for they are constantly conscious of various spiritual forces, Christian or tradition, that are unseen but are very much part of their physical world. These forces are believed to be the ultimate cause of all that happens especially of unusual and disturbing events. The ancestors of the community form an important part of the community of the living who are expected to relate not only to the living members but also these ancestors. Majority of the clergy have therefore adopted a non-confrontational approach towards most of the cultural ritual practices of their members because they make a lot of sense in their world view. Maragoli PAG Christians are aware of the place of Christianity and the existence of heaven and hell but these appear to be concepts reserved for the end time salvation. Whereas heaven and hell are believed to be located up there beyond the skies, the land of the spirits is believed to be located on the earth not far away from the land of the living. Mbiti (1975), argues that this land is very close and has rivers, mountains, lakes, forests, homesteads, cattle, sheep, goats, dogs, chickens, wild animals, and all the things that we find in our physical life. The living find it much easier to relate to this kind of thinking as heaven and hell are portrayed as abstract concepts. In some communities the departed are believed to remain in the neighborhood of their human homesteads.

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