

**CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL DEATH RITUALS
TO THE CHURCH IN AFRICA: A Case Study of Abagusii**

By
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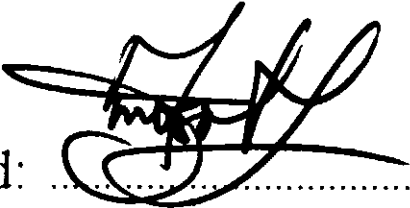
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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used here is my original and has not been submitted to any other institution for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 ABAGUSII

Abagusii are a Bantu people who live in the South-Western part of Kenya (see map 1 p. 59) in the present Kisii, Nyamira and Gucha districts. They comprise of six sub-divisions each of which grew from the six sons of *Mogusii*, the ancestor of the Abagusii. The six sub-divisions are: *BOGETUTU*, *NYARIBARI*, *BOGIRANGO*, *BOMACHOGE*, *BONCHARI* and *BOBASI*. (see map 2 p.60).

Majority of Abagusii hold that they came from a country they identify as *MISIRI* which gives an impression that it is somewhere beyond the northern part of Kenya. This popular theory, which is held by many Abagusii, contradicts the academically known migration history of the Bantu people which suggest that they originated from the Niger-Congo (from the Western part of Uganda all through to L. Chad).¹ This migration history, from the Niger-Congo region, is hardly known to many Abagusii except those with some western education. Even so, it remains the most scholarly plausible history according to migration patterns of the Bantu including Abagusii.

It is believed that the Abagusii might have reached their present settlement around the eighteenth century.

¹ . William R. Ochieng's book; A Pre-Colonial History of the Gusii of Western Kenya C. AD.1500-1914, Nairobi: East Africa Literature Bureau, 1974, pp. 11-40. There is a well documented and commented migration history of Bantu people of Kenya and to some extent East Africa in this first chapter. Ochieng gives a considerably detailed history, origins and migration of the Abagusii to their present homeland.

Though they are a Bantu group who speak one of the Bantu languages-*Ekegusii*, they are surrounded by non-Bantu speakers- the Luo in the south and south-west, the Kipsigis and the Maasai in the east and south-east respectively.

The Kuria who are linguistically related to Abagusii are separated by a corridor of Luo in the south. There is a close linguistic similarity with the Luhya group of Western Kenya, the central and Eastern Kenya Bantu speakers and the Ganda of Uganda.²

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

There is evidence and marked interest on anything concerning ancient life in many academic circles. With such an interest, it means that to find something on ancient life, particularly of the Africans, can make good reading material and source of academic enrichment to the contemporary man/woman who might not be very much in touch with traditional values.

Death and rituals related to it are aspects of human life that the unveiling of their traditional practices can arouse some interest. This is because one gets the impression that there are marked differences on how these rituals were carried out in the past and how they are done in the present time. The reason is that there is a noticeable dissatisfaction, , by the old generation who hold in high esteem traditional ways of doing things, with the way death rituals are carried out currently. The dissatisfied are an old generation which remembers their way of life during the earlier times. They argue that the

² . William Robert Ochieng; People of the South-Western Highlands (Gusii), Nairobi: Evans Brothers (Kenya) Ltd. 1986, p. 3. In this Kenya's Peoples series, Ochieng gives a good background of the movement of the Abagusii and their related tribes. He also looks into the life of the people though in passing.

way death rituals and other ceremonies were carried out in those days is preferable to that of the present. For instance, apart from financial support which might be there in this generation, there is lack of that closeness and concern which was expressed either in deed or kind by the whole clan. The psychological and social warmth which the bereaved got from other members helped them to come to terms with the reality of the loss caused by death. Death has been reduced to a family and close friends' affair. Most of the rituals which have been neglected by contemporary Abagusii were seen as very important means of expressing the willingness to continue the relationship which existed when the deceased was alive. At the same time one finds that the appreciated and practiced death rituals in the current era, especially by the present generation, which is largely identified with western lifestyle, show that modernity is much better than traditional practices. Which could mean that cultural/traditional death rituals have been overtaken by time, hence, are irrelevant to present people. One can note this by the way very little or no attention is paid to burial rituals which as we are going to see later, were(are?) greatly valued by traditional Gusii community. I see this as partly due to lack of understanding of the value system, especially among the Abagusii, on which comparison can be made and then conclusions drawn.

1.3 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Within any culture there are many practices which one can not out rightly condemn or endorse without entering into the value system of a people. This is a reality for any pastoral agent if she/he is to make the Gospel message relevant to the intended

people. Therefore, a knowledge of traditional death rituals is necessary for a Christian minister to make sense in whatever he/she does in carrying out Christian burials. Otherwise he/she performs his/her obscure rituals and then thereafter the bereaved come to perform their own. This study therefore, can be helpful to church ministers and the laity in areas of inculturation and in helping people to understand and/or change their attitudes. There is a need for one to find out whether traditional death rituals are necessarily opposed to Christian faith or not.³ Today, more than any time, there is need to understand the culture of the people of Africa and its influence on Christianity for meaningful evangelization. For one to do this, there must be a source of information. Therefore, there is a need to unearth the hidden treasures of this information from oral history, particularly of the Abagusii, into writing for the world to read and evaluate them. This is a challenge which Ochieng noted in the 1980s when he wrote in his booklet that,

"The past of the Gusii community has for a long time remained in the dark chapter in the general historical picture of Western Kenya as compared to the Luo and the Abaluhya whose pre-colonial history has been extensively studied."

Since then a lot has gone into print regarding the Abagusii but still the elasticity has not been stretched to the maximum especially on particular aspects of the people. As a way of trying to put the oral cultural customs and beliefs into writing I could therefore like to present the challenges that the Abagusii death rituals pose to the Church in Africa; the challenges which can be witnessed when modern persons shelf their modern (Western?) lifestyle and resort to traditional ones more especially during calamities, such as death, regardless of their deep foundation on western education.

³ .Cf. Richard J. Gehaman, Africa Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective, Nairobi: East Africa Publishers, 1989, pp. 15-18. Here Gehaman considers the tussle on the death of the Kenyan prominent lawyer S. M. Otieno; one could include the case of the celebrated Kenyan boxer Robert Wangila, Daily Nation, Oct. 15, 1994, p.3, as an examples where modern intellectuals and baptized Christians fought for the rights of traditional burial rites. Such people saw nothing contradictory to their faith.

⁴ . W.R.Ochieng, People of the South-Western Highlands(Gusii) p. 2

1.4 THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Africa is a vast continent with all sorts of people who have different ways of perceiving things. There are no two groups of people with the same cultural practices. For this reason sweeping statements, unless made for general information, regarding Africans as though they were a one people with uniformity of culture and beliefs cannot be taken serious. With this in mind, this study will be narrowed down to a particular case study, namely Abagusii. This approach will be rewarding to somebody interested in the Abagusii indigenous death rituals, more especially pastoral agents intending to work within the community.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The study was based largely on fieldwork research carried out in a period of three months, that is from June to August inclusive of 1997. The fieldwork was mainly personal interview with the elderly members of the community. So as to get the general view on how traditional death rituals were practiced, twenty-three people were interviewed, with at least three representatives from each of the six sub-divisions of the Abagusii community(see appendix p.61).

To facilitate the interview, friends and village elders were used as the accompanying group. The facilitators helped in identifying elderly members of their clan

who were re-known for their wisdom and memory of the past. Majority of those identified aged from sixty onwards. As it came out, these were well known for their past and present experience on death and burial rites. There was good cooperation from majority of the respondents.

There were prepared questions which were orally administered. This was found to be helpful as majority of the targeted respondents were illiterate. It was also convenient as one could ask details of certain areas of the topic or rephrase some questions for better understanding. This could not be possible if for example a questionnaire was sent to the respondents. This was also positive as it brought out spontaneously what people knew for there were no pre-conceived ideas on how to answer the questions. The immediate limitation of this method was that a few people were reached as it relied on personal interaction with the interviewee. The respondents were also not prepared before hand for the exercise which might have not given them a chance to answer the question as they could have if they were pre-prepared for them.

I also participated in two burial ceremonies that is in *Bonchari* and *Bomachoge* for a practical experience of present day burial.

At the same time there was library consultation, on the topic.

1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THE MATERIAL

This study is divided into five chapters. The general introduction is treated as chapter one . As part of the introduction there is a brief history of the Abagusii without details of their migration, socio-political and economic organization as they are not the

main focus of this study.⁵ The second chapter touches on the significance of life as a process of high expectations that are only disrupted by death. The third chapter is the core of the topic where origin of death and pre-burial rituals among the Abagusii are explored. The fourth chapter is also a detailed view on the post burial rites. The fifth chapter is a general conclusion with some analysis of the challenges that these cultural rituals present to the church with some recommendations.

⁵ . William R. O.; People of the South-Western Highlands (Gusii). He tries to give the occupation of the Abagusii. Also in Nyasani's book; Joseph M. Nyasani , The British Massacre of the Gusii Freedom Defenders, Nairobi: Nairobi Bookmen, 1984 gives the geographical location of Gusii land and a detailed Abagusii integration and confrontation with the British colonials. In a way he gives the socio-political system of Abagusii.

CHAPTER TWO

SIGNIFICANCE OF LIFE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

To many African people, life has a beginning but does not end with physical death as it can be reborn in the offspring(s). It is a process that begins at conception and goes on through physical life and then as the living dead. It is through life that one is able to perform all that a human person is expected of. For instance, among the Abagusii, it is through birth that one gains entry into any status as an individual and as a member of society. Therefore, for an individual, life is only seen as having been fulfilled when that individual is able to beget another life, that is, the ability to keep alive perpetually in his/her child(ren) when he/she dies. Hence, the natural/cultural pattern of life goes from birth(including naming), initiation and marriage. Death becomes the sunset of life and entry into another realm of existence. Many Africans believe that death is just another form of existence, hence even when one dies life does not end.

2.1 CONCEPTION OF LIFE

According to Abagusii, life is a precious gift in human person since the time of conception. Abagusii had great respect for women as begetters of life⁶.

⁶ . Though not a reason for divorce among Abagusii, barrenness(*ohogomba*) of women was one of the reasons for polygamy. Infertility in men was not seen as a problem as this could be solved by arrangement with another man who could beget children on behalf of the infertile one. A case of remote polyandry.

For this reason a pregnant woman commanded the respect, not only of her husband but of the whole clan as she was seen as carrying another life (*ebwateranetie*) for the community. Abagusii believe that inability to beget children is as a punishment for breaching a taboo or custom and displeasure of the ancestors for failing to appease them. Without modern technology, conception was noticed with the same signs which women experience in our time, such as sensing of the growing foetus, morning dizziness for some and enlargement of the breasts. During the pregnancy period women enjoyed what were seen as privileges. For instance such women could not be corporally punished for mistakes done as they were when they were not pregnant⁷. Therefore, conception elevated a woman's dignity among Abagusii. Such women were well taken care of and could not do certain works mostly those which were considered to be heavy. This was so as to take good care of herself and the life which she was carrying. There was a fear that if such women did some heavy work or carried some heavy load they could miscarry, thus cutting short life which was seen as sacred from its initial stages. However, pregnant women often maintained the usual routine of work.

2.2 BIRTH

As usual birth took place after nine months. There was usually a big celebration when a child was born in a home. A child was a source of joy and hope for the family and the future of the clan/community.

⁷ Though this brutish practice is going down with the sensitization of individual rights regardless of gender and the possibility of prosecuting anyone who assaults the other, including wives, it is still going on in rural areas mainly because there is lack of awareness of human rights in both men and women.

In child-bearing an individual ensures his/her immortality through progeny. This is the more reason why it is painful to lose a young person in Gusii community as the deceased can not be traced in his/her progeny. Hence, the natural desire of any parent for a child is to grow to a generative stage where he/she will realize him/herself in bearing. Life in this way becomes a vicious circle in which one lives, dies and is re-born in a new born baby with whom there is a genealogical relation.

This suggests that only those who procreate never die as they are regenerated by their progeny. This gives the marriage institution an unparalleled importance among the Abagusii and indeed many other African communities. Hence, through procreation a person ensures personal immortality in the sense that the name of the dead person is carried on in the children born in the family. For example my great grand father was *Ayieko*, my father is *Ayieko* among many others called by the same name due to genealogical relationship. Some have died and have grand children called by the name of *Ayieko* in the fourth generation; (see. Fig. 1 p.57); which among Abagusii means that the first *Ayieko*, my great grand father lives on in those who bear the name.

A new born is seen as new life added in the family/community so as to continue the family ties. A child is also seen as enabling a family to be generous to other people from out side the home, especially in families re-known to be stingy. For instance a family with a child will be compelled to prepare for compulsory feasts such as birth, naming, initiation and marriage. During such feasts these families are forced to share what they could have not normally shared out with others, hence the Abagusii saying, "*ekioomogoko n'omwana otoire*" which means that a child is the one who enables people to eat in a stingy family.

We could say here that life among Abagusii is cherished since the time of its fragility, at conception all through birth, naming, initiation, marriage and parenthood.

Anything that disrupts this pattern, even after marriage, is unwelcome. Death is one reality which inserts itself at any stage of life. In the following chapter we are going to discuss how Abagusii try to understand this inevitable reality.

CHAPTER THREE

DEATH AMONG THE ABAGUSII

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Death is an age old phenomenon which is as old as humanity. At the same time we get an impression from different cultures that death has a beginning presupposing that there was a time when it was not there. For instance, we get from the Christian teaching that, God created man and woman intending them to live happily in the garden of Eden without ever experiencing death. We read in the Genesis three story that people started to experience death after they had gone against the rule they were given. Reading further in the New Testament, death acquires a different perspective. It is no longer a distasteful reality but a way through which one enters into a different status which has been pioneered by Jesus Christ. Thus through death we enter into a new kind of life. Many traditionalists, especially among Abagusii, could argue that in the past less people died than in our modern times. While this may be true, considering the population of the people and the undeveloped health care services one could say that on average more people might have died than in the modern times. For instance, with the advancement in healthcare and good nutrition, child mortality rate has gone down while life expectancy has also gone up from what it was in traditional set up.

When we look at any culture, past, present and probably future, death is seen as a distasteful reality which nobody wants to talk or imagine about. Death is seen as being at

a far distance and can only happen to the other person and hopefully not “me”. It remains an unthinkable reality within the self. This can be noticed in the way the “*matatu culture*” and the reality of Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) are taken in our country Kenya today. People act and react in a way revealing their unimaginative thought of ever death being a reality within themselves. For instance many deaths are experienced or witnessed through road accidents in this country. Most of these are due to reckless driving without observing the highway code. Despite the fact that many, if not all, drivers have witnessed accident related deaths, they do not learn from these so as to be careful in their driving as bad driving can lead to death. This is the same with the reality of AIDS which has claimed many lives. Despite the awareness created and sometimes witnessing of people dying from this epidemic, people still continue with their risky sexual behaviors such as promiscuity. According to Mbiti, death is seen as a process which removes a person gradually from the present(*sasa*) period to the past(*zamani*). This is so because when an individual dies he/she continues to be remembered by the people of the family and relatives until such a time the last person who knew the deceased dies.⁸

Whatever the theories and myths advanced concerning death it still remains a reality where all advances in medical and health care lose their pride and start anew to look more keenly and critically on preserving life.

Christianity has a great influence in the way death is seen in the present time. Death is seen in the eyes of birth. As giving birth entails pain but at the end brings life so is suffering that climaxes in death, which in turn leads to a new state of being. But this does not mean that death and suffering are accepted realities within humanity. Christianity calls for courage and patience in front of suffering and death. Therefore,

⁸ . John S. Mbiti; African Religions and Philosophy, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969, pp. 25-26.

religion has always tried to offer meaning and purpose of suffering and death- acceptance of mortality for the sake of immortality.

Belief in life after death makes dying and death more rewarding though through denial and much suffering.

In our contemporary time the notion of life after death is losing meaning as many understand death as that point which marks the end of human existence. This is the reason why more than any time, modern persons are trying to avoid pain and suffering brought about by death. People go to great lengths to lessen the pain experienced in/at dying by prolonging life with life-supporting machines.

Boros in his book We are Future, says that death is a fulfillment of what man/woman is progressively growing towards since the time of birth. Between birth and death there is an advancement towards this reality. Boros also states that humanity always desire the absolute in whatever finite act they perform. Hence, whatever they do is dynamically influenced by the absolute. In line with this view, he also sees the human intellect as advancing to reach its maturity at the hour of death so as to make clear decision for or against God.⁹

Generally, Abagusii conceive death(*amakweri*) as something mysterious which can not be understood. This is attested by the many names they use to describe it: *ogosira, ogotonyora, ogotimoka, okong'anya, okomiamia, okorara* among others which literally mean, to get lost, going a head of us, to rest, to migrate, to close the eyes and to sleep respectively. Even so they believe that, to die means that the living principle(*omorengari*) in a person has escaped from the body-*okourwa omorengari*. This is why the Abagusii hold that a dead person casts no shadow. Therefore, death is

⁹. Ladilaus Boros, We are Future, Herder & Herder, NY: 1970, pp. 157-159.

something impure that brings cessation of life on earth¹⁰. Though there is a strong belief that Omogusii never dies completely, death is something ill that is never accepted in the family or community. It robs the community its potential advisers and perpetuators of the old generation. At the same time it is through death that one acquires the status of being an ancestor, the highest status that a human being can reach.

Death as an impure experience is not believed to be natural but a result of humanity's ill inclinations. Therefore, it has a beginning in time. This ties well with the first chapters of Genesis which give a picture of wholeness, harmony with God and the environment. Death comes in the scene as humanity's disobedience. This means that life as God's intention for humanity excludes death.

3.1 ORIGIN OF DEATH

Abagusii have it that death is as old as humanity which is attested by an expression *makweri makoro*. Even so, Abagusii have a myth which suggests that though people were originally dying, it was not as it is now. People were meant to die but rise again on the third day after burial. Death as it is experienced now, dying without rising, was brought about by a woman¹¹. This was due to the woman's jealousy(*enyakebogo/eng'areka*) and disobedience.¹²

¹⁰ . Abagusii have no clear cut concept on resurrection as that which we find in Christianity. Cf. Mary N. S. Getui. *The Establishment and History of the Activities of the Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) Church Among Abagusii of Western Kenya 1912-1985*. MA Thesis University of Nairobi, 1985, p. 50

¹¹ . Compare the Genesis 3 story where a woman is presented as the one through whom suffering, including death, came into realization.

¹² . Abagusii have a similar myth to explain why people started cooking *ugali* rather than eat just a solid mixture of flour and cold water.

3.1.a Myth on Origin of Death

God(*Engoro*) intended humanity to die and come back to life again three days after burial. This could be the same as the moon(*omotienyi*) which is believed to die and rise again after some days.

To explain why people die and do not come back to life, Abagusii point to a man who had two wives. One of the wives died and was buried with expectation for her rising three days after burial. On the third day the husband waited for the wife to rise but she delayed a bit and so he decided to take a walk in the fields. He left orders with the other wife that if she saw some sign of the soil bulging up she was to go and slowly with a hoe remove the soil for her co-wife to come out. While she was to remove the soil, she was supposed to say; *motienyi okwa osira banto bakwa baboka*, which means, the moon dies and does not come to life but people die and come back to life. But because of jealousy, (*enyakebogo/eng'areka*) when the woman saw the soil on the grave rising as a sign of the dead woman coming back to life, she rushed with a hoe and hit the soil saying; *banto bakwa basira, motienyi okw'oboka*¹³, which means, people die and do not come back to life, but the moon dies and comes back to life, in deviance of the instructions she was given by the husband. Since then, it is believed, people started to die without coming back to life while the moon dies and comes to life after some days. So the Abagusii have it that it is because of the jealous and disobedience of this one woman that people now die

¹³ . The moon, to Abagusii, was considered good omen when sighted when new. The people could know the seasons whether they were to expect good or bad harvest in a particular season by observing the moon.

without rising again to life.¹⁴ The woman is held as to have gone against God's(*Engoro*) intention of raising people after dying¹⁵.

3.1.b Why People Continue to Die

Scientists are much interested and concerned with the well-being of humanity- to remove pain and suffering from life. Death presents the greatest pain in any individual and society at large yet there has not been any solution either from the scientists or traditionalists.

According to Abagusii, since the sin of disobedience of that one woman, people have continued to die up to this time. One could say that the Abagusii community could have looked for ways and means to get rid of this distasteful and long time reality of death. Instead one hears during funerals, as a way of comforting the bereaved, relatives and friends saying, *timokumia, makweri makoro, aira baya na babe kemo*, which means that the bereaved should not be worried about the happening as death is an age old reality which takes the good and the bad alike. This sounds as a sign of resignation before a reality which is beyond their control. To explain why this reality continuous to be experienced despite its distasteful experience it brings, the Abagusii have a myth.

The story has it that, when there were many people dying and there were many people wailing because of the death of their beloved ones, *Engoro* (God) had pity and wanted to bring all these to an end. In order to do so, he made a demand of a blameless

¹⁴ . The Abagusii community is patrilineal which might have a bearing on their understanding of woman as the cause of death without resurrection.

¹⁵ . See similar myth with the Kono tribe of Guinea, in Ulli, B. Origin of Life and Death: African Creation Myths)

lamb as an offering, presumably for their sin of disobedience. The Abagusii prepared the animal and chose a chameleon to take it to *Engoro*. On the way, due to the clumsy movement of the chameleon the offering was soiled. On arrival at *Engoro's* residence, he(*Engoro*) was offended by people's disrespect of him for giving a soiled offering instead of a clean one. Because of this kind of insult God said that people must continue to die. Since then death has continued to visit humanity without any hope of ever getting rid of it.

3.2 Causes of Death

According to Christian teaching, Satan is the cause of all evil to individuals and society. The beauty one grasps from Christian teaching is that the Christians are in a position of either allowing evil in general, (not the scope of this study to go into details on this), to be actualized in their lives or not. Whereas culturally, any human misfortune is believed to be caused by powers beyond the victims' ability.

Among the Abagusii any illness, misfortune of life and death is believed to have a known cause(s). This is why *Omogusii* will go to whatever extent to establish the cause and find remedy to any misfortune, especially death.

Despite the fact that there are myths explaining why people die and why they continue to die, death to Abagusii is never seen as a natural end of life on earth. It must have a cause which is either human or supernatural.

3.2.a Human Causes

The common and immediate cause of any illness and eventual death among the Abagusii is witchcraft(*oborogi*). There is a believe that in the atmosphere there are good and bad spirits which can be tamed by certain individuals. Once they are tamed,

especially the bad ones, the individual is able to manipulate them so as to cause harm to intended people. Once an individual has these powers he/she¹⁶ can pass them to the children as an inheritance. The witches tendency is to cause harm to innocent people in the community. The evil spirits give the witches special powers by which they can change to animals such as cats, hyenas, snakes and many other animals so as to enter into someone's house at night without being noticed. In this way, popular story has it, witches take the sleeping occupants of the house without them(the occupants) realizing and use them to do jobs such as exhuming bodies and dividing the human flesh for the group of witches present¹⁷. This is why witches are a feared group of people in the Abagusii society. Encountering a witch at night is feared by many Abagusii. Somebody who encounters a witch has to keep silent and never tell anybody about it. In case such a person says anything he/she is stricken dumb and eventually dies unless some cleansing ritual is performed, something which I have witnessed. In 1986, a young man with whom I was doing studies met people on his way to the place where we were studying. When he greeted them they did not respond. Due to fear he came into the house scared and frightened. He told me the story and retired early that day. The following morning he was unable to speak. I narrated what had happened the night before and at once the village elder was informed to summon clan members for a cleansing ritual for the victim. An *Omonyamosira*¹⁸ was called to conduct it. After the ritual the young man was able to speak but could not remember the people he had met on the way.

A witch (*omorogi*) causes death to their victims due to personal reasons. As Fr. Clive writes in AFER;

¹⁶ . Though some men also practice witchcraft, majority of witches in Abagusii community are thought to be women.

¹⁷ . According to common belief, witches are believed to feast on human flesh.

¹⁸ *Omonyamosira*(*abanyamosira* pl.) is a person who possesses magical powers(*omosira*) by which he can cause death to a chosen victim. Majority are believed to be men.

“The acting mechanism for the release of witchcraft energy can be identical as anger, envy, jealous, resentment, spite, bitterness or hatred or/any such like disposition expressing overt or covert interpersonal conflict”.¹⁹

This means that the witches have an inner urge which impels them to kill so as to satisfy their malice. They can accomplish this through word, thought and deed as the force which moves the evil powers from their bodies to the victim.²⁰

To kill their victims by deed, they can either give poisonous concoctions(*obosaro*) or use anything identified with the targeted person. These could be a piece of clothing, footprints fingernails, saliva, hair or food remains. The poisonous concoction is either put in the food or drink of the targeted victim whereas the parts have to be planted in the house or by the door-step of the victim in order to be effective. Such planted things are believed to influence the health of the individual by in turn implanting themselves in the body of the victim. They eventually cause death to the person. They also use parts of dead human beings as part of their paraphernalia. These are thought to be a source of a witch's powers and are kept permanently by the witch.²¹

The western mind tries to explain away this dreaded reality among the Africans as just being an imagination of an impossibility or as being a channel for venting feelings of aggression. That is, a means of releasing tensions and frustrations in society in a

¹⁹ . Clive, Dillon-Malone; “Witchcraft Beliefs as a Pastoral Problem”, in, *AFER*, vol.28, no. 6, 1986,p. 377, the whole article goes up to-vol. 29, no. 1, 1987, (Eldoret): AMECEA Pastoral Institute(Gaba).

²⁰ . Witches are believed to have registers in which they write the names of those intended to be killed. Sometimes the names include those of close relatives such as their children, husbands or wives. In the register there is also specification of what will be the cause of death to the victim, for instance from a long incurable illness or accident. Witches are also believed to feast on the flesh of their victims. It is believed that they come at night at the grave and using some magical stick they strike the grave and the corpse comes out. This is why many families guard the grave for many days after burial so as to keep the witches away from taking the deceased's body.

²¹ . This is something which I have witnessed- one witch who was caught in the act at night was found with some parts of human body such as the arm, skull, human hairs and meat believed to be human flesh, which were found in a pot hidden in the traditional ceiling(*irongo*).

communally accepted way.²² Such kind of denial does not help members of the community. The reality of witchcraft in the community can not be ignored just as being a cultural fantasy. Though the western mind, including those from the community who have gone through western education, do not believe that witches have the powers ascribed to them, nevertheless they affirm that witchcraft exists.²³ The more reason why somebody who has undertaken a study on the topic from the African context can not ignore the existence of witchcraft among the Abagusii is because witchcraft is believed to be a force with physical effects such as death.

Any rejection by the westerners or the mainstream churches such as the Roman Catholic Church, that there is nothing like witchcraft does very little to the people as they can not find explanation for the occurrence of certain social misfortunes including death which some members of the community are capable of causing.

Abanyamosira are another group of people who are dreaded in the community because of their magical powers(*omosira*) by which they can cause death. Though feared, they are sometimes approached for their services. They can be hired by other people to kill, using their magical powers, someone who has caused death or any harm in a family. *Omosira* kills an intended person, especially witches and thieves. If for instance there is a notorious witch who disturbs a certain family at night, the father of the family wakes up very early in the morning before any other member and warns the other members not to step outside the house. This is in order to trace the footprints of the witch who was disturbing the family in the night. When the footprint is found, it is carefully removed using a split reed(*orosiaga*) and the soil preserved in leaves of a sacred tree

²² Cf. Gehman, p. 106. For similar presentation

²³ Robert A. Levine, "Witchcraft and Sorcery in a Gusii Community" in, Middleton, J.; Winter, H. E. (eds); Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa, 1963, p.229.

called *omotembe*.²⁴ The family head then hires *omonyamosira* who buries the footprint with other magical seeds. It is believed that immediately the seeds start to germinate the victim starts also to be sick. The health deteriorates with the growth of the seeds. The person is believed to die once the seeds' shoot comes out of the soil. To kill *omonyamosira* can use anything which has come into contact with the intended victim. The body of a person who dies of *omosira* swells especially the stomach and limbs, with blood oozing from the nostrils. According to what I found out, a person who dies as a result of *omosira* should not be touched by anybody. Anybody who touches or participates in grave preparation is bound to die unless the one who planted the magical seeds is called to cleanse the people with a special concoction (*amanyansi*) and remove the seeds. Hence, *abanyamosira* use their magical powers to cause harm to a selected people, mostly for a fee. It is believed that through their *omosira* they can send their harmful charm to any distance where the person intended is. Though feared, *omonyamosira* is some times society friendly as he/she is part of the healing system against bewitching. Because they possess anti-witchcraft and anti-theft powers, they on invitation bury anti-witch and anti-theft charms in the compound so as to keep witches and thieves away. Such a protected family has no fear of witches and thieves. In this case *omonyamosira* can be described as a person who possesses the special powers of a witch but who harms others only for a specific end. Normally *omosira* is only used to harm enemies who are deliberately attacked by means of specific magical rites performed by *omonyamosira*. Even so, there were cases narrated where an *omonyamosira* could kill somebody in order to prove the effectiveness of his power.

²⁴ . *Omotembe* is a sacred tree under which many sacrifices, swearing and oath-taking took place. Any swearing under *omotembe* was very serious and if there was a false swearing something bad, such as being struck by lightning, was (is ?) to happen to the dishonest person.

There are other witches who have their bewitching powers that come through the eyes(*ebibiriria*). Such witches reach a time when the evil powers want to go out. It is said that at such times they suffer so much from a kind of eye irritation. If at that moment they get a person particularly a small child, mostly a brown one, as they attract the evil eye more than those with dark complexion, the evil powers leave them and lodge in the body in the body of the victim.

The preference of brown children is because brownness is associated with goodness which calls for jealousy more especially with long time consequences that brown children when grown up are more preferable for marriage, thus more bride-price in the case of girls.

The evil powers carry along with them anything that is in the vicinity for example, sand, soil, very small pieces of leaves and sticks. Such a child if not traditionally treated in time dies.²⁵ Another similar type of witches(*abasoyi*) release their powers on adults. Once in the body, the evil powers cause irritation and stretch marks on the skin as if their was an allergy(*ogosoywa*).

Another dreaded cause of death among the Abagusii is the belief in the *sacred fire*. This is a fire which is lit when one is circumcised. Once this fire is lit it is to be kept alive all the time of seclusion including three days after coming out of seclusion.

In case it goes off and there is no ritual performed, the fire causes harm later on in life especially when one gets married. The fire can cause temporal barrenness or death of all the children born of the person whose sacred fire was neglected. These deaths go on until such a time when a ritual of re-lighting the fire is performed.

²⁵ . It is believed that *ebibiriria* can only be treated traditionally and not with western medicine as they do not usually show in any medical examination.

Curses(*okoragererigwa*) from parents or elderly members of the community were also causes of death. Among the Abagusii there is a strong believe that if anyone offends for instance by neglecting, beating and disobeying his/her parents or anyone of the age of the parents, he/she could be cursed and sometime this could cause death through an accident such as drowning or attack by wild animals. This is due to the belief, as Bolaji writes in the book Africa Traditional Religion that:

“In Africa, it is the general belief that a living father or a living mother, by virtue of his fatherhood or her motherhood, is endowed with the power to bless or curse an offspring effectively.”²⁶

The curse might affect the individual directly or indirectly by causing the death of the children. This was also closely related to people who swore falsely because of fear of immediate punishment.²⁷ People who died of accident such as drowning, dropping from high places such as trees or committed suicide were thought of as victims of cursing or bewitching.

Another human cause of death among the Abagusii is to meet or find a dead person on the way or in the forest. If one does not perform a cleansing ritual, which includes slaughtering of a chicken and cursing of the spirit of the dead person so as not to cause any harm to the person who found the corpse, his/her children may start to be sick and eventually die. This is believed also to cause derangement.²⁸ Other human causes

²⁶ Bolaji, Idowu, African Traditional Religion: A Definition, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1973, p. 185.

²⁷ These were cases in which someone is accused of a crime but he/she refuses to accept. In this case the elders of the community conduct a swearing of innocence ceremony. This is usually done under the *omotembe* tree. If the swearing person is guilty, it is believed that he/she will emaciate to death. Even these days there is *omotembe* in Ogembo town in Gucha District, “*omotembe bw'Ogembo*” where many thieves caught are made to swear and vow never to repeat the act of stealing. If such a person repeats his/her stealing usually he/she is killed in the process.

²⁸ . The first ritual when one finds a dead person is to “break a leaf for it” from a shrub known as *omoroka*. This applied also to carcasses of animals which were considered taboo e.g. dogs, cats and hyenas. To see tortoise and mating snakes was believed to cause insanity and sometimes death.

include breaching of taboos and sexual offenses(*amasangi*)²⁹. These evoke the anger of the ancestral spirits who administer punishment to offenders.

3.2.b Supernatural Causes

Abagusii believe that there are invisible powers lurking in the universe which can sometimes cause harm to the living people. These evil forces(*ebirecha*) make their presence felt in society by incarnating themselves in other living things such as birds especially the owl animals such as cats, wild dogs and even certain people(witches). The cry of these birds and animals, especially the owl, is believed to announce the imminent death of a member of a particular family. As these are invisible powers the living are therefore helpless in this case.

The invisible powers in the atmosphere include ancestral spirits which are spirits of those members of the family or clan who died and now live as spiritual persons.

Ancestor veneration, though not widespread and open these days, remains a fairly common phenomenon in the traditional Abagusii society, as could be found in many traditional African communities.³⁰ This was incorrectly conceived as idolatry by early missionaries as Shorter notes:

“Early missionaries had a preconceived idea that Africans were idolaters, and they tended to interpret the offerings made to ancestors as instances of that idolatry.”³¹

²⁹ Among Abagusii it was a taboo for married men to have sexual relations with married women. In case one went against this taboo and unless a cleansing ritual is performed, he/she was not supposed to see his/her marriage partner when sick. It was believed that if he/she saw her/him the sick partner could die even if the sickness was not serious.

³⁰ . Alyward Shorter, “Conflicting Attitudes to Ancestor Veneration in Africa” in, *AFER*, vol. 11, no.1, 1969, p. 29.

³¹ . *Ibid.* p. 30.

Ancestor veneration does not exclude the Supreme Being. The two co-exist with the knowledge that there is a Supreme Being who is the ultimate creator of all there is and from whom the ancestor spirits get their powers.³² Though frequently mentioned in family worship, there are very rare occasions where ancestors were invoked when the whole clan was involved, it was only the Supreme Being who was recognized as creator of all and hence got priority of respect by the whole people. *Engoro*(God) was believed to be everywhere, hence everybody took care not to do anything that could offend Him. Ancestors came in as just those who understood the life of the community and thus able to intercede to the Supreme Being on behalf of the community as they are closer to him. Bolaji makes this more clear when he writes:

“The ancestors are related to the living community in a way that cannot be claimed for Deity or Divinities who are definitely of a different order. The ancestors are regarded still as heads and parts of the families or communities to which they belonged while they were living human beings: for what happened of the phenomenon called death was only that the family life of this earth has been extended into the after-life super sensible world. The ancestors remain, therefore, spiritual superintendents of family affairs and continue to bear their titles of relationship like ‘father’ or ‘mother’.”³³

This intercessory role of the ancestors should not be misunderstood as idolatry as it can be compared to devotional prayers for intercession in some of our churches especially in the Roman Catholic Church where there is a well organized and appreciated devotional prayer to the saints sometimes invoking their intercession.

³² . Ibid. p. 33-34

³³ Bolaji, Idowu, African Traditional Religion, p.184

I concur with what Ayisi says in his book, *An Introduction to the Study of African Culture*, that the African recognition of ancestors is an affirmation of their belief in the world of spirits and life after death as an integral part of cosmological belief.³⁴

Ancestors(*chisokoro*) are believed to be human beings who lived their earthly lives well and now live in a higher life closer to the Supreme being(*Engoro*)³⁵. Such people remain actively involved in the lives of the community.³⁶ Any offense against them could lead the aggrieved spirit to cause problems especially death to the offender either as an individual or to the whole family. In this case death becomes vindictive and instructive to the offender. The offended spirit reminds the people of their responsibility of keeping all the norms of society. The aggrieved spirit is appeased with sacrifices according to the prescription given by a diviner(*omoragori/ abaragori pl.*)³⁷ so as not to cause further harm. One could offend the ancestors by disobeying the customs and traditions of the society which include strict observance of burial rites.

³⁴ . Eric, O. Ayisi; *An Introduction to the Study of African Culture*(2nd ed.), Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers, 1979, p. 89.

³⁵ . It was not just enough for one to die and then is considered as an ancestor in a family or clan. Ancestors were people who lived exemplary lives. Sorcerers, witches, murderers and other social misfits did not merit to be ancestors.

³⁶ . Abagusii believe that death is not the end of kinship ties, hence lineage include the living and the dead who are believed to be alive in another form which is higher. The living dead exercise strong influence on the lives of the living relatives by providing mechanisms for social control i.e. keeping promises, respecting customs and taboos, cultural values and life in general. Therefore, any Omogusii lives his/her life such that it pleases God and the ancestors by respecting all the cultural norms and values.

³⁷ . Diviners(*abaragori-sing. Omoragori*) were(are) specialists who seek to diagnose the cause of calamities in the society and recommend solutions to the problems. They are able to communicate with the invisible powers in the universe either through inspiration or manipulation of certain objects. Diviners work in close relationship with the medicine-people in the healing process.

Modern technology in medical health care has greatly influenced societal care of the sick. For instance, there are institutional centers where people are confined so that their health conditions can be closely monitored up to a time when they are considered to be recovered or almost recovered and only needing time to regain the lost strength. Things were quite different in traditional set up as Tendese rightly points out in his article *"Pastoral Care and Counseling in Relation to Death and Dying"* that:

"For a traditional person in Africa the situation is completely different. He is communally oriented, intimately related to his family, clan, tribe and ancestors. He grows and develops from birth through puberty to marriage. Death is the passage into the final stage of his relationship with the community as he becomes a 'living-dead' ".⁴⁸

The sick were cared for within the family set up where all the members of the family were involved in taking care of one of their members who was sick. In this case, a person was cared for in an environment where he/she felt close to the family, clan, tribe and his/her ancestors. Caring for the sick did not only depend on an individual family (parent(s) + child(ren)) as understood in modern western sense but it involved the whole of extended family, distant relatives and friends. The traditional sense of communal responsibility played a key role, not only during festivities but also during calamities and difficulties.

For the Abagusii there is nothing that happened without a known cause, especially misfortunes of sickness and death. This is why, traditionally, before any healing could take place there was first to be a detection of the cause(s) of the ailment or death. In the

⁴⁸ . Tendese, Kassa, p. 264.

process of trying to know the cause of the sicknesses diviners(*abaragori*) played an important role.

After diviners diagnosing the cause of sickness, the medicine-people(who are wrongly refereed as witch-doctors by early westerners who could not distinguish *abanyamosira* and witches from medicine-people) ³⁹came in to offer their healing services⁴⁰.

Medicine-people were expected to be trustworthy, morally upright, friendly and ready to serve. As they had access to special forces of nature which others did not have, they were often given tokens of appreciation for their service . They were the hope of good health in the society⁴¹. Sometimes medicine-people were expected to offer protection and security from evil forces, to remove curses and control restless spirits of the dead who could otherwise cause death in the society.

On the traditional healing process of the Abagusii, the whole person is focused, that is, his/her physical, spiritual, social and psychological aspects where touched. All these aspects of healing could be provided for by the same healer unlike in modern medicine where a person is taken to different specialists.

Sometimes a medicine person could use a charm(*egete/ekemoya*) to protect his/her client against harmful external forces. This was obtained from certain herbs, animal body parts, parks, roots and branches. The word spoken at the time of giving the charm is part

³⁹ Medicine-people usually inherited their profession from their parents or close relatives. In talking with some of them they said that they had got their profession through special calling by the ancestral spirits. This could be in a dream or vision where one got to know the medicinal value of some herbs and plants.
⁴⁰ It was found out that some physicians of western medicine acknowledge the fact that some sicknesses cannot be treated with modern medicine and sometimes advice relatives of a patient to take him/her home and try native medicine. Also relatives may demand to take their patient home even against the doctor's advice so as to try indigenous ways of healing.
⁴¹ For details on Abagusii traditional medicine, concept of disease causation, detection and healing see Isaac Sindiga et al (eds), Traditional Medicine in Africa, Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers, 1995, Chapter 9.

of the effect of the charm. Sacrifices were also used as a healing means especially on those ailments considered to have been caused by supernatural powers.

In trying to understand death and its causes, Abagusii wanted to come into grips with the reality that pervaded their ability. A reality which left them in a helpless situation. In their healing, they show an effort to keep this reality away from any family; but this was just for a time as death eventually stroke. When this reality did strike Abagusii had ways and means of dealing with it. In the chapter that follows we are going to look into how the Gusii community dealt with this reality of death.

CHAPTER FOUR

ABAGUSII BURIAL RITES

4.0 INTRODUCTION

From a Christian point of view we get the impression that burial and performance of rituals for a dead person is the responsibility of the living. This can be seen when the women went to the tomb to perform a burial rite to the body of Jesus which had not been properly buried(cf. Mk16:1). Among the Abagusii, death involves the whole family and community. The village gathers in the home of the bereaved for many days to mourn, arrange for burial, attend the funeral and participate in some post-burial activities.

As noted earlier, death is seen as an impure occurrence that disrupts the social harmony of the affected family and village. Abagusii have ways and means by which they cleanse and restore harmony. This is through rituals and ceremonies. All these are meant to establish and maintain a relationship with the one who has been separated from the community through mysterious and supernatural forces which people could not control. Rituals are believed to be effective immediately if they are performed well. The rituals are also an assurance that the dead person is or will be recognized as an ancestor within the family⁴².

When there is death in a family there is no lighting of fire in the house where the corpse is, hence, no cooking by the bereaved family. Relatives are the ones who take care

⁴² . There is a strong belief that health, good fortune, order and life are inseparable from good relations with the ancestral spirits.

of that particular family until such a time when they will have performed all the rituals allowing them to start undertaking their normal activities.

4.1 CATEGORIES OF DEATH

When a person died there was always crying and mourning(*ebirero*), but the degree of public mourning varied according to the social status of the deceased.⁴³

Infants and children were not mourned much and few people attended their burials. In the past, children were buried in the house but this has changed. Also youths were not accorded all the rites that were given to married adults. Children born out of wedlock were buried outside the homestead as they were not considered as members of the family.⁴⁴

If a young person died, there was bitter mourning due to the big loss of not having a chance to contribute to the well-being and continuity of society. The saddest reality was that the young person had no children to continue his/her name(to keep the person alive), hence, the belief that such a people could go to waste. Most often children are not named after them. On rituals, only a cockerel or a young hen for a lady was slaughtered by the graveside the evening after burial.

In the case of married adults, when a person was very sick and death was imminent, the family members and relatives kept a close watch over him/her. For a man, he was brought to the living room(*eero*) where they took care of him. If he died in the

⁴³ . Traditionally, people with high social status, such as chiefs had long days of public mourning. Even the number of people who attended the funeral was big compared to other ordinary people. Also people with a family i.e. married had elaborate mourning period. An unmarried person was considered socially dead, not regarded in the society, a person to be pitied. This underlines the importance of the institution of marriage in indigenous Gusii community.

⁴⁴ . This contributed to discouraging young and unmarried women from engaging in sexual relations as it could bring them shame if such an eventuality occurred.

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bedroom (*irungu*) he was brought *eero* and laid on animal skin. For a woman, she was kept in the bedroom(*irungu*) until the burial.

If a man had more than one wife, he was expected to spend his dying moments and be buried at the senior wife's house. This was because the senior wife was considered the mother of the home. In case he died in a junior wife's house he was transferred to the senior one where he was supposed to lie in state at least overnight before being buried.⁴⁵

In the indigenous setting, once somebody died in the family, the women sounded the alarm by wailing and crying(*ebikuro/chikurate n'ebirero*) so as to announce the death. They ran all over the homestead tearing their clothing(*chingobo*), throwing and rolling themselves on the ground. The neighbours who came, especially women, did the same, breaking household utensils, destroying crops around the homestead, spilling all preserved grain mostly finger-millet(*obori*). This was in order to note that the owner of the things had gone. This was not interpreted as destruction of property but a warm send off for the dead person.

If the deceased was a husband, the wife(wives) removed her/their clothes, sprinkled herself/themselves with ashes. She or the senior wife in the case of polygamy, wore the husband's clothing(*engobo y'omogaka*) inside out as a sign of mourning(*ogokobania*). The significance of this, wearing of clothes of the deceased inside-out, was to mark the start of mourning and to feel the intimacy for the last time from the material things of the spouse who had gone out from the living spouse, a sign of lost love. It also signified that things had changed.

⁴⁵ . People who died outside their homestead, once brought home are supposed to stay in their house for at least an overnight before burial. This is because the people cherish the idea that somebody though dead should be given a send off from the family house. It is also meant to express the feeling of communality and belonging with the living. Abagusii still hold on to this custom.

4.2 BURIAL

Death was one of the moments where the whole family and clan was involved. It was a moment when one realized the value of extended family as a source of encouragement socially, psychologically and physically. The other members of the clan were there to support the bereaved members at that moment of grief. People stayed in the home of the bereaved since the time death was announced until the rite releasing them from the home was performed. There was wailing and mourning all through this time which was intensified at the time of burial.

The grave(*oboina*) was(even currently is) prepared on the day of burial and not before. This was due to the belief that if anything alive fell into the grave it was to be abandoned and another one was to be prepared.

The site where the grave was, and at the present also, prepared depended on the sex of the deceased. The grave was/is dug in front of the house. If the dead was a male, the grave was prepared to the right side of the house(*okoboko ku'omosacha*) and the female on the left side of the house(*okoboko ku'omokungu*). This was because traditionally a man was supposed to sleep on the right hand side. Also in the grave he was placed such that he 'slept' on the right hand side with the back to the house signifying that physically he had gone out for ever. Likewise a woman sleeps on the left hand side. In the grave she is laid on her left hand side with the back to the house also signifying that physically she has gone out for ever.

According to Gusii custom, if the deceased has grandsons, the eldest one breaks the ground(*goaka egekamago*) where the grave is to be prepared. If there are no

grandsons the husband breaks the ground for his wife. The eldest son or brother to the deceased can do the same.

The preparation of the grave(*oboina*) was a communal activity which involved all men of youthful age of the community.

Though a communal activity, there were some people exempted from participating in the preparation of the grave. Old men or those who had grown up sons were not required to prepare the grave in person but through their sons. Men with expectant women were not customarily allowed to come close to the grave or even come into contact with the soil (*ekeroba*) from the grave. Equally expectant women were not allowed to come near the graveside. This was due to a strong belief that if such a people, husbands of expectant women and the expectant women themselves, participated or came into contact with the soil from the grave they were courting death e.g. the wife would have a miscarriage. I was told that this belief was as a result of a long time experience of miscarriages of women who came into contact with the soil or whose husbands took part in digging of the grave of their relatives. The belief was meant also to show that death does not go with life- which is manifested through pregnancy. From my interview I found out that this belief is so strong in the mind of the people such that no one is ready to risk so as to prove it, even in those who are well founded in western education. Distance visitors particularly the in-laws, women and children are generally excluded from preparing the grave(*oboina*).

The ones who prepared *oboina* in the past were supposed to be silent more especially when inside the grave. Even when one wanted to ask for something he did so by signs. This was in order to give the best concentration on the mystery of death which had manifested in the dead person. Also it was to reduce exchange of words which could lead to quarrels, confusion and avoidance of the work. Apart from the wailing and

mourning, those waiting for the grave to be ready talked in low tones or remained in total silence. The silence was to signify the solemnity of the occasion and honour to the deceased. Wailing was intensified during the time of lowering the body into the grave and returning of the soil. It marked the solemn send off for the deceased. For burial, the body was carried from the house by grandsons, brothers or cousins of the deceased. It was passed through the side door(*egesieri kia bweri/kia gesakwa*)⁴⁶ if the deceased was a man and through the front door(*egesieri kia boronge*) if a woman(see fig. II p. 58). In the grave the body was laid with the back facing the house.

Traditionally, Abagusii did not bury their dead in a coffin. The dead was laid on animal skin and covered with another one or some of his/her clothing. Before covering the grave, a thorough check was made for anything metallic. Even clothe buttons were removed. It was believed that if a person was buried with such things they could cause unceasing severe headache to those who participate in the burial. Today things have changed greatly as people are buried in coffins fully dressed even with metallic bangles and necklaces.

When all is done, to show their last respect, family members using the elbow pushed some soil into the grave cursing whoever caused the dead to also die quickly.

⁴⁶ . Abagusii built their houses with two doors. The front door is for entrance and the side door is refereed as exit for a man. Sometimes the front door is referred to as women's door and the side door as men's.

4.3 POST BURIAL RITES

As we have seen above, death among the Abagusii was considered impure and hence, all those who in one way or the other were involved in the burial had to cleanse themselves after the burial. Death also removed the living from the physical world into another state of being which is more superior than the one the deceased was when alive. The dead were believed to be closer to the Supreme Being(*Engoro*). They also had an important role to play in the life of the living members of the family and the clan at large. Therefore, the living had to make sure that there was a positive relationship with the dead members of their community.

Abagusii cleansed themselves from the impurity of death and established positive relationship with the dead relatives through performance of certain rituals and sacrifices as explained here below.

4.3.a Washing of the Feet

This was a cleansing ritual which was performed by those who were involved in the digging of the grave. The water for washing the feet or removing the soil(*ekeroba*) was fetched from a river in a small pot(*egetono/entono*) by a young girl. The young girl was conditioned not to look behind once she had fetched the water until she reached the graveside. To ensure that this condition was kept, the little girl was escorted by an adult. The small pot was to be carried on the head without any support of a tie ring(*engata*).

By the graveside the water was poured in a potsherd(*orogio*) obtained from an old pot. All the grave diggers washed themselves from this common potsherd. The washing

was merely symbolic as they did not wash themselves clean. Though a symbolic gesture it was so meaningful such that those who dug the grave could not leave until they had performed this ritual. This was because people believed that if they went with the soil from the grave to their homes without touching the water, they could take death along with them. Hence, culturally everybody involved in the preparation of the grave could undergo this ritual.⁴⁷

4.3.b Sacrifices

The evening after burial a cock was slaughtered, if the deceased was a man and a hen if a woman. Such a fowl was slaughtered and roasted with the feathers on the fire by the graveside. The meat was eaten by closest kin by the graveside and bones burnt in the fire. After the burial, members of the family spent the night in the home of the deceased, except aunts uncles and married daughters of the family. The members of the family stayed here without going to sleep in their homes or going to the garden until a sacrifice of allowing them to go out was offered(*ekeng'wanso ki'ogoteroka/okorahia omochie*).

In the night of the first day after burial there was a sacrifice of a goat known as *egetinyori/ekeng'wanso ki'ogokendi nyomba*. This was meant to chase out spirits of death which could be lurking in the house of the deceased. The sacrificial goat was strangled and not slaughtered. It was only eaten by brothers and cousins(both men and women) of the deceased. The meat was eaten leaving no trace of it until dawn. Bones, skin and any meat which remain uneaten was burnt to ashes before sunrise.⁴⁸ This was in order not to leave the evil spirits which had caused the darkness of death see the light of

⁴⁷ . Cf. The ritual of water for purification in Numbers 19:17-22

⁴⁸ . Cf. Israel's Passover meal in Exodus 12:10

the sun which is associated with good health and well-being. On the second day after burial, there was a ritual dance known as *eburu*. In this ritual young men went out very early in the morning taking cattle for grazing in a swampy area(*ekerubo*).⁴⁹

The young men went armed as for war, carrying spears, arrows, horn-trumpets, shields, drums and clubs. By midday they drove their cattle to the deceased's home singing, wailing, beating drums and blowing horn-trumpets. Women waited for them midway home. On their part, women decked themselves with leaves and painted their faces, hands and legs with clay. They met men midway and all went to the home together wailing and mourning. Once in the home, there was a vigorous dance which involved all the cows in the homestead. The animals were allowed to eat any crop-plant that was there in the home. The young men performed a mock fight to show their readiness to fight death if only it were visible as it had robbed them one of their own. Another reason for the mock fight was to wade away the evil spirits from the home giving assurance and comfort to the bereaved that death may not visit the home soon.

There is a similar ritual dance among the Luo who are neighbors to Abagusii. There might have been an element of borrowing from one another. From the research, though not very conclusive, there is little likelihood that Abagusii could have borrowed it from the Luo. This is because traditionally Abagusii had low esteem of their neighbors, the Luo as they do not practice circumcision. They regarded the Luo as children who could not offer anything worthy imitating or borrowing.

On the third day after burial another sacrifice was offered. This sacrifice, (*ekengwanso ki'ogosoka/ki'ogoteroka*) enables those who were staying in the home of the deceased to go to their homes and resume their duties. During this ceremony, the wife(wives) or husband, children and close relations of the deceased had

⁴⁹ . Nobody claimed such areas as they were considered unfit for settlement or cultivation.

their hair shaved. After the shaving, if the deceased was a man, his clothing was hang on the wall of the upper side of the sitting room(*eero rogoro*) and drinking pot, walking stick and stool were also placed at the same place. If the deceased was a woman her clothing was placed inside out on the wall of the inner room(*irungu*). Also the three cooking stones were unearthed and pushed together symbolizing the end of cooking for that time.

Another thing that was done was the breaking of the protruding sharp stick(*egesuri/egechuria*) on the apex of an Omogusii traditional hut(see fig II, p. 58). The *Luo* have the same. This was only done if the deceased was a man. This signified that the owner of the home was not alive.

After this ceremony the husband or wife/wives were excluded, to some extent, from the common life system of the community. For instance widows wore their clothing inside out, could not shake hands in greeting, could not sit on a chair, nor bathe, nor cross a river, no entering into the neighbours' houses and could not be rained on. Men were only supposed to observe the greeting prohibition. The reason advanced for this discriminatory prohibitions between men and women was that a man was traditionally known as the fender (*omosachi*) from where Abagusii word for man(*omosacha*) comes, which meant that he had to move out quickly to fend for his family. He had also many responsibilities in the clan. To observe many prohibitions could cause other problems to the family and the clan at large. A woman was traditionally known as one who takes care of the house(*omokungi*) from where Abagusii word for woman(*omokungu*) comes. This mentality of seeing women as domestic workers is changing even in the rural setup. This kind of exclusion lasts until the last funeral rite(*kobwata amaguta*) is performed.

The last funeral rite to be performed was the cleansing ceremony known as *ogotuna/okobwata amaguta* or *okogororokia chingobo*. During this ceremony if the deceased was a man, oil obtained by churning(*gotunda*) of milk was placed on his

traditional stool and then it was applied to the widow(s) by the brother of the deceased. The oil was applied on the forehead, back of the palms, elbows and knees. There was also beer prepared by the widow(s). The clothes, drinking pot and stool were cleansed and could be used by other people. The *egesuri/egechuria* was once again re-put; the *Luo* do not resume. After this ceremony all prohibitions were removed and the family members resumed their normal social life. If still in the age of getting children, the widow could, with consultation of the elders, welcome a man into her house (*gosou nyomba/gochiegwa nyomba*), but the man should be one of good character and having a family of his own. The children born out of this relationship belong to the deceased husband and have full rights of inheriting property of the family. Most of such relations were terminated once children, especially the first born, had grown and were capable of taking care of the family. Days that follow after *okogorokia chingobo* there were many visitors who came to visit the home bringing with them local brew(*ebusa*) and some food. These were celebrated in the home, not in a mourning mood but happily as all the necessary rituals had been accomplished. This was meant to make the bereaved know that other people recognize their sorrows and were committed to offer comfort.

The company given to the bereaved family members by the whole clan and distant relatives served as a psychological and social support and healing so that the bereaved were able to cope with the sad reality. The rituals and gradual withdrawal of other members of the clan helped one to adopt to the new reality. The sacrifices and other rituals gave an assurance to the members of the family that the deceased member would act favorably to them in the new status of ancestor, hence death became not that much tragic.

4.4 Unusual Cases of Death

Any misfortune among the Abagussi was caused either by human or supernatural agents. This was more strong when a misfortune such as death occurred in unusual circumstances. These included drowning, being struck by lightning, suicide, dying at childbirth, death of unmarried men and women, married women who died in their maternal homes and people from other tribes. Due to their particular and unique occurrence they were also accorded particular rites and ceremonies.

Drowning was a very rare cause of death as there were/are very few big rivers within the Abagusii community. Even so, the many streams and a few rivers such as *Kuja(egucha), Omogonga, Risonto, Eriana, Mogusi and Riyabe* could burst their banks during rainy seasons. Sometimes people trying to cross such swollen rivers and streams could be swept down stream and drown. Such people's burial and funeral rites took place by the riverside where the body was retrieved. The first person to spot the body in the river, even if it was accidental, did not go home until after burial and due rituals had been performed. The reason was to avoid taking home the evil spirits that might have caused the person to drown. Such a person sent someone else to go and announce the happening to relatives of the drowned person. After burial and relevant sacrifices, the person who spotted the body first went home and cleansed him/herself by slaughtering a white hen or cock depending on whether the deceased person was a man or woman. Sacrifices were offered so as to wade away the cause of death or curse whoever might have caused the death. However, most of those who drown were believed to have been bewitched or cursed.

Death by **lightning** was considered as a very serious curse due to some dishonesty in swearing or lack of keeping an oath. During my research I was given a story of one man in *Bonchari* who wanted to take his neighbour's cow by claiming that his great grand father had given a loan of a cow to the family of his neighbor that was never paid. The two were taken to the village elders so as to solve the case. After their case could not be solved easily, the elders resorted to oath-taking(*koria chimuma*) and cursing(*koragereria*) to whoever was not saying the truth. The elders invoked lightning(*koriegwa n'amache/goakwa n'engokoba*) as the reward for whoever was a liar. I was told that a few minutes after the case was over and everybody was going home, it started to drizzle and there and then one of the two men was struck dead along with the cow. The victim was believed to be the dishonest one.

While this could have been by coincidence it drove a strong message home to the witnesses. Other cases upon which such curse could be invoked if the suspect denied to accept liability were adultery, theft, murder and defamation. Abagusii also believed that a person with an evil eye could throw a spell in form of lightning to his/her victim. *Abanyamosira* were also dreaded fellows in causing death through lightning

If somebody died of **lightning** the body was not touched. It was covered with a heap of blocks of hard soil(*amaticha*). The family members of the deceased were not supposed to touch rain water as lightning was associated with rain. As there were no shoes barks of trees were used as sandals in order to step out after rains. Some cleansing was performed so as to wade way the cause of the death. The evening after burial a cock was slaughtered at the place where the victim was struck. Sacrifices for such people were performed by somebody who had had lightning effect and had cleansed him/herself. As it

was rare to find such people, people went to meeting places such market places and made public announcement for anyone legible for such sacrifices to come forth and help.

If someone committed **suicide** by hanging, the first ritual performed was to bring the body down. A sheep was hang next to the body and left to die. After it had died the two strings, that is, the one from which the body of the person is hanging and that from which the body of the sheep is hanging , were cut simultaneously. After this, a traditional medicine person performs a cleansing ritual using certain concoctions (*ogosiarera amanyansi*)⁵⁰ so as to make sure that such a sad reality did not happen again.

The structure upon which the victim hung was destroyed. If it was a tree, it was uprooted with all its roots leaving no trace of it anywhere. The reason was that if some roots remain, they might rejuvenate and grow to another full tree where someone else might hang him/herself as it was declared a cursed tree. Even if it was a house, it was destroyed and the building material burnt or the medicine person was given free.

During burial some parts of the sheep which was used in the ritual of bringing the body down were buried together with the victim so as to bury all that caused the person to hang.

Death of **unmarried** or **barren women** was considered an unusual case. This was due to the belief that the natural thing for any man or woman was to beget children. If a person grew old without marring or getting children and then died, such a person was accorded particular burial rites. For a man the rite known as *okoruta omwaro* was performed. This was a ritual where one of the bars of his bed(*omwaro*), was thrown out

⁵⁰ . This is a concoction of different leaves and grasses which is widely used among the Abagusii for cleansing ceremonies.

as his body was taken out for burial. This was meant to represent the wife who could have mourned after his body. He was not given full burial rites. Only a cock was slaughtered in the evening after burial. For an unmarried woman, her body was also buried without full burial rites. She was buried next to the fence of the homestead as she was supposed to have moved out of the home. Her breasts were pierced with a thorn(*rigwa*) to symbolize the children whom she could have suckled. For a barren woman a little chick (*egechuchu*) is tied to her leg. The cry of the chick was meant to represent her children who could have mourned her death.

Death of **women at childbirth** or **while pregnant** was highly regrettable and treated as one of the worst calamity to befall a family or clan. Such a woman's body was put in the grave and before it was covered an old man went down into the grave to operate on the stomach of the deceased so as to remove the foetus and lay it by the side of the mother's body. It was believed that if such was not done there was likelihood of the same re-occurring to others in the family or clan.

For a **married woman** to die in her parents' home was considered as unusual. In such a case arrangements were made for the body to be taken to her marital home. The two families were involved. A central position was established, and the parental family carried the body, always at night, up to the agreed place. The husband's family will be waiting there but in hiding as they were not supposed to see each other. They would only recognize the voices of some people talking and then wait for a while for the other party to disappear and then come and pick the body. Then the husband's family would perform full burial and funeral rites.

People from other tribes who died in Gusii were considered a misfortunate.

This was because of the strong belief that people from other tribes, particularly the **Luo** and **Maasai**, had haunting spirits that could affect the family where they died unless they were given a special “sendoff”. To do this the Abagusii slaughtered a black sheep in the forest so as to leave the dreaded spirits there. Such a people were not buried according to Abagusii burial rites. They were thrown into the bush.

From the research it came out that the family did not concentrate on according full burial and funeral rites to people who died in an unusual manner or circumstances. There is more concentration on finding out what caused that particular death then there-after perform rituals, not for the sake of the dead but to wade away the causal circumstances. In this aspect diviners always came in as those who can find out the problem and prescribe the necessary remedy. In the following chapter we will see a kind of synthesis of what has been presented this far and how it presents a challenge to the church in Africa today.

5.0 CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

From this presentation one could say that in every human society there are socially recognized ways of acting and reacting that bring certain expected results which can be either favourable or unfavourable. Such recognized patterns are bound to become part of the persons of a particular society such that one cannot separate one from the other without causing a feeling of emptiness on the persons. As we know, breaking a habit, for instance addiction of any kind, and trying to adopt into another is bound to cause fear and insecurity. This is because the conditioned responses to certain ways of acting and reacting are not working⁵¹. This is much the same when someone enters into a new culture. There is an experience of what is called 'culture shock'. Such is what has happened(still happening?) with the encounter of Abagusii cultural death rituals with Christian ones. Christianity as it came to the Abagusii, in the early part of this century, had some conditions and requirements for qualification of membership. These included abandonment of cultural practices, which included death and funeral rites, that were seen as devilish. Because the aim of the Christian agent was to proselyte Abagusii, slowly he/she managed to convert some. What we see here is a willingness, of those converted, to join the new religion, which entailed a new way of relating to the Supreme Being and ways of creating a sense of security and well-being in the society. As we have seen this is bound to cause some kind of shock. The converted could not, and many have not managed to enter completely into Christianity, thus, leaving his/her traditional religion

⁵¹ . Bourdillon, Religion and Society, pp. 311.315.

behind as this is part his/her being.⁵² Christianity here could be seen as something extra or convenient to be added on what is already there. This could be the reason why Omogusii Christian finds no contradiction to intermingle Christianity with his/her traditional life in some situations as can be attested by *Mzee* Laurent Mokora of Bonchari;

“--- there is no problem to offer sacrifice to *Esokoro*(ancestor). It does not go against my Christian faith as I am just fulfilling my duty as it has been done since time immemorial. If I do not respect my ancestors they will not look favourably to my family. Do you think I will be able to follow my Christianity if there are constant misfortunes caused by displeased ancestors----?”⁵³ see below.

This is an expression from a very long time follower of Christianity who finds no replacement of his traditional value in the Christian faith. There are many Christian faithful who fall back into traditional ways of solving life problems mostly during crises such as calamities, sicknesses and death. There is a felt vacuum here which Christianity has not managed to fill. Hence, *Omogusii* has to find out a way of filling it as he/she cannot survive long with this kind of emptiness.

This switching, of any group of people, from Christian faith to traditional religion is, as Engelbert Mveng observes in his article, “Christianity and Religious Culture of Africa”, a critical questioning of the faith. The questioning is whether it really supplies the answers to psychological, moral, religious and social questions which are asked all along everyday life situations.⁵⁴ If answers to these questions are in short supply, the individual concern has to find alternative sources as he/she finds that life with unsolved

⁵² . Cf. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, p. 1.

⁵³ . Exact words of Laurent Mokora who is a long time follower of the Christian faith but now he is not a very active member due to his advanced age. He is about 95 years old but still with clear thought and memory.

⁵⁴ . Engelbert, Mvengi, “Christianity and Religious Culture of Africa”, in Kenneth, Y. Best(ed), *African Challenge*, Nairobi: Transafrica Publishers, 1975, p. 7.

problems is almost impossible.⁵⁵ Another fact we have to note is that death and rituals related to death are the slowest to change. There might be a change outwardly but deep down in the persons no lasting change takes place. This is mainly because death is a reality that touches every aspect of the human person; spiritual(religious), psychological, social, political, economic and physiological. Until such a time a replacement is found that will stand in for all these aspects people will be hesitant to change that which they consider necessary in restoring harmony and wholeness which death disrupts.

At the same time it can not be assumed that the agents of Christianity who came to Africa(Gusii-land in this case), preached their gospel to empty hearts which knew nothing about the Supreme Being and how to relate with him/her. This comes out clearly if we are to go by Bolaji's descriptive definition of religion, for that is what Abagusii cultural death rituals are pointing to, that;

“ Religion results from man's (people's) spontaneous awareness of, and spontaneous reaction to, his (their) immediate awareness of a living power, 'wholly Other' and infinitely greater than himself (themselves); a power mysterious because unseen, yet a present and urgent Reality, seeking to bring man (people) into communion with, and vital relationship to, this power as a source of real life.”⁵⁶ (bracketed words mine to improve on Bolaji's wanting exclusive language)

As we saw above, the Africans, Abagusii included, are permeated by religion such that whatever they do has a religious implication. Hence, before the onset of Christian missionaries, Abagusii knew about the Supreme Being(*Engoro*) and had established ways of relating with Him. What is at stake here is the way missionaries are approaching local cultures in their zeal to preach the gospel. There is a need for these agents of evangelization to learn how to appreciate the diversity of cultures and the role they(cultures) play in any human society before effecting change. This calls for a good

⁵⁵ . This is sighted as one of the reasons for founding African Independent Churches which seem to address and recognize in depth the indigenous beliefs and systems of thought.

⁵⁶ . E. Bolaji Idowu. African Traditional Religion. A Definition, NY: Orbis Books, 1973, p. 75.

understanding of particular cultures as nobody can effect meaningful change to anything he/she does not know well.

5.1 Recommendations

This paper has been a result of fieldwork research among Abagusii. Though undertaken carefully, intensively and detailed, as much as was possible, it does not claim exhaustive presentation of all there is on the topic considering its importance and magnitude. Hence, there is need for further investigation so as to unearth more information on the topic. For instance, it could be very important to find out whether the death of Jesus Christ has any real significance to Abagusii, especially those who claim to follow the Christian faith.

Another thing which could be interesting to find out is whether Abagusii cultural values were just a preparation for the gospel values. If it be affirmed, now that the gospel is at hand, can it be that these traditional values are rendered obsolete and thus having no role in the process of salvation?

I am also in agreement with Gehman when he says that, the Christian church should seek to understand the appeal of traditional values and evaluate them in biblical perspective.⁵⁷ This could give a good picture whether the African's (Abagusii's) relapse to traditional practices in time of crises is a relapse into the devil or a need for the church to look into some ignored felt needs which have not been adequately addressed.

⁵⁷ . Gehman, African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective, p. 20

This calls for an objective evaluation which will preserve truth and expose error by the standard of scripture which is above any culture. At the same time this will help in resolving the confusion which might be there of differentiating **westernization** from **evangelization** aimed at conversion which might have been seen as synonymous by early missionaries, if not current ones also. Care has to be taken also to find out whether post independent Africa is just adopting a post colonial reaction to anything seen as epitomizing western culture, including Christianity.

Another aspect that could be of interest is to find out how to reconcile Abagusii, (who have no concept of resurrection as such), traditional burial rites with Vatican Council II call that, funeral rites have to have a paschal character where there is hope for the future resurrection⁵⁸.

5.2 Conclusion

In this study I have tried to present a case of Abagusii cultural death rituals as they were in the traditional setting. We saw how death is inseparably linked with life, a life which is so naturally patterned in that one expects certain results at certain stages. Sickness comes in as an unbudgeted for intruder and interferes with the celebration of life. During sickness one is so concentrated on healing such that he/she cannot possibly celebrate life. The medicine-people, those who possess the art of restoring and preserving health, were very important in the healing process. In the healing system we find that

⁵⁸ "The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC)) no. 81 in Flannery Austin (Gen. ed.), Vatican Council II, Bandra, Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975.

there are other sicknesses such as those caused by the “evil eye” that cannot be treated using modern medicine thus needing traditional medical experts⁵⁹.

Unfortunately healing sometimes does not yield the desired results and hence the victim dies. This is more painful when the deceased is a young person who has not gone through the whole pattern of life. Abagusii have socially established mechanisms through which they try to find out what could have led to such eventuality. After such is established, appropriate rituals are performed so as to bring about a sense of well-being: security from the reoccurrence of death.

Among many other causes of sickness and death, Abagusii rank witchcraft at the top. Witchcraft in the community is believed to be real, with practical effects, such that to explain it away does not provide reasons as to why undesirable occurrences should be experienced by a family when everybody seem to live according to social norms.⁶⁰

Though many contemporary Abagusii do not perform death rituals as it was in traditional set up, there are elements which reflect some of the cultural ways of funeral rites. Elements such as choice of the site where the grave is to be prepared, making sure that the deceased lies in state in her/his house for at least a night, the immediate family staying for some days before resuming normal social life, and spending days at the deceased’s home from the time of announcement of the death until at least burial day. Some of these elements are meant to lay the dead to rest in peace so as to avoid any guilt feeling in the living later on. This is quite relevant psychologically and socially more especially for the bereaved.

⁵⁹. At the same time Abagusii cannot afford to ignore modern medical technology.

⁶⁰. M. F. C. Bourdillon, Religion and Society, a *Text for Africa*, Mambo Press, 1990, p. 188.

Therefore, as unchristian as some cultural rituals might seem, for instance sacrifices, to some Christian agents, they(rituals) are a help to cope with problems and misfortunes, and so eradicating despair which might inhibit action.

We have seen also that death entails patterned funeral rituals, ritual here meaning actions which involve some symbolic communication with the supernatural(invisible) world. As Bourdillon says, funerals comprise an important religious rite in any society. They concern the world of spirits, and they concern the integration of a community threatened by disruption of death.⁶¹ These funeral rites take the form of ceremonies(*eburu dance*) and sacrifices which underscore the reality of death, bring support and warmth to the bereaved members hence providing a transitional bridge to the new circumstances brought by death. The bereaved are provided also with socially accepted means of expressing grief through, for instance crying, running round the compound, shouting, throwing oneself down and tearing of clothing. It also enables those who were closely related a time to mourn as a means of showing their love and readiness to share in the deceased's pain if he/she were to live on. For instance a wife/husband may feel that she did not give all her/his love to the husband/wife while he/she was alive hence suffers a feeling of guilt. The elaborate time of mourning enables such a widow(er) to express her/his love in a socially recognized way.

Socially, there was a profound closeness of members of the family and clan during experience of death which no any other gathering could surpass. Even severe hatreds are forgotten during such moments attested by a saying, *chaga mwangane mwanchanere matatia*, meaning that there can be hatred between individuals in the whole of their life but during experience of death all is forgotten. The concern of the whole clan

⁶¹ . Ibid. pp. 360-361

helps to strengthen kinship ties thus giving a renewed sense of belonging even in the present society which seems torn apart by individualism.

Performance of burial and funeral rites among the Abagusii is not solely meant to incorporate the deceased into the world of the ancestors as such. A person's admittance into the world of the ancestors depends on how he lead his life while he was alive. The performance of the rituals is intended to ensure that the deceased will have a favourable relationship with the living members of the family. The rites were mainly meant to incorporate the deceased into the community as an ancestor. That is, ensuring that his spirit will be happy to watch and protect the family. There is a strong believe that if such rituals are not performed the spirit becomes hostile to the living members.⁶² Also, as Evan Zuesse, (Ritual Cosmos) says, rituals force the participant to recognize his/her built in limitations and how she/he tries to come to terms with them rather than trying to run away from them by ignoring/pretending that they are not there. Rituals also indicate that one's life is sanctified by participating in the ritual which is a divine activity. During the performance of ritual one is so linked to the divine reality which is not the same when he/undertakes everyday chores of life.⁶³

⁶² . Arnold Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, The University of Chicago Press, 1960, pp. 160-161 (English translation by Monika B. Vezedon & Gabrelle Caffee).

⁶³ Evan Zuesse, Ritual Cosmos, p. 239.

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AYIEKO'S FAMILY TREE.

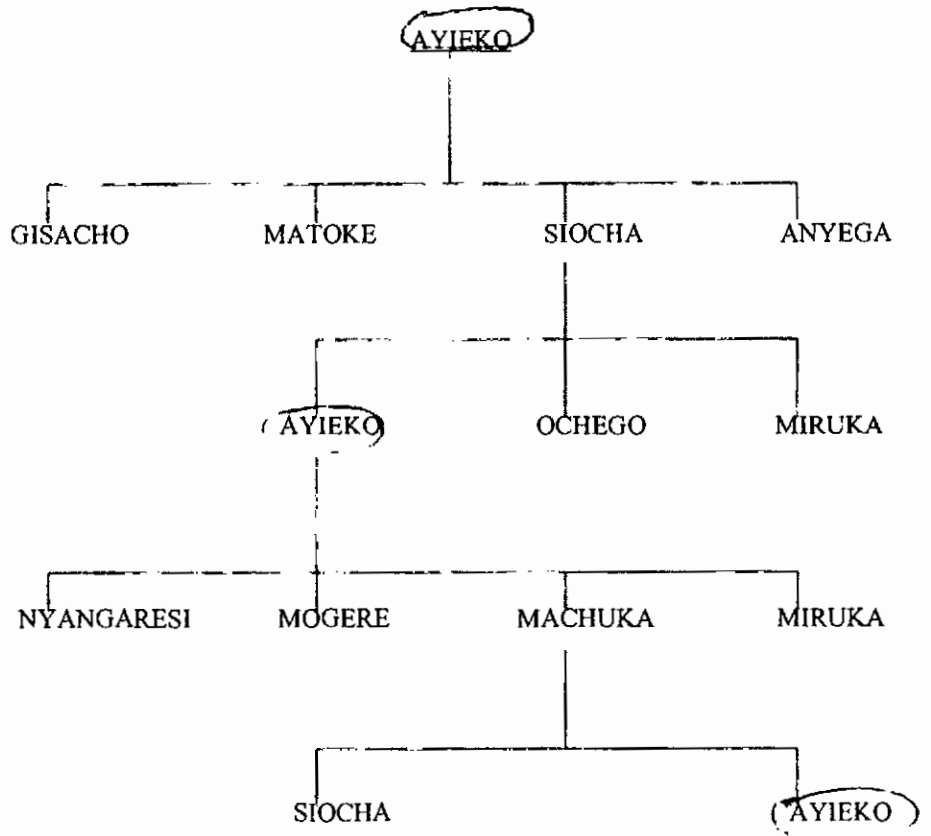


Fig. 1

ABAGUSII TRADITIONAL HUT

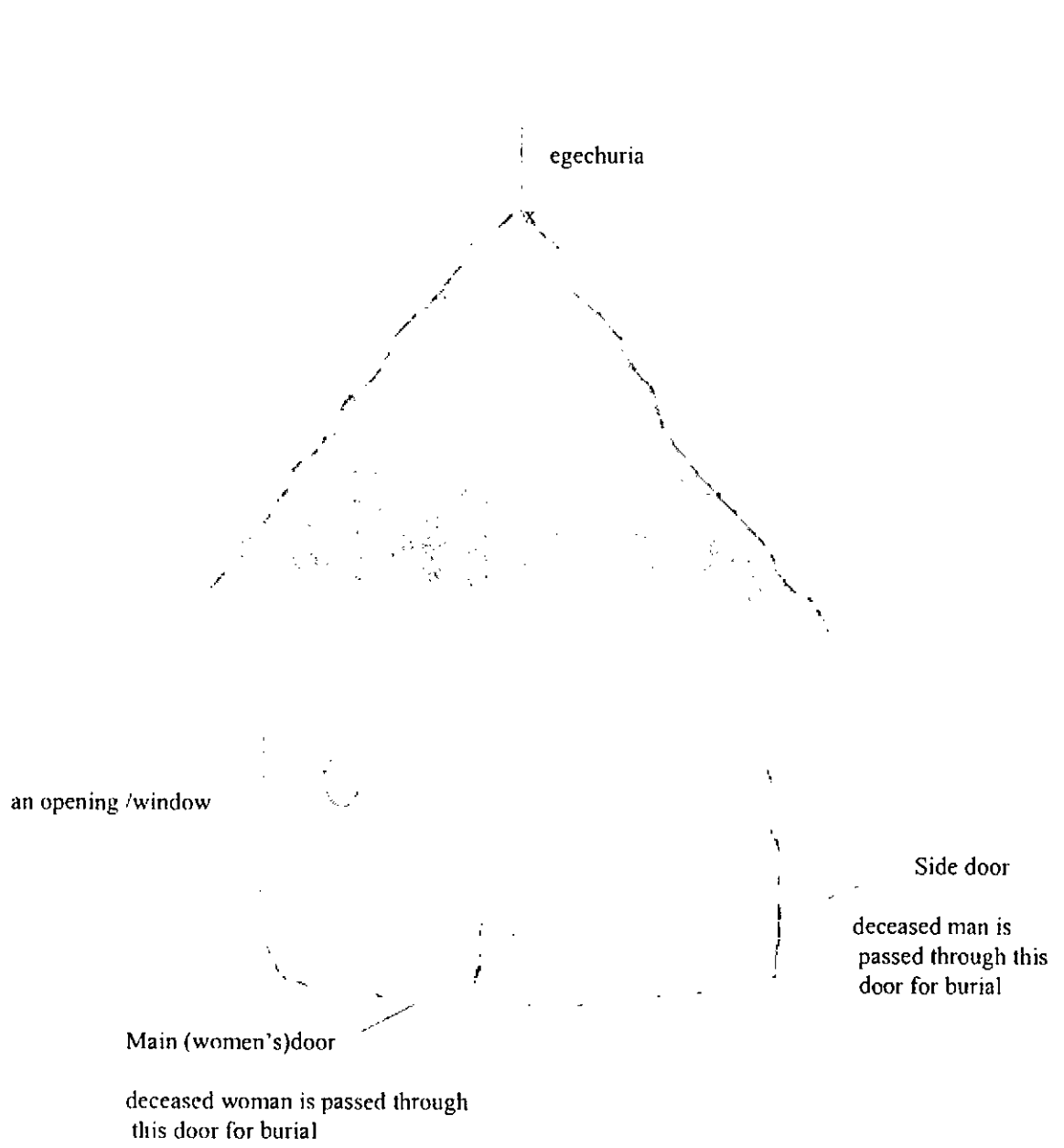
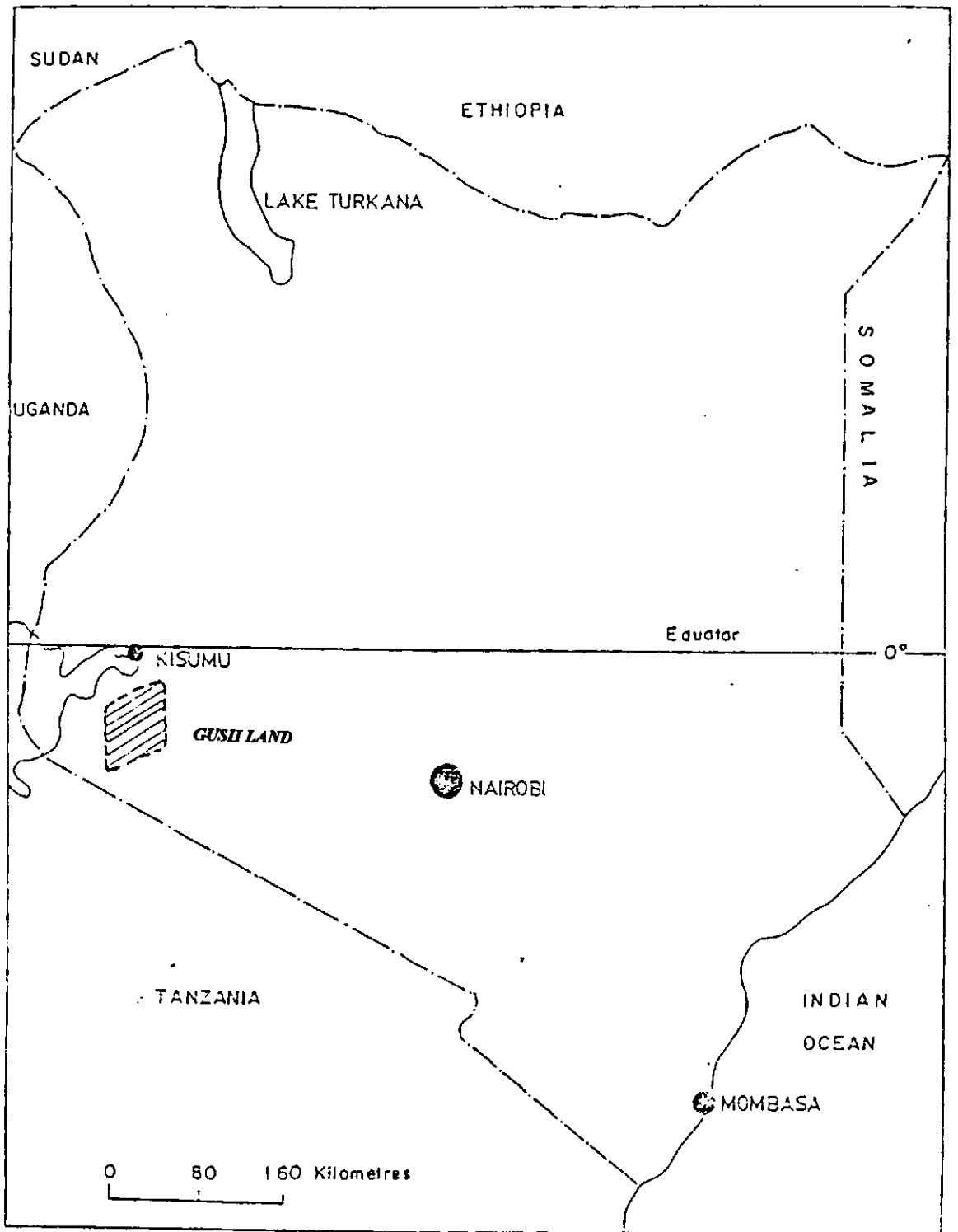


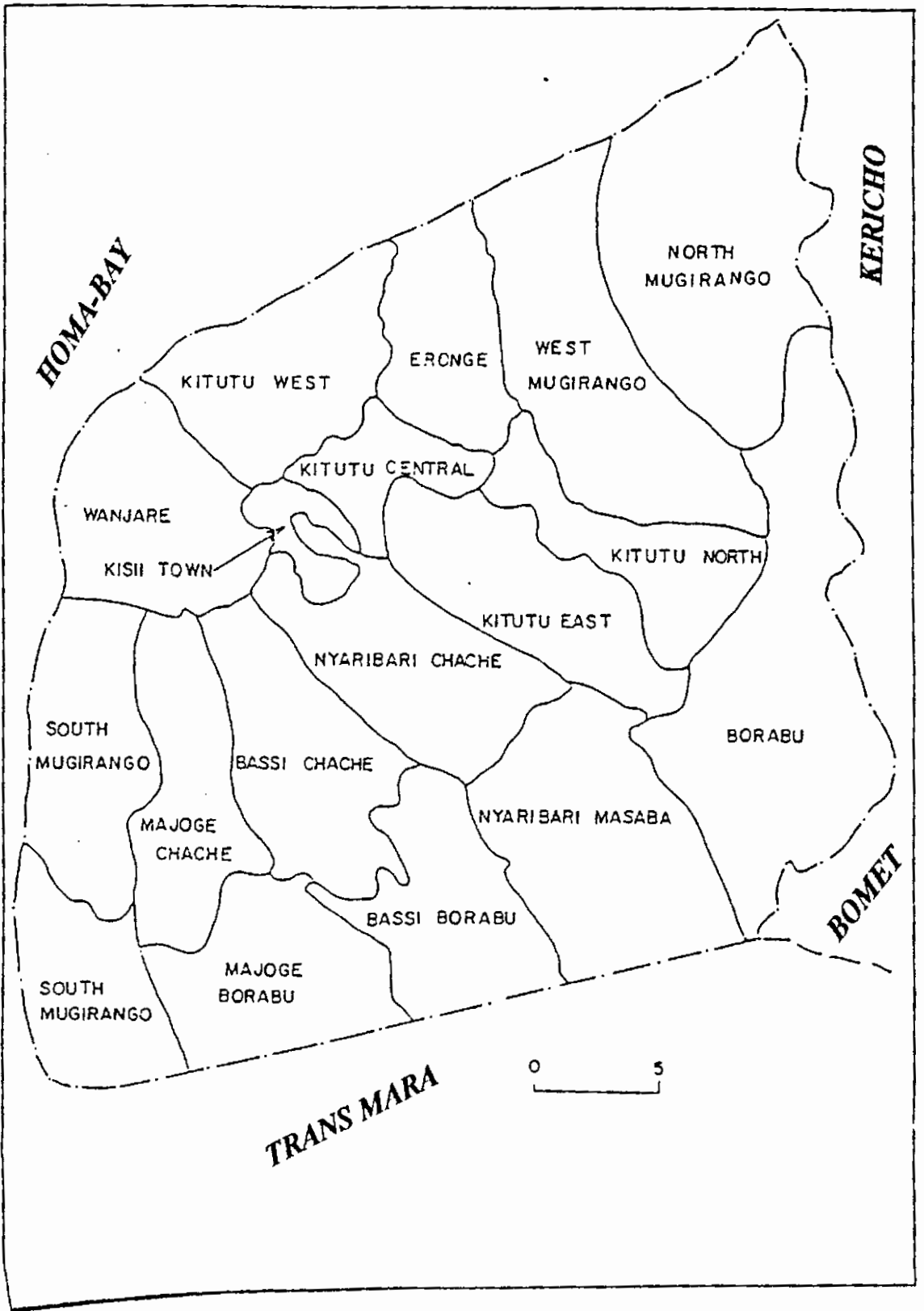
Fig. II

LOCATIONAL MAP OF GUSII LAND



Map 1

LOCATIONAL MAP OF ABAGUSII SUBDIVISIONS



Map 2

APPENDIX

LIST OF INFORMANTS

NYARIBARI

Ondieki Bisonga- 91
 Susan Kerubo- 80
 Matiabe Monyoro-76
 Maranga Isoe- 68
 Mose Karagacha- 67

BOBASI

Chrysanthus Oyuru- 68
 Elias Onsarigo- 72
 Margret Nyanchama- 81

BOGIRANGO

Zebedeo Omwange Ong'esa- 70
 Francis Masese- 72
 Ibrahim Ondari Magare- 73

BOMACHOGE

Isaac Nyandoro- 87
 Mogaka Mogunde- 82
 Biyaki Omwamba- 65

BONCHARI

Paulina Bogomba- 84
 Laurent Mokora- 95
 Alexina Bonareri- 76
 Raphael Ayieko- 61
 Zacharia Matoke- 41
 Selina Bonareri- 60

BOGETUTU

Yovinus Nyamari Moseti- 70
 Mogunde Keragori- 84
 Bonuke Mekubo- 63

GLOSSARY

Abagusii(Omogusii sing.): a group of people who claim their origin from a man called **Mogusii**.

Abasoyi: a type of witchcraft whose evil powers pass through the eyes and affects the skin of their victims.

Amasangi: death that results when one of the spouses has been involved in extramarital affairs

Ebibiriria: a type of witchcraft similar to **abasoyi** but affects small children only.

Ebirecha: evil spirits.

Ekegusii: the language spoken by **Abagusii**.

Gusii: area inhabited by Abagusii.

Matatu Culture: tendency of public service vehicle drivers to go against established highway code, especially on Kenyan roads.