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The Anthropology of Death and Dying Among the Bukusu of Kenya C. 1895

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Abstract
Precolonial African communities were endowed with cultural tenets observed without external and internal meddlers attempting to modify them. Death, for instance, constituted significant rituals whose operations were meant to appease gods and the dead, as well as make a smooth entry into the spiritual world for the souls of the dead. Further, such rituals were conducted to shield and absolve the living from impurities that accompanied death. In other words, the living observed such rituals to clean themselves from the impurities occasioned by death and other bad omens and evil spirits that were to be kept at bay. Hence, the anthropology of death and dying among African communities before colonialism was very complex, with several rituals that were observed to fulfil the demands of their culture. Among the Bukusu of Kenya, the occurrence of death provided the platform upon which many rituals were expressed to demonstrate their beliefs regarding the afterlife. Hence, this paper examines significant rituals that were related to the anthropology of death and dying, outlining why such rituals were important to the deceased and the living. It has been observed that death was not an end to the earthly life. It was a stage at which human life was transformed into immortal that was expected to last forever. This, in essence, signified the belief in life after death, thus explaining why such death rituals were developed to enhance the transition from earthly life to immortality. The findings in this paper emanated from extensive field interviews (abbreviated as O.I. in the text), which were corroborated by existing secondary sources.

Keywords: Dying and death, interment, mourning, rituals, vigils

Introduction

The Bukusu are a Bantu-speaking community that belongs to the Baluhya cluster of the interlacustrine region (Kolala, 2014). By 2010, most occupied Bungoma and Trans-Nzoia although some had settled in Kakamega and Busia (Makila, 1982). Most of those with advanced studies had relocated to urban centres in Kenya, while others had gone overseas for studies and employment. A few of them without advanced studies had also relocated to urban centres in Kenya for casual employment.

According to Wasike (2013), death is integral to life in many communities. The most anticipated aftermath of death is great pain and permanent disturbance in the equilibrium of tribal life. However, death also focuses on a society's cultural values by which people live and evaluate their experiences (Huntington & Metcalf, 1979). Hence, African communities developed mortuary rites that demonstrated the nature and practice of rituals related to death, which incorporated the deceased into the spiritual world (Gennep, 1960).

In the pre-colonial Bukusu community, a similar scenario is observable and the reverence bestowed on death illustrated the importance of conducting rituals associated with it. There existed levels of death that were determined by gender, age, and the status of the deceased person, which also dictated the gravity of emotions and thoughts encountered in the course of mourning (Barasa & Shitanda, 2020). That is why Lee and Vaughan (2008) argued that

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funerary practices among Africans expressed and shaped social relations, including maintaining kinship ties and the succession of property.

Causes of Death

The Bukusu believed in three main causes of death. *Lifwa likhalakhale* (normal death) was the most preferred form of death in which the deceased died out of old age. According to Natembeya (O.I., 2022), this was the usual form of death that was instituted by their ancestors, through which grieving and mourning were symbolically done to illustrate the role the deceased had played in society.

Lifwa liliang'inya and *lifwa limalaba*, on the other hand, were forms of death that were not welcomed, and their occurrence attracted suspicions regarding the causes of such deaths. In Nyongesa's assertion (O.I., 2022), *lifwa liliang'inya* occurred due to external forces from individuals who may have disagreed with the deceased. Assassinations were good examples of this death, and in the recent political history of the Bukusu, the demise of Masinde Muliro (1992) and Wamalwa Kijana (2003) was suspiciously thought to have been planned murders by those who feared the growing political fortunes of these two. Rogue individuals in the society who were killed while stealing or while committing other societal evils such as adultery always occasioned *lifwa limalaba*.

Death Rituals Among the Bukusu by 1895

When someone died among the precolonial Bukusu, several rituals were conducted to fulfil the demands of the culture. Foremost, leather straps or banana bark strappings held the corpse's jaws by rounding them below the lower jaw and tying them across the head to prevent the mouth from gapping (Wasike, 2013). Eyes were also closed before formally announcing the death (Kassilly, 1994). It is observed that a presumed good death occurred when someone passed on at night or in the afternoon. In the events of such deaths, the announcement was immediately announced, unlike deaths that occurred in the morning. In such scenarios, announcements were postponed until later in the afternoon when people were deemed to have tackled important daily assignments.

To announce the demise of elderly men, sporadic wailing was initiated by the wives, sisters and daughters, which in turn spread quickly and echoed across villages (Kolala, 2014). Relatives and family members of the deceased who lived far away were informed through messengers. However, it was the duty of each man's wife or wives to physically inform their kin concerning the death of their husband.

Whenever a polygamous man died, his wives also mourned him in style. The eldest wife carried the man's spear and shield, leading her co-wives and other women in traversing the village while singing dirges (Makila, 2004). They were also required to wear ankle bells and to decorate their faces with special ash. Another retinue of women wore banana fibre ribbons around their heads, necks, and ankles to indicate the beginning of the mourning period.

As already stated, some deaths were not accepted, and upon their occurrence, ritual ceremonies were never conducted in their honour. There was no commemoration of deaths occasioned by suicide, leprosy, and lightning because it was believed that such individuals were a disgrace to society and a curse to themselves (O.I., Nabangi, 2021). Hence, the Bukusu were very cautious in handling the bodies of such victims lest they encountered similar curses. In fact, such victims were not taken to their huts for night vigils before burial. Instead, they were inhumed at night under very strict guidelines that dictated such deaths (O.I., Wamalwa, 2022).

Suicidal cases that arose out of self-hanging were literally pushed into the grave that was dug outside the homestead. Other accounts indicate that the bodies of such victims were always whipped several times before they were brought down from the suicidal scenes. Symbolically,

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it signified the process of condemning the victim's evil act of taking their lives and keeping their souls at bay (O.I., Masoni, 2022). If such individuals died while in their huts, their bodies were taken out through the backdoor.

Moreover, bodies of uncircumcised men, bachelors, spinsters, and barren women were exited from the huts through the backdoor (Makila, 1982). However, it was mandatory for a man who died before undergoing circumcision to be circumcised before interment. Hence, those who died before honouring this ritual were circumcised on their deathbed before they were buried. However, this ritual is not that old because the ritualization of circumcision among the Bukusu is a recent historical phenomenon instituted at Mwiala in 1800. Before then, circumcision was only preserved for those who anticipated leadership positions in the future (Banda, 2017).

Under normal circumstances, however, the body of the deceased lay in the house of the senior wife (Mbiti, 1969). If the deceased was a minor, the body lay in the child's paternal grandparents or parents' house for a night of vigil before interment. Bodies of senior bachelors and overgrown spinsters were put in their respective huts where cleansing rituals were conducted before inhuming. When the deceased was a political figure, burial plans were delayed for several days until most of his family members had assembled to participate in his final send-off (O.I, Nyongesa, 2022).

Likewise, people who died without accomplishing compulsory cultural rites contributed to delays in their burials until such rituals were conducted. A man whose wife died without fully paying the bride price was supposed to fulfil this requirement before he was allowed to bury his wife, failure to which the deceased's relatives were at liberty to demand for the body for a decent interment at her parents' home (O.I., Kisaka, 2022). Similarly, burials of spouses who died before undergoing the rite of *sitekho* (traditional wedding) were delayed until the surviving partner performed a mock ceremony of *sitekho* with the spouse's relative of the opposite gender (O.I., Wafula, 2021). Again, the surviving partner was culturally forbidden from viewing the body of the deceased until after the performance of the mock ceremony of *sitekho*.

Among the Bukusu, the grave was dug on the burial day, and close relatives of the deceased were tasked with this responsibility (O.I., Natembeya, 2022). In most cases, grave preparation was a preserved duty of men, except in circumstances where the deceased was a child or a woman who died in pregnancy. On such occasions, women were allowed to prepare the grave under strict guidelines to ensure that no taboos were violated. Furthermore, there were times when people expressed their desires of not being buried upon their demise. Bodies of such people were dumped in forests by joking relatives, and after some time, their skeletons were retrieved and hidden in the nearby bush until the performance of the last funeral rite of transferring the skull (Makila, 1982).

However, other oral accounts contradict the Bukusu pristine assertion of burials. Idilia (O.I, 2022) argues that the Bukusu did not conduct burials. Instead, bodies were left in houses after death, and the surviving kin moved to other places to escape the impurities caused. Besides this approach, Lusike (O.I, 2021) notes that bodies were left at the place where death occurred. This was possibly achieved because of the averment that sick people were usually abandoned at lonely places to die.

In this situation, sickly people were tied with ropes and later abandoned away from the homestead, after which all forms of communication were achieved through the rope. Upon pulling the string from home, the sickly person pulled it back to communicate that they were alive, and if there was no response, it indicated that the person was dead. In this assertion, therefore, the deceased person's body was left in the bush to be devoured by the birds of prey and scavengers. Contradicting this approach, however, Mbiti (1969) notes that sick people were cared for until they died or recuperated.

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Otherwise, graves were usually dug up to a depth of 3 to 7 feet at the appropriate position in line with the door of the main hut of the deceased, the age of the deceased, the status, and the circumstances under which the death occurred. Usually, graves were dug on the right-hand side of the door that entered the main hut. Such burial sites were reserved for the married couple of that homestead. Children's graves were prepared on the left-hand side of the door that entered the main hut, while spinsters' graves were dug behind the house or at the extreme end of the homestead (O.I., Elijah, 2022).

In other situations, people indicated their preferred interment places, and in such circumstances, the wishes of the deceased were obeyed even if they went against the existing interment norms. The case of Elijah Masinde should suffice. Masinde, who founded the Dini Ya Musambwa (the religion of the spirits), was a renowned anti-colonial crusader in Kenya. Before his death, he pointed to the exact spot at which he wished to be inhumed. The site was several metres away from his eldest wife's house and on the extreme end of his land, outside his homestead. This was contrary to the Bukusu interment rituals that stipulated how a man of his calibre was to be buried. Although his kins neglected his wish, they were later compelled to fulfil Elijah's instructions after encountering another suspected interment place while preparing his grave. Note that it was culturally wrong for corpses to share graves among the Bukusu. Upon completing digging the grave under normal circumstances, a burial chamber was dug on the base of the grave, where the body was laid (O.I., Wamalwa, 2022).

Observing overnight vigils was an important death routine that was mandatory. The ritual commenced immediately after death occurred and ended after the hair-shaving and mourners warmed themselves around a bonfire that was lit within the compound of the deceased. While keeping night vigils, mourners kept on prattling on the cause and nature of death while reflecting on the deceased's life, their achievements, and other memorable events the departed individual may have undergone (See plate 1**:** night vigil in progress) (Wasike, 2013).

Plate 1: Overnight Vigil in Progress
Source: Taken by the Researcher on 28 July 2022 at Kibisi village in Kimilili constituency

Night vigils were significant and necessary to the living and the deceased's spirit, which was believed to be hoovering around the homestead in anticipation of going to the world of the spirits. Hence, mourners were required to observe this ritual to keep the spirit of the deceased company, which would have felt lonely if the ritual had been neglected. Additionally, night vigil also served as a deterrent measure against suspected killers who planned to interfere with the grave or the corpse to elude the wrath of the deceased (Wasike, 2013).

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On the interment day, bodies were taken out through the front door and laid on a bier outside the house to enable the mourners to catch the last glimpse of it before wailing (O.I., Wafula, 2021). Great men were laid to rest either in the morning or late afternoon, and the argument behind this was that men rarely died, and they needed to be laid to rest in such times to allow them to watch over their homesteads at peace (Mbiti, 1969).

During inhuming, bodies were always placed in the burial trench. The body was laid on the side as if the dead person was asleep, with the head resting on one hand (Kassilly, 1999). Similarly, the body was made to face the direction, which was believed to have been the historical route by which the clan ancestors had arrived in Bukusuland (Makila, 1978) (See Plates 3 and 4: positioning of the body in the grave). It is alluded that the spirit of the deceased was to return to the original ancestral home of the Bukusu via that route.

However, some clans among the Bukusu buried their dead persons in seating positions (see Plate 2). Bukusu clans such as the Balunda and the Bafumi observed this ritual for relevant historical reasons, and within the Baluhya cluster of the interlucustrine region, the Bakhibe sub-clan of the Batura who presently occupy the Bumula constituency, also buried dead bodies while seated (O.I., Idilia, 2022). It is unclear when this interment rite was adopted among the Bukusu, but as Wasike (2013) argued, the Balunda and the Bafumi were rainmakers. Hence, these skills made them to be the custodians of the community (O.I., Natembeya, 2022). Henceforth, burials in seating positions signified their state of alertness to oversee the community's wellbeing.

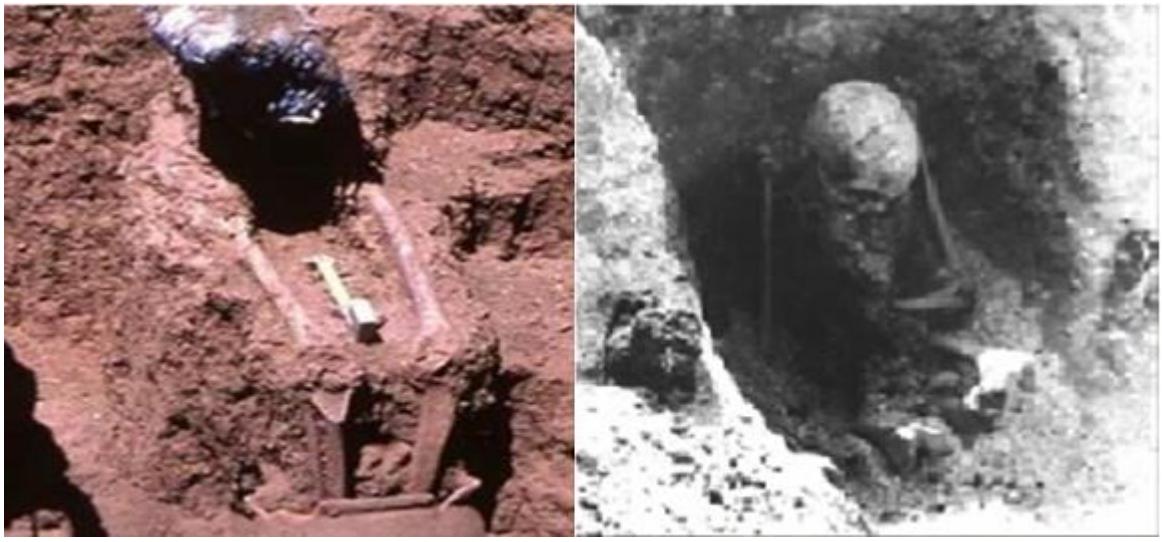

Plate 2: Bodies That Were Buried in Seating Position
Source: Kenya National Archives

However, other Bukusu oral accounts reveal that burials in seating positions originated from a disabled woman called Mulemia within the Balunda clan who possessed rainmaking skills and prophecy. Upon her death, it was difficult to straighten her limbs for usual inhuming procedures. This then compelled people to prepare a special grave that was meant to bury her with her disability. In the end, Mulemia was buried while seated. Natembeya (O.I., 2022) contends that this was the genesis of interments in seating positions by the Balunda and the Bafumi clans within the Bukusu.

It is also argued that the Balunda and the Bafumi clans buried people in the houses of the deceased. In this case, corpses were placed in graves in seating positions, but the head was left outside, and relatives guarded the grave until the body decomposed and disconnected from the

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head (Mukhwana, 2021). Once this was announced, the deceased relatives demolished the house to signal the beginning of other death-related rituals.

According to Bukusu burial routines, several individuals were prohibited from attending the interment process and viewing certain dead bodies. Daughters-in-law were culturally forbidden from viewing the bodies of their husbands. Similarly, fathers-in-law were also prohibited from viewing the bodies of their sons' wives. Equally, members of the same age set, men whose wives were sisters and couples whose children married one another, did not see each other after death (O.I., Wamalwa, 2022). In other circumstances, adulterous women did not view the bodies of their husbands, and wives who distanced themselves from their husbands' bodies were suspected of infidelity. At the same time, relatives, friends, and neighbours who may have had sex with the deceased man's wives never dared to view the bodies of their lovers' husbands (O.I., Kireba, 2022).

After all these prohibitions were considered, bodies were placed in burial trenches, sandwiched in fresh skins of oxen (Kassilly, 1999). Contrary to the above averment, however, animal skins were only permitted in cases where the deceased was the eldest in a family of grown-up men. Wafula (O.I., 2022) argues that younger brothers were not sandwiched in skins during interments if their elder brothers were still alive. If this was to be done, the act would have resulted in the death of the deceased's elder brother. Hence, this condition was fully reinforced regardless of the status of the deceased. Even if the deceased was a political figure in the society and his elder brother was still alive, interment in such cases was done without animal skins.

Plate 3: Positioning of The Body in The Grave
Source: Taken by the researcher on 30 April 2022 at Sengeli village in Kimilili constituency

Burial trenches were prepared by putting in grass upon which the body was laid. Thereafter, branches taken from the *kumulaha* tree (Cambretum bindlranum) covered the body. Another layer of grass was put on top of the *kumulaha* branches, after which close family members threw several lamps of soil over the covered body in sequence while pronouncing farewell words to the deceased. The essence of covering the body with grass was meant to prevent the body from coming in close contact with the soil soon after inhuming (Mbiti, 1969).

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After graves were sealed to form mounds, elders from the deceased person's clan addressed the departed briefly, asking the deceased not to begrudge the living. Spontaneous wailing thereafter followed, after which mourners dispersed to allow the departed to rest.

Plate 4: Positioning the Body in The Coffin to Face the Desired Direction Before Burial
Source: Taken by the Researcher on 29 July 2022 at Kibisi village in Kimilili constituency

A grave among the Bukusu was called *silindwa* and the English translation of this word is 'what is guarded'. This implied that graveyards were sacred places and securely guarded to keep off impurities that may have arisen if proper care was not taken (O.I., Nyongesa, 2022). Guarding the grave was also important in keeping away suspected killers whose malicious intention would have been to interfere with the grave as a way of ritually cleansing and absolving themselves from the wrath of the deceased's ghost. Always, suspected killers tampered with the grave by planting evil charms on it or drilling a hole in the head side, after which hot water was poured down, supposedly to inhibit the deceased ghost from haunting them (O.I., Kireba, 2022). Strong night vigils were put in place for as long as after the shaving ceremony to stop such evil plots.

Shortly after interment, there was a cattle drive ritual in which clansmen and agemates of the deceased rounded up their cattle and drove them around the grave to signify that the deceased was a skilful warrior and also succeeded in raiding the enemies' cattle (O.I., Wafula, 2022). Other accounts indicate that the cattle drive was done to honour the deceased as an outstanding farmer who successfully reared enough livestock. Similarly, the ceremony is comparable to modern-day Christian services during burials, where the deceased is eulogized for the success he or she realized.

Similar cattle drives were also performed with respect to senior women who brought up exemplary sons who also succeeded in raiding and rearing animals. Seemingly, the Tiriki also had a similar ritual. Karani (2017) adequately interrogated the cattle drive among the Tiriki in which the ritual was called s*hilemba.* After the cattle drive, mourners went to the river to undertake the washing ritual, which entailed undressing the widow if the deceased was a man. Elderly women within the deceased's clan were tasked to undress the widow while the rest of the women formed a screen around the widow purposely for washing her (O.I., Chikati, 2021).

Later in the evening, the widow climbed the rooftop of her hut to pull down the apex rod, which signified the dismantling of the male symbol in that homestead (O.I., Wafula, 2021). Other accounts indicate that the nephew of the deceased (sister's son) removed the apex rod from the roof and received fowls as payment. The absence of the apex rod from any home

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symbolised allowing the woman to be inherited by a man of her choice but within the bloodline of the deceased (O.I., Wamalwa, 2022). The widow kept the apex rod until after the shaving ceremony when she burnt it in a thicket under the supervision of women who undressed her during the washing ritual. A day after burial, there was a gathering called *kimikhalwa* or *mumikhalwa* (beer of gathering) whose sole purpose was to enumerate relevant litigations and other petty matters for discussion at the hair-shaving ceremony.

Three days after burial, the hair-shaving rite (*mulufu*-pertaining to the death) was performed. The spirit of the deceased disappeared to the spiritual world on this day, and any sort of contamination that may have been caused by the interaction with the departed was cleansed by shaving off the hair of those who were close to the deceased before the demise (Kassilly, 1999). Additionally, relatives of the deceased who were culturally prohibited from witnessing the burial were allowed to condole with the bereaved on this day. However, the grave was covered with a skin as a symbolic adherence to the 'in-lawship' respect that existed. Devoid of skins in modern days, graves are covered using blankets to uphold their traditions (See Plate 5 for the post-burial ritual of hair shaving).

This ritual also provided the opportunity upon which the public comforter (*omuseni kumuse*) addressed and comforted mourners while narrating the vital community's history (See plate 6: The *Omuseni kumuse*) (O.I., Natembeya, 2022). While doing so, he applauded the successes of the deceased as well as his clan and quickly downplayed any speculations that could have developed regarding the possible cause of the deceased's death (see plate 7: The ritual of *khusena kumuse* in progress). Being a special ritual among the Bukusu, *khusena kumuse* attracted many who were eager to learn historical and moral issues that were told like the poem narrations of today (Mukhwana, 1996).

Hence, the seating arrangement was made so that men took the higher ground positions on the side of the arena while women sat on the lower side. Other accounts maintain that the public comforter always arranged and rearranged the seats of his audience so that men took seats on the Northern side facing south while women occupied seats on the Southern and the Western sides. The deceased's family members sat down in a line without using chairs (O.I., Natembeya, 2022).

While performing his narrations, the public comforter walked in the row created between the seated men and women. While pacing from one end to the other, a path was created, which was believed to be the way the deceased would use while going to the spiritual world (see Plate 8: the path created after the *kumuse* ritual). The path was also a symbol of *kumuse* itself and a stage upon which the public comforter indulged in his oratory demonstration (Nakabayashi, 1982).

Plate 5: The Post-Burial Ritual of Hair Shaving
Source: Taken by the researcher on 11 June 2022 at Matunda village in Webuye West Constituency

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Comparing this path with the Biblical teaching about the Kingdom of God, public comforters argue that it is similar to the narrow and small gate that will lead people to heaven, as recorded in the Bible. The scripture records that the road to heaven is very small and will only accommodate very few people who will meet the qualifications (Mathew 7: 13-14). Perhaps this explains why public comforters forbid the living from crossing the said path before and after the oratory condolences. It is stated that the path is meant to lead the deceased's spirit to heaven, and the living are completely discouraged from using it soon after the ritual (O.I., Natembeya, 2022).

During his solemn presentations, the *omuseni kumuse* was not supposed to swallow saliva. At the same time, people were not expected to cough or sneeze while in the arena. It was forbidden for the public comforter to continue with his work upon hearing loud peals of thunderstorms, and in such situations, he was under obligation to cancel his engagement because an event of that kind was considered advantageous to him. In normal circumstances, however, he finished his presentation while uttering his last words faintly as he disappeared towards the other end of the row without looking back (O.I., Nyongesa, 2022).

It should be observed that the ritual of *khusena kumuse* was not performed anyhow without due consideration. For a man to qualify for this ritual, he was expected to have witnessed the circumcision of his son's boy (Nakabayashi, 1982). He was also supposed to have led a good moral life that was well-established in society. However, special exemptions allowed the observation of this ritual even if the deceased did not have a grandchild. Men with leadership, religious, and political roles were eligible for this ritual. That is why Bukusu politicians such as Masinde Muliro and Wamalwa Kijana attracted this ritual even though they did not have circumcised grandsons (Banda, 2017).

Plate 6: The Public Comforter

Source: Taken by the researcher on 11 June 2022 at Matunda village, Webuye West Constituency

Apart from *khusena kumuse* and the hair-shaving ritual, important and petty litigations were handled on this day. Pending litigations for the deceased were amicably settled, and the deceased's heirs agreed to clear such outstanding litigations. At the same time, those with outstanding debts were also identified and agreed on when to settle such balances to benefit the deceased's heirs (O.I., Nabangi, 2021).

Moreover, debts related to cultural dictates were settled on this day if they involved the deceased person. Such included the cow of *omwiwana* or *sibikho* (claimed from the maternal uncle before burial in relation to the bride price paid for his sister), the bull of *nangeso* (to recognize a woman's wealth making while at her parents' home), the bull of *kumwoulo* (demanded by a man who had fully paid bride price upon the demise of his brother-in-law) and the cow of *sitekho* (taken to a father-in-law upon the demise his son's wife) among others (O.I., Chikati, 2021).

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Again, the deceased's will was made public on this day, and his male heirs distributed his property. In a home where there were no sons, the property was reverted back to the deceased's brothers, and widows were only given a milking cow for the sake of raising the surviving children. If it was a woman who died, her property was distributed to her immediate family members, and in some circumstances, the husband's relatives demanded some of the bride price from the woman's kin if she died childless (O.I., Wamalwa, 2022).

The ritual of bringing back the shadow was held forty days after interment. This rite was not restricted to the Bukusu alone. It was widely spread among the larger Baluhya cluster of the interlacustrine region (Karani, 2017). This ritual was also found among the Bantu of Central and West Africa. The Dawayo of Cameroon also observed this ritual. In this community, a person's spirit, which was called *looreyo*, returned to the home of close relatives (Bockie, 1993). Upon death, therefore, it was mandatory for the spirit to be brought back to where the skull was buried (Nigel, 1981). Likewise, the Bukusu also adhered to the ritual in which the shadow of the deceased was brought back home, where they were buried. Nine months after burial, the widow was assisted to accomplish the ritual of *khumala silindwa* (cementing the grave). The bush around the grave was cleared, and cracks that had emerged on the grave were sealed, after which the grave's surface was smeared using clay.

Plate 7: The Ritual of *Khusena Kumuse*
Source: Taken by the researcher on 11 June 2022 at Matunda village in Webuye West Constituency

The cutting of ribbons ritual (*Khukhala kimikoye*) was thereafter conducted one year after burial. If the deceased was a woman, however, the ritual was held four months after the interment. In the case of a man, relatives gathered in his former homestead to pull down his living hut (*khukwisia likubili*) (O.I., Wafula, 2021). Very early in the morning on this day, the deceased's relatives rounded another cattle drive to the river, and an ox was earmarked for slaughtering by being smeared with clay (O.I., Chikati, 2021).

In the morning, which followed the cattle drive, the centre post was removed from the widow's hut and placed on the grave mound. The rest of the structure was pulled down (*khuyesia likubili*) and burnt. The earmarked bull was then slaughtered to entertain visitors with meat after which the widow washed and dressed herself like an ordinary unmarried woman to allow the cutting of the widowhood ribbons for burning. Thereafter, she moved to a new hut constructed by her sons or a prospective husband (O.I., Wamalwa, 2022).

One year after the *kimikoye* incident, the ritual involving burning the centre post left on the grave mound was conducted. Thereafter, the final death ritual was done in which the

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deceased's skull was transferred to the new homestead of the living in a process that was called *khuuya lianga* (transferring the skull). Other accounts indicate that the deceased eldest daughter picked fresh grass or a stone from the grave, which was temporarily placed at the shrine constructed at the new site where family members had relocated (see Plate 9: a constructed shrine). Makila (1978) further recounts that the skull was always wrapped in a skin by an elderly woman who later deposited it at the place where they would settle.

Plate 8: The Path Created After the *Kumuse* Ritual
Source: Taken by the researcher on 11 June 2022 at Matunda village in Webuye West Constituency

In comparison with the Old Testament Biblical texts about death, Bukusu elders believe that the ritual of *khuuya lianga* originated from Joseph who instructed the Jews take back his bones to Israel from Egypt:

> …and Joseph made the Israelites to take an oath and said, 'God will surely attend to you, and then you must carry my bones from this place… (Genesis 50: 25).

Following these instructions, Moses took Joseph's bones with him before departing from Egypt during the exodus.

> …Moses took the bones of Joseph because Joseph made the Israelites to swear an oath when he said, 'God will surely attend to you and then you must carry my bones with from this place"… (Exodus 13: 19).

Joseph's bones were thus carried back to Shechem and re-buried in a tomb that Abraham bought from the sons of Hamor. Therefore, Bukusu's claim of *khuuya lianga* should be given meaningful attention to the effect that the community's oral traditions point to Egypt as their cradle home. Their ancestors must have emulated Joseph's instructions and incorporated this practice into their anthropological practices of death.

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Plate 3: A Freshly Constructed Shrine
Source: Taken by the Researcher at Kitale National Museum on 20th July 2022

Conclusion

From the foregoing, precolonial Bukusu constituted peculiar rituals that were strictly observed to give shape and meaning to the anthropology of death and dying. The observation of these rituals indicated their belief in life after death and it was the obligation of the living to uphold the said rituals. In other words, the anthropology of death among the Bukusu ensured the smooth and total transition from earthly life to immortal life devoid of death regardless of the prevailing conditions. Successful completion of death rituals thus enhanced the transformation of individuals from earthly humans to ancestors who acted as the link between humans and God.

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5. Masoni, W. P. Lukhuna, 20/42022
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