

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONTEXT AND MEANING
OF THE POETRY WITHIN THE *BABUKUSU*
KHUSWALA KUMUSE FUNERAL RITUAL**

BY

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*An analysis of the
context and meaning*



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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university or for any other award.

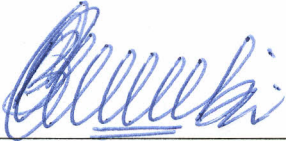


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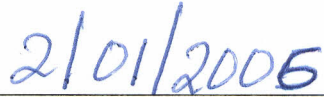


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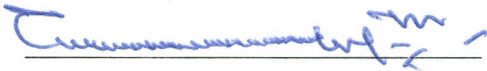
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents: Papa Michael Wekesa Musungu and Mayi Leah Nafula Wekesa, my brothers and sisters, Martha, my late uncle Victor Mukhwana, and above all God the Almighty.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

- a) **Context:** It refers to the condition under which an event occurs that makes it possible to interpret its meaning. In this study, the following elements constitute context:-
- i) Content of poems
 - ii) Structure of performance of poems
 - iii) Intention of poems
 - iv) Time and place of performance of the poems
- b) **Diction :** Use of language in a particular way to convey intended messages. In this case, it refers to the words clearly chosen by the ritual performer to refer to the *Babukusu* communal values and way of life.
- c) **Euphemism:** An expression that is mild or less direct than the one normally used to refer to something unpleasant. In this study, euphemism is looked at as the words that the ritual performer and community at large use in reference death.
- d) “*Khuswala kumuse*”: It’s a death ritual among the Babukusu community performed by a re-known ritual performer called “*Oswala Kumuse*”.

Oswala Kumuse is a man who must attain the following qualities:

- i) Be relatively tall (at least 5.8 feet)
- ii) Must not have a receding hair line
- iii) Have a first – born child who is a son
- iv) Have a circumcised grandson

This ritual is performed for a respected man who has an unquestionable social standing in the society.

e) **“Kumuse”**: Refers to an assembly of people, in this case, mourners. It is to this “Kumuse” that “Oswala Kumuse” directs his oration. The content of oration includes:-

- i) Inevitability of death
- ii) Causes of death
- iii) Meaning of death
- iv) Destination of the spirit of the dead
- v) History of the deceased
- vi) History of the *Babukusu* in general

f) **Meaning**: Refers to the message derived from the oration/poetry by *Oswala Kumuse*.

Refer to e) above.

g) **Opinion Leaders**: These are people: men and women who have vast knowledge about folkways of the *Babukusu*.

h) **Personification**: This is the assigning of human attributes to inanimate things and phenomenon like death. In this case, it refers to the adoption of human characteristics and potential by either living or non-living things.

i) **Repetition**: The recurrence of mood, idea, sound, word or line in a poem.

In this study, it refers to the recurrence of given words in a poem.

j) **Rites**: These are solemn rituals performed to mark transition from one stage of being to the other. For instance, in the event of death among the *Babukusu* ritual sweeping of houses after burial of the dead signifies the end of mourning and beginning of a new phase of life. This means that death is not an end. Rather, it is a part of the complex circle that is the life of the *Omobukusu*.

k) **Ritual**: Means a series of actions that involve the use of words, symbols and images to communicate significant information. Refer to example i) above.

ABSTRACT

The theme of death and dying in Africa has attracted a lot of studies mainly from anthropology, sociology and religious studies. Such studies include: Abrahamson (1951), Goody (1962), Sangree (1966), Mbiti (1969), Adeyemo (1979) and Gehman (1999). These studies have mainly focused on the causes of death, the meaning of death and the destination of the souls of the dead. In literature, few studies have been made on this theme. These studies have been broad covering many communities in Africa. Also, they have been general in the sense that they lack a specific guiding theoretical framework. These studies include: Finnegan (1970), P'Bitek (1974), Nandwa (1976) and Akivaga and Odaga (1982). It is in the light of the foregoing that this study comes up to study the poetry performed within the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* funeral ritual.

The study employs the ethno poetic theory to locate the poetry within the ritual to the community's setting. This theory provides an opportunity for the researcher to have a closer interaction with the community under study through field work. Such an interaction is vital in analysing the given poetry.

In field research the study used participation and observation, interviews as well as review of documents to collect data. Our research team attended and participated in four funerals from different parts of Bungoma District. The funerals attended were limited given that this ritual is restricted to a few elderly male members of the community. The people interviewed were selected through purposive and snow-balle sampling techniques.

The exercise set off with interviewing ten opinion leaders who were identified by ritual performers. These leaders then identified ten more people. The sample encompassed people from different parts of Bungoma district. The documents reviewed included textbooks, dissertations, articles in journals, government reports and review commentaries.

In this study, it is revealed that the poetry within the ritual of *khuswala kumuse* is disseminated during the funeral of elderly male members of the *Babukusu* community. It has also been established that the poetry performed within *khuswala kumuse* transcends the funeral context. This poetry educates the community on matters of life and death. In relation to these findings, the credibility of this study is established.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 BACKGROUND

This study is based on the observation that oral poetry is highly regarded in the African culture. This is revealed through the many different studies conducted in this field. Notable ones include: Finnegan (1970), lo Liyong (1972), p'Bitek (1974), Nandwa (1976), Kipury (1983), Chesaina (1991) as well as masters and Ph.D dissertations from different African communities. According to Finnegan (1970), different forms of poetry mark different occasions. There are children's poems composed and sung for or by children, wedding/marriage poems sung during weddings, elegiac poems meant for funerals, court poems performed for chiefs and their visitors, special purpose poems sung during war, work or hunting among others. The different forms of poetry are meant for specific functions. Children's poems for instance have entertainment and education as their main focus; elegiac poems console and educate the community on important matters relating to life and the hereafter. Court poems were meant to entertain, praise and cleverly caution the chiefs and their visitors. Special purpose poems for war, hunting among others mainly serve to encourage people out on war or hunting expeditions while at the same time psychologically tuning them to be ready to meet the enemy clan.

Among the *Babukusu* of Western Province of Kenya, one of the significant occasions when poetry is performed is in the event of death. In this community, there are general songs which are sung in any funeral, whether it is for a child or an adult. There are also poems performed specifically in the event of a death of an elderly male member survived by a grandson who has undergone the circumcision rite. These

poems which form the focus of this study are the most specialised and highly regarded of the entire corpus of the funeral poems. They are performed only in the context of the ritual of *khuswala kumuse*. The fact that the poems within the ritual of *khuswala kumuse* are accorded preferential treatment brings out the *Babukusu* as a predominantly male oriented community characterised with male chauvinism. In any given society, success or failure in life should not be tied to sex. This is the point that the *Babukusu* fail to appreciate when they treat men as superior members of the society who deserve the best of everything given that *khuswala kumuse* is a very important ritual, it should be performed in honour of both men and women who deserve respect in the eyes of the community. Failure to do so only renders the *Babukusu* as a community that has little respect for women

Through the ritual of *khuswala kumuse* and the poems performed therein, the *Babukusu* communicate the point that males especially those who have contributed to the perpetuation of life of the community by siring another male who in turn sires another male and prepares him for the important task of procreation through circumcision, are given preferential treatment.

Through incantations, chants and short songs performed in *khuswala kumuse* ritual, the *Babukusu* communicate their views concerning death. To begin with, death is seen as a human reality. It is also viewed as an inevitable but painful phenomenon. This view is shared by other African communities. Writing about death among the Luo of Nyanza Province of Kenya, Ong'ong'a (1978:31) observes: "death breaks the normal course of life and shakes the moral foundations of the society".

Ongonga's view echoes Mbiti when the latter notes: "death is a monster before whom man is utterly helpless. Relatives watch a person die and they can not help him escape death ." (Mbiti 1969:158).

The *Babukusu* however, believe in life after death. Given this belief, death is not seen as a complete annihilation of life. One continues to exist in a spirit form. Death is as a result considered a form of transition from one form of existence (physical) to another (spiritual). It is this understanding that gives the *Babukusu* consolation and hope when death strikes. The meticulous ritual of *khuswala kumuse* is as a result believed to be aimed at facilitating the said transition to the next world. Writing about *khuswala kumuse*, Makokha and *Kakai* (2003:85) note: "The performance of *kumuse* is a dramatisation of transition in which the deceased is believed to make an entry into the afterworld." Rituals within *khuswala kumuse* and the attending songs are then a form of escorting the spirit of the dead to the next abode.

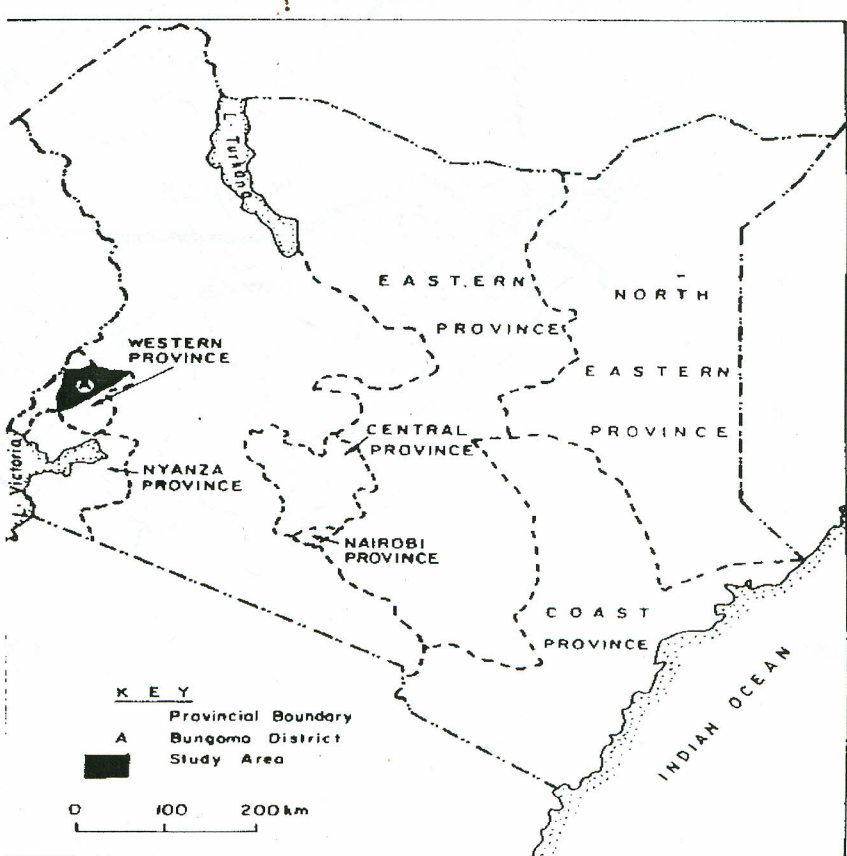
The poems in the event of *khuswala kumuse* are however not just about death and the dead, but they also address and communicate important values about the living. The history of the community is articulated as well as the values of forgiveness and good neighbourliness. These values encourage harmonious co-existence in the society. These poems are therefore not just about death, but also life.

To appreciate a work of art, however, calls for an understanding of the background of the people who produce it. This is due to the fact that a work of art is best analysed within a given context. Analysing a work of art without knowledge of its context may lead to a general misunderstanding or distortion of facts. For instance, it would be

difficult for a non-African to understand and appreciate the reason behind singing and dancing in African funerals. Equally, people from different African communities need to appreciate their cultural diversity as a prerequisite to an objective response to their works of art. Finnegan (1970:81) as well as Foley (1995:48-49) stress the significance of specificity in examining a work of art. It is as a result vital to understand the *Babukusu* community before studying their creative works. This would avoid unnecessary distortions and glossing over of significant details.

The *Babukusu* people inhabit Bungoma District of Western Province of Kenya (Fig. 1.1 and 1.2). A number of them have since independence spread into most parts of Trans-Nzioa District. The spread has been engineered by the need for fertile agricultural land as well as the sharp increase in population within Bungoma District.

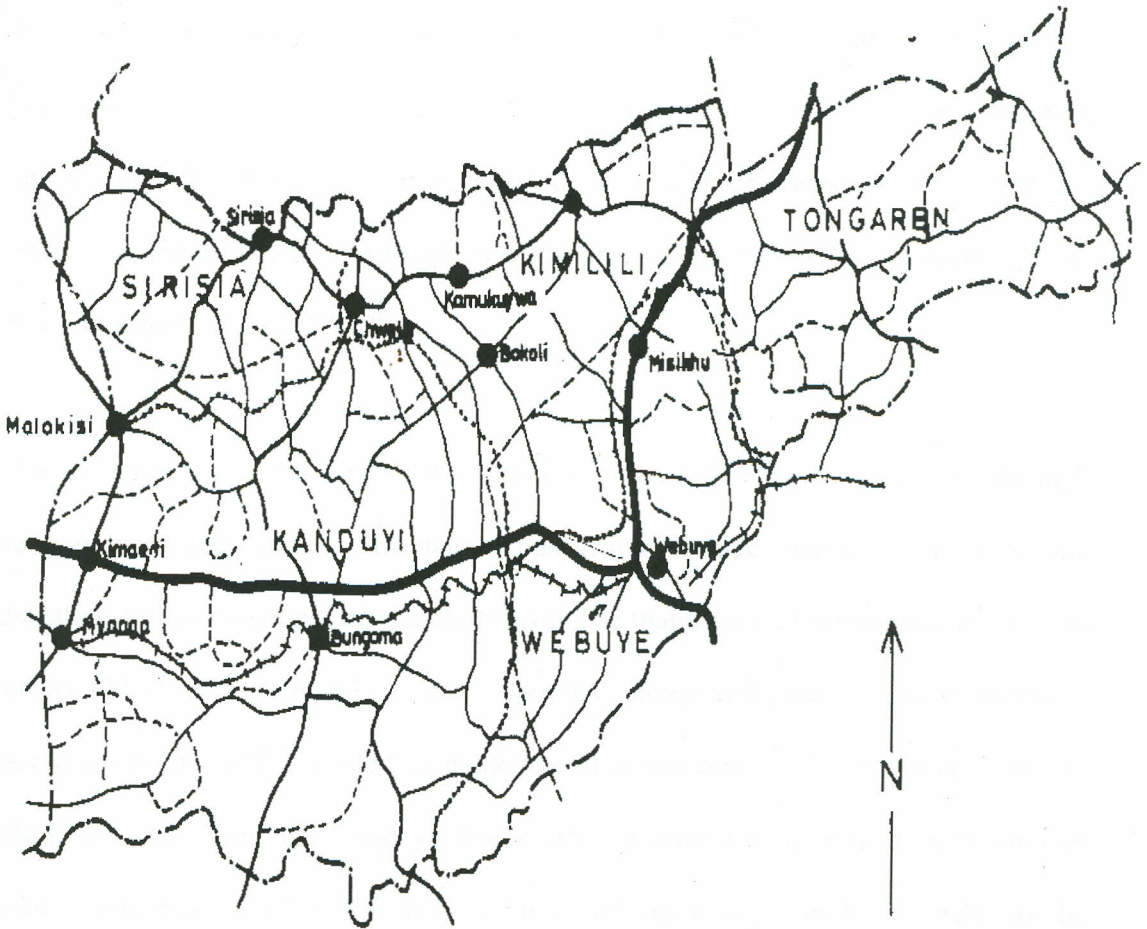
MAP OF KENYA



Map of Bungoma District

KEY

- District boundary
- Divisional boundary
- International Trunk Road
- Primary Road
- Secondary Road
- - - - - Rural Access Road
- KANDUYI Divisional Name
- , ■ Towns



Bungoma District covers an area of about 2063 square kilometres (District Commissioner's Office, Bungoma District: 1996). It borders the Republic of Uganda at the North Western point at Lwakhakha border point. It lies between latitude $0^{\circ}25.3$ North and $0^{\circ}53.2$ North and longitude $34^{\circ}24.4$ East and $35^{\circ}04$ East. The district has an altitude of 1200 metres above sea level in the West and 2000 metres above sea level to the north. The topography is generally low lying.

The district experiences two rainy seasons whereby the long rains are experienced between March and July while the short rains are from August to October. The mean annual rainfall is between 1250 to 1800mm – with the heaviest rains in April and May. The mean annual temperatures range from 21°c - 25°c . (District Development Plan, Bungoma District 1999).

The chief economic activity of the population is agriculture which is favoured by high temperatures and rainfall. The main crops grown include: maize, beans, sorghum, bananas, millet, sweet potatoes and cassava. The major cash crops are sugar cane and coffee. Most farmers also keep cattle, poultry, sheep and goats. Some commercial activities are basically located in markets and urban centres like Webuye, Kimilili, Bungoma, Tongaren and Kanduyi. These urban centres are dominated by businesses like wholesales, retail shops, bars, hotels, and bookshops. In his address to the audience, the ritual performer refers to these economic activities as he stresses their significance in ensuring a prosperous society. These activities form the bedrock of communal survival.

According to Makila (1982), the *Babukusu* are part of the *Abaluhya* community who belong to the Bantu group. About 200 clans are known to exist among the *Babukusu*. The clan units assume names of individual founders although in certain cases the names may be connected with particular events or trans-ethnic relationships.

The religion of the *Babukusu* is characterised by a belief in the Supreme Being, *Wele*, who is seen as the creator of the world and human beings. He seats at the apex of a kind of hierarchy of ancestral spirits who, like *Wele* himself, are the helpers and protectors of the living who are below them in the hierarchy.

The belief in the ancestral spirits is based on the concept that there is life after death and that physical death is not the end of existence. Among the *Babukusu*, the limits between life and death do not really exist. The dead continue to be part and parcel of their communities and they play important roles. The *Babukusu* traditional society, hence, consists of both the living and the dead.

The social structure of the *Babukusu* has the family as the basic social unit which makes up the inhabitants of a homestead. Each homestead comprises of a household head who is the husband, his wife or wives and children. Owing to the fact that the *Babukusu* community is patriarchal, important decisions are made by the head of the household. Inheritance, power and influence flow through the males of the community. The life of an individual is divided into a number of crucial stages which help to define the status and responsibilities of the individual. The first stage in life is birth. This stage is marked by the performance of many rituals. The most important ritual is the naming ceremony. As a mark of the belief in life after death, children are

named after their dead relatives. However, relatives who die before having their own children are not named after. Equally those who exhibited anti-social characteristics like sorcery are not named after. This practice emanates from the belief that the spirit of the dead indeed lives among the living and more specifically among children named after such departed relatives. According to Mukhwana interviewed on 12th nov.2003, people who die without bringing forth offspring should not be named after because the spirit would dwell among the children who may end up dying barren. The same reason is given for people who exhibit anti social characteristics. The *Babukusu* practice circumcision of the boys at puberty age. This rite marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood which demands moral uprightness and responsibility from the initiates. This ceremony as well paves way for an exposure to a more serious form of traditional education. Circumcision is preceded, accompanied and followed by a lot of tuition in all areas of life including sex education.

Marriage is the next stage after circumcision. This is an equally important stage marked by many rituals. It is an important stage in the sense that it brings two sub-clans together, the wife's and the husband's to establish the most important basic unit, the family.

Death marks the last stage of man's physical existence. Although it is a painful experience, the *Babukusu* do not see it as the final end of man. This stage is marked with numerous rituals. It is from this stage that the base of this study finds root. A discussion of this rite of passage is taken up in the rest of thesis.

Today, large proportions of the *Babukusu* profess either Christianity or Islam. Some of the common Christian denominations in Bungoma are: the Catholic Church, Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Friends Church, Salvation Army, African Divine Church as well as Anglican Church of Kenya.

Although, the *Babukusu* have experienced a number of changes due to western influence, the basic elements of this community and its culture have withstood the test of time. This is reflected in the *khuswala kumuse* funeral ritual which despite the major influence of religion in the area has survived. Perhaps the basic reason behind the survival of *khuswala kumuse* lies in its dynamism. For instance, during its performance, one does not fail to discern the role of Christianity. Quite often, the belief that the deceased has been summoned by *Wele*, God, is brought out. This serves to console the bereaved family and the entire community. The traditional oral poetry within this rite has also had a remarkable influence on the Christian funeral rites. For instance, in a situation where the deceased was a Christian all the Christian funeral rites are observed both at home and in the church. However the ritual of *khuswala kumuse* is eventually performed on the third day of burial. To this end, it can be argued that the *Babukusu* have not wholly embraced western ideologies.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study is aimed at studying the poetry within the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* ritual which has received little attention. It sets out to investigate the meaning of the oral poetry within *khuswala kumuse* through a comprehensive analysis of its context, content and meaning. It seeks to establish the rationale behind reserving this form of poetry to specific departed male members of the community. It is also aimed at

investigating the significance of context in determining the content and overall meaning of the poems performed in this ritual.

The overall effect of this study is to establish how the poetry performed within *khuswala kumuse* of the *Babukusu* contributes towards the understanding of death among the *Babukusu* community and by extension to the readers.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- a) To describe the context within which the poetry is performed.
- b) To collect and record different forms of oral poetry within the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* funeral ritual.
- c) To identify and discuss the poetic features within the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* funeral ritual.
- d) To analyse the meaning of the poetry within *khuswala kumuse*.

1.3 RESEARCH PREMISES

The proposed study was guided by the following assumptions.

- a) The *Babukusu* funeral poetry within *khuswala kumuse* ritual is dynamic and has pragmatic value.
- b) The nature of the social milieu influences the content of the poetry within *khuswala kumuse*.
- c) It is possible to construct the context and meaning of the poetry within *khuswala kumuse* without necessarily attending a funeral.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study aims at not only exploring the context within which the poetry performed in *khuswala kumuse* is realised but also analysing the meaning of this poetry. This stems from the realization that this area has not had much scholarly attention. The studies so far conducted in this area have not included the poetry part of this funeral ritual. Examples of such studies are: Karani (1991) and Makokha (1993). Karani for instance, set out to analyse the theatrical elements of *khuswala kumuse*. In this study, he completely overlooks the poetic part that forms the core of this ritual. Makokha, on a similar note examines this ritual from a rather generalised point of view by focusing on the moral ethics behind this ritual. It is therefore hoped that an analysis of the poetry performed in *khuswala kumuse* would be of benefit not only to the *Babukusu* but also to the general readers as well as literary scholars.

To the literary scholars, the study has provided a basis for similar and comparative studies in different communities. Such kind of studies, it is hoped, will be productive in that they would not be characterised by a lot of generalisations. The research findings from such studies can be built upon to provide generalisations in future studies.

The general reader on his part is bound to benefit from this study in that he/she will appreciate the significance of funeral poetry in general and the poetry performed within *khuswala kumuse*. This is because this form of poetry does not confine itself to talking about the dead but also the living.

1.5 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Several studies have been conducted in the field of funeral poetry in Africa. They include: Finnegan (1970), p'Bitek (1974), Nandwa (1976) and Alembi (2002). Except Alembi (2002), a close reading of these studies reveals that they are full of generalisations. Finnegan, for instance, draws her examples from the funeral poems of the Akan community of West Africa to generalise on funeral poetry in Africa. P'Bitek on the other hand uses the funeral poems performed in the event of a death of a man to generalise on funeral poems among the *Acoli*. Nandwa also falls victim to generalisations by analysing funeral poems among the *Abaluyia* of Western Province of Kenya from the *Itsukha* and *Kisa Luyia* sub-communities context. In doing so, she overlooks the fact that all the nineteen *Luhya* sub tribes look at death differently.

While the contribution of these scholars to knowledge in funeral poetry is appreciated, there is need to redress the problem of generalisations. The current study therefore offers a micro-level and specific study in that it focuses only on one genre of the *Babukusu* poetry namely, funeral poetry that is performed within *khuswala kumuse* ritual. This is in line with Finnegan (1970:80) who stresses the need to conduct studies on specific genres and communities in Africa.

The poetry performed in *khuswala kumuse* communicates valuable issues to the community in a language that is not easily accessible to everybody. Heavy symbolism and imagery is used. Moreover, through movements and other elements of performance, these issues are communicated. It is therefore crucial to capture, analyse, record or store them in a form that can be accessed by many people in the

community and any other person from outside the community who will be interested in it for specific information or academic purposes.

This study uses a methodology that ensures close interaction between the researcher and the community to be studied. This way, the researcher gets into the depth of the community and participates in its daily rhythm of life. This minimises the limitations including distortions that arise from quick and short interviews in literary research.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of African Oral Literature provided below is based on the material written in English that I was able to access. As a result, I do not claim to offer an exhaustive analysis of all the studies carried out on African Oral Literature. Further, these studies have been confined to the Sub-Saharan Africa.

The study of Oral Literature in Africa can generally be divided into three broad phases. These are: the pioneer phase, the phase of African elaboration and formulation and the contemporary phase characterized by consolidation and charting of the future.

The first phase which can be traced from mid nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century is characterized by a monopoly of the study of African institutions and cultures by anthropologists. According to Finnegan (1970:26), these scholars use Western theories like evolutionism, diffusionism, and functionalism to study African Literature.

Evolutionism, according to Finnegan (1970:29) treats African Literature in a derogatory sense as belonging to the "primitive" man. The western scholars thus define oral literature as the "study of survivals." Finnegan further observes that evolutionism and diffusionism refute creativity in African peoples. She argues that these theories mostly dwell on unverified assumptions and pseudo-history, hence impacting negatively on the study of African oral literature.

As Okpewho (1983) observes most of these theories ignore creativity in Africa. Most of the scholars in this era therefore seem to have a clear agenda. Their aim is to demonstrate that African literature is not actually literature. This way then, they would convince the Africans to accept their literature which according to these scholars is true literature.

The second phase in the study of African oral literature stretches from mid twentieth century to the 1980's. This period is characterized by African nationalism with Africans developing interest in their own literature. Scholars like lo Liyong (1972), p'Bitek (1974), Nandwa (1976), Mutswairo (1978), Babalola, (1981) among others championed this enlightenment.

The African scholars advocated for the introduction of oral literature in the African universities and schools. An example of these scholars' views was realised when oral literature was introduced at the University of Nairobi Curriculum in 1969. According to lo Liyong (1972) cited in Okombo and Nandwa (eds.) (1992:6), the reasons for this introduction were:

We decided that African oral literature form the core of a Literature Department in an East African University for the primary duty of any literature development is to illuminate the spirit animating a people, to show how it meets new challenges and to investigate possible areas of development and involvement.

Okot p'Bitek (1974) demonstrates the importance of appreciating the source of oral literature. In his study among the *Acoli* of Northern Uganda, he points out that different forms of poetry ranging from lullabies, love poems, religious poems, to funeral dirges derive meaning from their source communities. Nandwa (1976) studies oral poetry from the *Luhya* community. In this study, she discusses the functions of oral poetry from the *Luhya* community. Mutswairo (1978) on a similar note identifies and discusses basic functions of oral poetry. Oral poetry serves functions as teaching, warning, informing, entertainment and transmission of culture as well as advising and training. Babalola (1981) further discusses poetry in religious rituals. Among the Yoruba, for example, the devotees of *Ogun* use Poetry to win his favours.

Generally, scholars in this era have marshalled enough evidence to counter the view of the pioneer western anthropologists that no worthwhile literature exists in Africa.

The contemporary phase dates from the 1980's to the present. Recent trends in the study of oral literature are characterized by emphasis on fieldwork as a precondition to effective analysis of oral literature material. Scholars in this period have also emphasized the significance of context in appreciating and understanding oral literature. Scholars who fall under this category include: Kipury (1983), Kabira and

Adagala (1985), Chesaina (1991), Kabaji (1991), Karani (1991), Alembi (1992), Okhoba (1995) and Wainaina (1998).

Kipury (1983) in her book *Oral Literature of the Maasai* advocates for the preservation of the Maasai oral literature material which according to her research findings is an embodiment of the cultural values of the Maasai community. Kabira and Adagala (1985) in their book *Kenyan Oral Narratives* give a selection of oral narratives from different Kenyan communities. This study focuses on the aesthetic value that characterise Kenyan oral literature.

Kabaji (1991), on the other hand focuses on the meaning and aesthetics of the *Maragoli Folktale*. His study thrives on the fact that the *Maragoli Folktale* has survived in spite of the modern changes because of its dynamic nature and its applicability to the lives of the people in different times in history. Alembi (1992) analyses the style and social significance of the *Abanyole Children's Oral Poetry*. To achieve this, Alembi studies the performance style as well as the content of these poems. Okhoba (1995) further examines the style and meaning of the *Abamarachi children's Oral Poetry*. In her study, she investigates the meaning of children's oral poetry among the Abamarachi of Busia District in Western Province of Kenya. The study achieves this through the analysis of the poetry's content, performance and style.

Other scholars like Akivaga, et. al., (1982), Nandwa, et al., (1983), Lusweti (1984) and Kabira (1985) have been preoccupied with publication of school texts. These texts have been crucial in imparting oral literature among the youth in the African

context. The young people in schools have had an opportunity to encounter their oral literature material in written form making them appreciate oral literature. Given their nature, however, these texts have not been able to provide an exhaustive analysis of oral literature. In most cases, they are intended to meet the students' needs with regard to the examination requirements.

With regard to the study of funeral poetry in Africa, a few studies have been conducted. These include: Finnegan (1970), p'Bitek (1974), Nandwa (1976) and Alembi (2002). A close examination of Finnegan (1970) and p'Bitek (1974) reveals that these studies are too general. For instance, Finnegan discusses the poetry related to death in the whole of Africa. This poses a problem in that different people in Africa have different rituals related to death. It is important to note that Finnegan in fact uses a lot of examples from the *Akan* community to generalise on the funeral poetry in Africa. Okot p'Biek (1974) offers an equally general discussion on *Acoli* funeral dirges.

Nandwa (1976) discusses poems performed in the event of death in the whole of *Luhya* land. This discussion, though specific to the *Luhya* community does not offer a microanalysis of the interpretation of death form specific *Luhya* communities. Discussing funeral poetry the way Nandwa does may lead to glossing over or neglecting useful details on this important rite in Africa.

From the above discussion, it calls for micro-level studies in order to avoid generalisations. Alembi (2002) offers one such case of a micro-level study. In this study, he examines the perception of death among the *Abanyole* of Western Province

of Kenya as presented through *Okhukoma Poetry*. Alembi (2002:198) stresses the need for similar studies in specific communities. The current study is in line with Alembi's suggestion to conduct similar studies. This study is even more specific in that it only deals with one genre of funeral poetry namely, the funeral poetry performed in *khuswala kumuse* of the *Babukusu*.

There are a few studies carried out on *khuswala kumuse* ritual. Notable studies on this subject are Karani (1991) and Makokha (1993). These scholars, however, have not analysed the poetic part of this funeral ritual. For instance, Karani focuses on the theatrical aspects of *khuswala kumuse*. His study is as a result preoccupied with performance rather than the meaning from poetry point of view. Makokha on the other hand approaches the subject from a philosophical background. He emphasises on the need to use *khuswala kumuse* to inculcate moral uprightness in the community.

From the above, it is clear that this study differs from the earlier ones in that it sets out to analyse the context and meaning of the poetry performed in the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* funeral ritual. The study also examines why this practice is a preserve of funerals and particularly those of specific male elders of the society.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A study of oral poetry as in the case of this study lends itself to a number of theoretical possibilities. This can pose a challenge to the candidate who is still grappling with the vast theoretical landscape. The present study is guided by an important yardstick in selecting a theoretical orientation that links the research to literature and the gathering of empirical evidence. In brief, the theoretical orientation

in this study is based on the need to maintain a close problem-theory method linkage. In order to establish a suitable theoretical orientation, I had to sift through a number of theories among them performance studies which looked relevant to my research. For instance, I had to examine the basic characteristics of performance theory.

Bauman (1992:44) defines performance thus:

A specially marked mode of action, one that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of communication is to be understood.

In this sense of performance, the act of communication is put on display, objectified, lifted out of a degree from its contextual surroundings and opened up to scrutiny by an audience. Performance hence calls forth special attention to communication and gives licence to the audience to regard it and the performer with special intensity. It also makes one communicatively accountable in that it assigns the audience the responsibility of evaluating the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's accomplishment.

According to Foley (1995) performance provides a unique experience for transmitting the meaning of oral texts and it is defined by the culture and traditions of the performer and the audience. He observes:

To appreciate a work on its own terms, one must attend the event in the proper arena, the same place (with same limits) in which it has always been performed (Foley 1995:48-49).

In Foley's view, there is need for one to engage the work of verbal art in the context in which both tradition and individuals have located it. He stresses the significance of the arena as a conducive setting in which a variety of techniques are meaningfully and purposely employed to communicate the message.

The theory mentioned above has grown out of a long history of reflection and development in social sciences. Having closely examined the theory, it was realised that it could not fully address the research concerns of the proposed study. Given the nature of my research concerns, it was found necessary to adopt a theory which provides a link between the problem and the methodology. This basic consideration logically led to the adoption of ethno poetics as a theory for this study. Ethno poetics is suitable for this study because it accommodates the basic characteristics of performance which could have been an alternative theory for this study. This theory contains elements relevant to my research theme particularly the analysis of elements of performance and spoken word in oral funeral poetry. A discussion of the basic tenets and application of ethno poetics is provided below.

1.7.1 Ethno poetics

Ethno poetics sheds light on aesthetic and poetic structuring of oral art. Its practitioners treat the relationship between performance and text as a field of experimentation. According to Bauman (1992:82):

Texts that were taken down in the era of hand-written dictation and published as prose are reformatted and retranslated in order to reveal their poetic features as defined by such formal devices as initial particles, native pattern numbers, syntactic structures and parallelism.

An ethno poetic score follows the original timing of a recorded performance, dividing the words into lines according to the alternation of sounds and silences. Consequently, pauses create suspense by cutting across verse or sentence structures rather than coinciding with them. Bauman (1992:85) further observes thus:

Ethno poetics remains open to the creative side of performance, valuing features that may be rare or even unique to a particular artist or occasion.

There are two branches of ethno poetics championed by Dell Hymes on one hand and Dennis Tedlock on the other. The branch propounded by Dell Hymes emanates from the idea that works of verbal art are subtle organisations of lines and verses. These lines and verses according to Hymes cited in Anttonen (1994:113) are: "... organised in ways that are not only poetic but also a kind of rhetoric cultural schema for the organisation of experience".

Hymes further emphasises on the stylistic and grammatical features in order to find the formal poetic structure of a text. He argues that texts analysed are available only as written documents. Hymes and his followers are hence against mere observing and recording of life performances.

Dennis Tedlock on the other hand comes out strongly in favour of the patterning of the text which must also be shown in the transcription. He stresses the need for aural qualities which he considers central in the organisation of speech.

Writing on the importance of aural qualities; Mills (1991:25) observes:

--- They convey to the listener a sense of the relative importance of propositions and their connections with each other which are essential aspects of meaning.

Ted lock hence stresses oral nature of texts and the dependence of the organisation of texts upon lines. He gives priority to field work and argues that all material studies must have been collected and transcribed by the researcher.

Having presented the above two branches of ethno poetics, it should be observed that they do not present a collision of concepts. The two branches however, emphasise interrelated dimensions of ethno poetics which commutatively provide a richer analytical framework.

Whereas Hymes stresses written texts, Ted lock concentrates on oral performed texts. The latter stresses the need for fieldwork to provide a basis for rich interaction between the researcher and study community as well as the interpretation of oral texts. Consequently, the two approaches find convergence in looking for meaning irrespective of whether the texts are written or performed. Our current study adopted the two approaches because they complement each other in looking for meaning. These two approaches emphasise inter-related dimensions of ethnopoetics which cumulatively provide a richer analytical framework.

1.7.2 Applying ethno poetics

The ethno poetic perspective is applied in the current study to locate the poetry performed in the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* funeral ritual in the community's setting. Further, the approach provides an opportunity for us to interact with the community under study through field work. Through this interaction, we are able to penetrate, understand and analyse the kind of poetry that is performed in *khuswala kumuse*.

In the final analysis, through this theoretical orientation, the life world of the *Babukusu* as presented through the poetry in *khuswala kumuse* has been meaningfully revealed.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I elucidate how I collected and analysed the relevant information to address the research theme. The nature of the research problem and the theoretical orientation was a prerequisite to the selection of a relevant research design, sampling frame, methods of data collection and processing as well as methods of interpretation and presentation of data. I have described all these aspects in the subsequent sections. I have equally described the challenges encountered during my research work.

1.8.2 Research design

Our research design was governed by two main research purposes. The first was to describe the phenomenon of death as presented through the poetry performed in *khuswala kumuse* of the *Babukusu*. The second purpose was to interpret and analyse contexts, symbols, images and performances as a basis of arriving at the meaning of death as presented through the poetry within *khuswala kumuse*. Following the above research purposes our research design was descriptive and analytical.

1.8.3 Sampling frame

We adopted a combination of purposive and snow-balle sampling techniques. We started the exercise by inquiring from ten opinion leaders in the village. These leaders were identified by the known ritual performers. These opinion leaders then identified others who offered information on the ritual of *khuswala kumuse*. In total twenty adults and four ritual performers were interviewed. The sample involved persons from villages found in different parts of the *Babukusu* community. The sample encompassed people of different socio-economic status, religion, sex, education, age and trade. The study analysed twelve poems which were the most commons ones in all the four funerals attended. These poems were selected because of their diversity an dynamism. It was found that they handle contemporary issues without necessarily alienating the *Babukusu* from their cultural practises.

1.8.4 Methods and instruments used in data collection.

In our research, we used the following methods to collect material on the poetry within *khuswala kumuse*: participation and observation, interviews and review of documents.

As already pointed out in our theoretical orientation, Dennis Tedlock stresses the need for fieldwork in order to derive meaning from any given work of art. By implication therefore, the researcher has to get into the depth of the community and participate in its daily rhythm of life.

It is within this context that we employed participation and observation to collect the poetry within *khuswala kumuse* and any other complementary information to aid in the analysis and interpretation of the data.

The sample involved persons from villages found in different parts of the *Babukusu* community. The sample identified encompassed people of different socio-economic status, religion, sex, education (formal, non-formal), age and trade.

The information from respondents was through oral interviews using a set of questions. Notes were taken in the process of interviews. Tape recorders were used to record the discussions in order to complement the notes taken. In the review of documents, we examined both published and unpublished documents in order to get an interpretation and analysis of the poetry within *Babukusu khuswala kumuse*. The documents examined included: textbooks, government reports, dissertations, monographs, articles in journals and review commentaries as well as anthologies of oral poetry.

These documents were secured from libraries, individuals and institutions. Throughout the entire research period, we continuously searched for the relevant documents. This was achieved through visiting libraries as well as writing and contacting a wide range of persons and institutions. The main sources used included: The Kenya National Archives as well as main libraries in Kenyan universities.

1.8.5 Data analysis

In data analysis, we critically read through and identified messages on death in particular the causes and meaning of death. Data collected from fieldwork was processed. The information recorded on tapes was transcribed then translated from *Lubukusu* to English. The notes taken during in-depth field interviews, observations and participation were examined to identify the major issues. The assembling together of all the information collected assisted in carrying out analysis and interpretation.

The analysis and interpretation of the poetry within *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* involved the informants as well as our own analysis of the funeral situations and the accompanying poetry in *khuswala kumuse*. It also depended on documentary sources available on this subject. To enhance the validity and reliability of the information collected and analysed, the initial draft of the research report was discussed by a number of persons familiar with the poetry within *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* and community affairs to verify details, words, concepts, events among others. Through this interaction, comments were made and suggestions given on the validity and reliability of the analysis made and presented. The overall interpretation however, remained our responsibility drawing on the various criteria.

1.8.6 Challenges encountered during field research

A number of difficulties were encountered during field work. Given the sacredness that characterise the ritual of *khuswala kumuse*, there were cases of suspicion among some respondents. This prompted the researcher to clearly explain the purpose of the study. Some respondents out rightly refused to respond to interview questions wondering what a graduate student would want to do with oral traditions of a

community. However, most of the respondents were co-operative and they provided the researcher with vital information.

Other problems encountered were lack of adequate funds to cater for transport and accommodation. The researcher had to walk long distances on a number of occasions to reach respondents.

Chapter five provides a summary and conclusion on major findings. Appendices and selected bibliography are provided at the end of the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 THE CONTEXT OF KHUSWALA KUMUSE POETRY

2.1 Introduction

In defining context the study focuses on a number of components. These include: content of the poems, structure of performance of the poems, intention of the poems, time and place of performance of the poems as well as the audience. This chapter answers two of our study objectives which are: to describe the context within which the poetry within the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* is performed and to collect and record different forms of poetry within the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* ritual.

Before focusing on our study objectives, it is necessary to delve into the origin of the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* ritual. There are different accounts surrounding the origin of this ritual.

2.2 Origin of the ritual

According to Kilwake interviewed on 10th October, 2003, the ritual of *khuswala kumuse* owes its origin to a *Bukusu* elder called Mwambu. This is one of the earliest patriarchs in the community. Mwambu is said to have performed his first *kumuse* at *Esibakala* (present day Ethiopia) after receiving a divine revelation from God. It is reported that it was after the burial one male elder when a spirit (*kumusambwa*) overwhelmingly possessed Mwambu and directed him to counsel people at the funeral. This set in motion the practice which came to be known as *khuswala kumuse*.

Another account propounded by Wanyonyi Manguliechi, a leading ritual performer traces the origin of *khuswala kumuse* to Maina wa Nalukale, one of the earliest seers among the *Babukusu*. In this account, Maina received divine calling through a strange incident. It is believed that Maina, while looking after livestock, saw a sacred stick (*esimbo ye bukambisi*) descending from heaven. This stick, it is said, was earmarked for Maina in the sense that despite his young age, the elders agreed to his possession of the stick. An opportunity to test Maina's leadership came when one day, one of his sons engaged in a sexual affair with his stepmother.

Maina was prompted to summon elders from the *Babukusu* and neighbouring communities for a public address. In this gathering, he received diverse views from different communities. For instance, whereas the Sabots and the *Iteso* agreed that Maina's son had to be killed for the abomination, the *Bamasaba* of Uganda adopted a lenient stand by proposing that a cow had to be slaughtered instead of killing the boy. When Maina rose to speak he vilified both the *Iteso* and *Sabaots* for their militant stand against his son. However, he praised the *Bamasaba* and prayed for their success in general. Whereas the Sabots and the *Iteso* were to remain in constant feuds with their neighbours, the *Bamasaba* were destined to lead a simple and prosperous life.

Maina later deserted the *Babukusu* community for their non-committal attitude towards his calamity. It is believed that he later settled among the Agikuyu of central province of Kenya. According to Manguliechi interviewed on 2nd Jan., 2004, the practice of *Khuswala kumuse* started when Maina addressed people of different communities. It was later infused into the funeral of an elderly member of the community since such a death provides a rare opportunity for people to meet. During such moments, Manguliechi notes that the ritual performer has an opportunity to

provide a clear direction to the bereaved family, the *Babukusu* as well as the entire society.

According to our respondents, it was found necessary to have the practice of *khuswala kumuse* in the context of a funeral because this provides a neutral ground for people of all walks of life to meet. This is because death among the *Babukusu* is regarded as a communal rather than an individual affair. Consequently, by assigning the ritual of *khuswala kumuse* to the funeral context, it is hoped that crucial matters that are brought out by the ritual performer on this occasion will reach a diverse audience.

2.3 The audience

The origin notwithstanding, it is commonly acknowledged that the practice of *khuswala kumuse* and the poetry there in has specific functions for the audience and the *Babukusu* community in general. The *Babukusu*, like many other African communities have rites of passage in life. These rites which are more often than not accompanied by rituals include birth, initiation, marriage and death. Whereas the first three rites of passage are marked with jubilation, death is characterised with sadness and uncertainty. This is because the *Babukusu* have not come to terms with the inevitability of death. One of our respondents, Mukhwana interviewed on 13th Dec. 2004, points out that death is a cruel monster which threatens the peaceful social order in the society by robbing us off our loved ones. Her views are generally supported by most members of the community. This view is further supported by the interpretation of death from other African communities. For instance, writing about death among the Luo of Kenya, Ongong'a (1978:1) observes: "the fact that death can

strike at any time without choice makes it altogether a dreaded event. In the face of death everyone is equal and powerless.”

From Ongong'a's observation, it can be deduced that death among the *Luo* is a dreaded phenomenon because it creates a vacuum in the society.

Alembi (1998) equally presents death as an unwelcome encounter in the lives of the *Abanyole* community. Writing about the funeral poems among the *Abanyole*, Alembi (1998:42) points out: “they express bitterness towards death for robbing them off their members, condemning the bad omen that cause death.”

To this end, it can be argued that the *Babukusu* and many other African communities indeed look at death as an unwelcome phenomenon. People express bitterness at the cruel hand of death because it threatens the social order by snatching them their loved ones. The meticulous rituals that are performed in the event of death are as a result meant to cleanse the society of the destructive powers of death. *Khuswala kumuse* is one such important rite. This ritual is performed by a ritual performer, a sage, held in high esteem among members of the community. This person is considered to possess super human characteristics, thus the *Babukusu* take his word for gospel truth given that his powers, are believed to come from the super natural. Interviews carried out with Manguliechi and Kilwake interviewed on 2nd Jan, 2004, reveal that the two ritual performers owe their powers to the supernatural. For instance, at an early age of ten years, Manguliechi had exhibited extraordinary oratory skills. He could engage elders in a discussion and he had developed a personality that could not be compared to his age mates. Consequently, divine intervention was sought and it was established that he was destined to become a ritual performer. Kilwake, on the other hand, was taken ill for years and no medicine could cure his ailment. However, it was surprising that

he could equally talk a lot despite the sickness. Just like Manguliechi, he was to become a ritual performer.

2.4 The ritual performers

The practice of *khuswala kumuse* is a privilege of a few earmarked individuals. It is however, worth noting that the ritual performers must meet certain criteria before they qualify for actual performances. The ritual performers interviewed as well as our respondents like Mzee Musa Yohana, Joseph Mulati and Walela Wekulo seem to agree that *khuswala kumuse* is an important funeral ritual hence the performers must be people who are acceptable to the society. Some of the obligations that should be met by the ritual performers include the following:-

- a) They have to be married men
- b) They need to have at least a grandson
- c) Be versed in the Babukusu culture
- d) Possess good oratory skills
- e) Be morally upright

The above are some of the basic qualities necessary for one to qualify to become a communal ritual performer thus *omuswali kumuse*.

The *Babukusu* insist on marriage and procreation as a measure of maturity and wisdom hence the need for a ritual performer who has attained the two qualities. The emphasis on one having grand children for him to perform this ritual further points to the high regard the *Babukusu* hold the elderly male members of the society. It is believed, that age, in most cases goes hand in hand with wisdom. This view appears to be shared by a North Yemen tribe. Writing about poetry as a cultural practice in

Yemen, Caton (1990:53) observes: “before a man marries and has children, he is considered to be too immature to speak out on topics relevant to the village, the tribe and the nation.”

Perhaps the position the *Babukusu* and other communities have taken with regard to marriage and children is rather ineffective in determining an individual's worth. In the contemporary society, it is common to encounter quite resourceful personalities who may be relatively young in age. It will be as a result an unfortunate thing to deny such resourceful men and women a chance basing on age.

The ritual performer, too, is expected to be versed in the cultural aspects of the *Babukusu* community. This is because in most cases his role in *khuswala kumuse* transcends talking about the dead. Quite often, he delves into the cultural practices of his community. Our respondent, Kilwake gives the following as one of the poems in reference to the *Babukusu*.

Efwe Babukusu khwama Esibakala

We the *Babukusu* came from Esibakala

Efwe babana be lirango lie enjofu

We are children of the thigh of an elephant.

Efwe sianja barende

We the lovers of strangers

Bana befwe chino chindalo chimbi

My siblings these are bad days

Khihoya khwaba ne bulala nga kamake

We should be as united as termites

Khulekhe likhalikha

Let's stop jealousy

Manya we mungaki akhuwekho chisuku

The one above may give us two days''

Chibili

From the above poem, the ritual performer mentions the origin of the *Babukusu* which is *Esibakala* or present day Ethiopia. At this point it is important to point out the different dimensions taken by the ritual performers in relation to the historical accounts of the *Babukusu*. Given that the *Babukusu* are part of the larger Bantu, it is clear that like all the other Bantu tribes, they must have originated from the Niger Congo in West Africa. To this end, the ritual performer misses the point. He does not reliably inform the audience about the origin of this community.

He goes ahead to refer to the community as children of the thigh of an elephant. Just the way the elephant is strong, the *Babukusu* feel they are equally strong since they were able to overshadow and even assimilate some minor tribes en route their migration path to the present homeland. To date, this community still nurses the feeling of being a superior tribe. A *Bukusu* man regardless of his social status in the community always refers to himself as the 'thigh of the elephant'. This feeling helps in strengthening the unity and identity of the *Babukusu*.

The ritual performer also points out that the *Babukusu* love strangers. To this end, the *Babukusu* are depicted as people who adore strangers and detest fellow tribesmen. This is perhaps due to petty jealousies and rivalry among members of the community. No wonder in the event of death, the cause is always attributed to an enemy who is probably jealous of the deceased. From the above poem, it is important that the ritual performer reminds the audience to shun such petty jealousies and rivalry so that God may reward them. By invoking the name of God in ensuring longer life, the fear of death as being caused by an enemy is down played. People have to accept the reality that with or without an enemy the ability to exist lies in the hands of God.

The *Babukusu* equally show their respect to orators. Good oratory skills are necessary for the ritual performer who has to engage a diverse audience during a funeral context. Of even greater significance is the need for the ritual performer to be morally upright hence a role model in the society. Any ritual performer who is viewed as immoral stands a risk of losing respect in the eyes of the public. Immorality in this case entails engaging in extra-marital sexual relationships and other anti-social characteristics like theft, sorcery among others. In Manguliechi's view, on the eve of *khuswala kumuse*, he "does not go near his wives." This according to Kiwanuka interviewed on 14th December, 2003, brings out the communal values of the *Babukusu*. It is believed that sex contaminates hence the ritual performer should not go before people and God unclean. Perhaps it is imperative to observe that in traditional community, one would not have sex when going to war. The ritual performer is like a warrior thus he should abstain from sex on the eve of *khuswala kumuse* as it is believed that sex contaminates one. It is unacceptable for the ritual performer to go before ancestors and God in performance unclean. He would risk being destroyed by these powerful forces that also gave him the powers to be a ritual performer.

Having observed that the ritual performers' powers are generally drawn from the supernatural, in addition to elucidating their criteria, it is necessary to mention that these ritual performers indeed employ the use of literary terms and techniques in their address to the audience. The overall effect of this is what will constitute our analysis in our subsequent chapters.

2.5 Types of *kumuse*

There are two other types of *kumuse*; the sitting and the standing. In this study, focus is on the walking type which is the most prestigious of the three. However, there is need to shed light on the other two types.

To start with, the sitting type of *kumuse* is performed in the event of a death of a respected woman. In view of Mukhwana interviewed on 2nd Jan, 2004, a respected woman is one who has given birth to children and is survived by grand children. However, this woman must not exhibit anti social characteristics like adultery, theft, laziness among others. This is yet another pointer to the emphasis that the *Babukusu* placed on children and positive living. This emanates from the belief that children guard against annihilation of life through death. This view will be analysed in our later chapters. The deceased should also have exhibited virtues like hard work, generosity, selflessness among others. Consequently, on the second day of her burial, the ritual performer is called upon to address people. In such a situation, the ritual performer, who should be relatively young in the profession, takes a sit as he addresses the audience. This occasion is normally observed by close family members and relatives.

The other type of *kumuse* entails the ritual performer taking a standing posture throughout his address to the audience. This type is performed when a male member dies when he is either relatively young or his father or elder brother(s) is still alive. In this case the deceased is not honoured with the most elaborate and prestigious type of walking due to the belief that doing so is likely to cause harm or even death to the remaining senior members of the community. Perhaps this belief emanates from the

perception that an individual who is survived by a father or elder brothers is relatively young hence he has not fully participated in the noble goal of procreation.

It is worth noting that *khuswala kumuse* is not performed in the event of a death of a man who has no children. Challenged to explain the reason behind this gesture Sikuku a ritual performer retorts:

"Bano babana nibo. Berire lulwibulo."

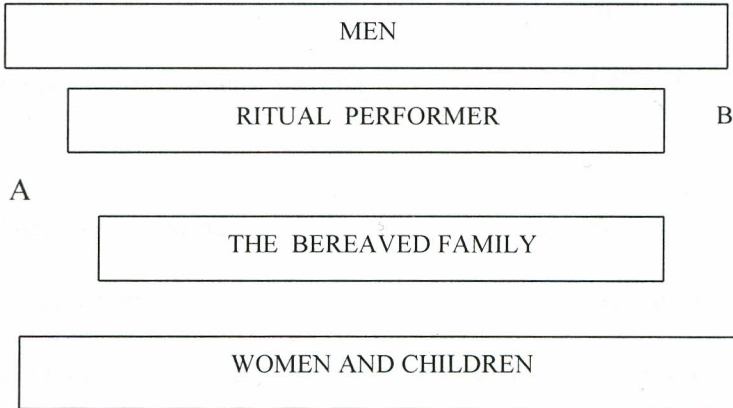
"These are children. They have discontinued the lineage."

Failure to bring forth children is likened to exterminating the family lineage. This explains the extent to which the *Babukusu* regard children. As a result, any member of the community who fails to bring forth children is a disgrace to the community hence he should not be honoured with full funeral rites. Alembe (2002:91) shares this high regard for children among their *Abanyole* when he observes: "Children keep alive a people's lineage."

2.6 The *khuswala kumuse*

In the event of a death, of an elderly and respected male member of the community, a ritual performer known in the community as "*Oswala kumuse*" is informed by relatives to the deceased man. The ritual is normally conducted on the third day after burial. On the material day, the bereaved family, relatives and other mourners are anxious as they wait for the ritual performer who has to find them already seated. The sitting arrangement is in such a way that men sit in one line, the bereaved family in another line while women and children sit behind the bereaved family. This is in the homestead of the deceased man. Consequently, the ritual performer addresses men and women, both young and old.

2.7 Sitting arrangement



The ritual performer moves from point A to B in his address to the audience.

From this sitting arrangement, it is clear that men occupy the front seats next to the ritual performer while women and children sit on the ground behind the bereaved family. This kind of arrangement clearly depicts the *Babukusu* as a society that encourages gender disparities. The fact that men are given preferential treatment to women even in situations which call for communal unity is worrying. By insisting on women sitting on the ground together with children is even worse. Women in this community are regarded as being no better than children, thus they have no role to play in matters of communal interest. It is high time this misconception about women got discarded as it is detrimental to societal development and prosperity.

An interview with Manguliechi on 13th Dec, 2003, attests to the fact that women are indeed inferior to men. For instance, when our research team wanted to establish why women have to sit on the ground and why they are never ritual performers, he explained:

<i>Khale omundu mukhasi kenyokha Musikhasio</i>	Long ago a woman rose to speak in a gathering
Noli kanja khuloma esachi yatikha	Upon her address the calabash broke
<i>NeBabukusu baloma bali</i>	So the <i>Babukusu</i> said that
<i>Khukhwama luno</i>	Henceforth
<i>Omundu mukhasi saloma ebweni we babandu ta</i>	A woman will never talk before people

From the above, Manguliechi uses deep imagery to demean women. The breaking of the 'calabash' in this case has been used to refer to women's menstrual cycle. From Manguliechi's words, women are people who cannot even manage simple biological aspects like being aware of their menstrual cycle. Consequently they should not be allowed to preside over any forum where their male counterparts are present so as to avoid embarrassment.

The ritual performer arrives in the homestead of the deceased as early as nine o'clock. in the morning to address an attentive audience. The "*Oswala kumuse*" dressed in the traditional colobus monkey skin known as "*ekutusi*" a traditional hat, "*ekhorero*", a royal staff ("*esimbo*") and royal beads "*chisimbi*" goes ahead to address the audience as soon as he arrives.

2.8 The regalia

It is necessary to elucidate the implication of the regalia that the ritual performer puts on. To start with *ekutusi*, the royal dress is the main dress made in form of an overcoat. It is made from the skin of a colobus monkey. The colobus monkey is

known to live for many years hence it symbolises longevity of life. The ritual performer as a result wishes or symbolises long life for the deceased as well as the living. The ritual performer wishes the deceased long life because it is believed that life continues in the world of spirits after physical existence in the world. To the living, he wishes them a long and prosperous life.

Lichabe and *enjabasi* are both armlets. *Lichabe* is worn on the arm just above the elbow while *enjabasi* is worn around the wrist. Both are made from the elephant tusk. The elephant is generally known for its strength and long life. If it is tamed, it has friendly behaviour. The two armlets hence symbolise long life, strength and prosperity.

The ritual stick (*Esimbo*) is extracted from different tree species. The most common one is the dreaded tree called *lukhendie*. People believe this tree has extra ordinary force and if one points it at a person, the person can suffer a misfortune or even die. This stick, it is believed guards against evil. An evil person cannot handle it. It therefore repulses evil forces in the community. The ritual performers as such are expected to be morally upright people. This stick is therefore a protective symbol not only to the ritual performer but also the entire community.

It is thus an important protective instrument by which the ritual performer arms himself with to confront and neutralise the evil forces brought by death.

Ekhoroero, the cap, worn by the ritual performer is made from beads collected from the sea/ocean. The *Babukusu* believe that riches and prosperity are found in the sea. Consequently, by putting on this cap, the ritual performer stands for riches and

prosperity to the society. The Babukusu like many other communities have high regard for riches. A man's riches is valued in terms of children, livestock, land and even wives. Having many children is considered a sign of wealth because they are apparent heirs to their parents and they are the ones to continue the family lineage. The *Babukusu* however, regard children differently. Both boys and girls are important in their own respects. Boys are judged with continuing the family lineage through procreation hence they are the ones to inherit family property. Girls on the other hand are valued in the sense that in their marriage, their parents will be rewarded in terms of bride wealth. Either way therefore, children among the *Babukusu* are regarded as important assets. This explains why most men resort to polygamy in case they fail to bear children with their first wives.

Livestock, land and wives are equally regarded as forms of wealth since property ownership is bestowed in men.¹ A man who owns a lot of livestock, land and has many wives is considered rich.

By putting on *ekhorero*, the ritual performer, by inference, is reminding the audience and the entire society on the need to strive and acquire riches while on earth as this is a sign of prestige.

It is evident from the foregoing that the regalia worn by the ritual performer is not a mere decoration. This regalia carries a deeper meaning to the bereaved family, the audience and the entire community. It also reveals the values of the community.

Picture showing Manguliechi in his ritual regalia



2.9 The content

In most cases, the performer sets off his oration by chanting "*Lifwa lino! Liliefwe likhale!*" literally meaning death has been with us since time immemorial. This statement serves to reassure the audience on the reality of death. The performer then implores God known in the community as "*Wele*" to receive the deceased.

At a funeral of John Waswa, 71, in Chwele of Bungoma District, Patropa Kilwake began his oration thus:

<i>Wele ewe niwe khabumbi</i>	God you are the creator
<i>Bona luno walangile omundu</i>	Today you have summoned your person
<i>Khusaba omwakanile</i>	I implore you to receive him.
<i>Baramile obawe bunyindafu</i>	Give the bereaved family courage

From the above, the ritual performer informs the community that death is caused by forces beyond human comprehension. It is believed that death is normally caused by the creator of all creatures who is God and that is why the ritual performer asks Him to receive the deceased and give the bereaved family courage.

By re-assuring the audience and the entire community about the reality and the mystery surrounding death, the ritual performer plays the role of a public comforter. To achieve this goal, Kilwake went to greater heights of giving the history of the *Babukusu* in general and the deceased in particular. He talked about the way the community *Babukusu* moved from their ancestral home in *Esibakala*, modern Ethiopia to the present home. As he did this, he was reminding the audience that all those who lived before them had died, hence the need for every individual to look forward to death as a reality.

The following is yet another example of a short poem from Manguliechi, our leading ritual performer interviewed on 30th Dec. 2003..

<i>Bana befwe oyuno kakonile</i>	My brothers and sisters this one is ‘asleep’
<i>Wele khakaba akaba</i>	God the provider gives
<i>Wele khabumbi abumbulula</i>	God the creator dismantles
<i>Sibala sibala bandu</i>	The earth counts people
<i>Liloba lilia bandu</i>	The earth eats people
<i>Khukhoya khwaluma kimioyo</i>	We should be brave.

This is an example of a chant that the ritual performer enacts during a funeral. Asked to explain the meaning of this chant, Manguliechi says: “*omundu nafwile khubolanga khuli kakonile khubela engene eyo nio engila yefwe fwesi. Kakonile sikila achilila*

khumenya nende bakuka emakombe.” When a person is dead, we say he is asleep because that is the way for all of us. He is asleep because he continues to exist with our ancestors in the world of spirits. Manguliechi goes further to explain that life indeed goes beyond our physical existence on earth. He qualifies his argument by providing an example of the community’s naming children after their departed relatives. In his view, children are likely to depict the characteristics of their departed relatives.

When challenged to explain his position on the belief that God is the provider of life and whether he really believes in God, Manguliechi poses, “*nanu wabonakho Wele? Enyanga eyi niyo Wele.*” Who has ever seen God? This sun is God. This analogy brings out God as a mysterious being. Just the way the sun provides light so does God provide life. Our respondent holds the position that God is beyond human comprehension. As a result, we should not question his deeds. This is a belief that has generally been embraced by the whole community.

The image of the earth ‘eating’ people is clearly brought out in the above poem. In Manguliechi’s opinion, this is a pointer to the bitter reality that those who lived before us have all been ‘eaten’ by the earth. Thus, we should prepare to follow suit. In this case, the inevitability of death is clearly revealed. The same earth is said to count people for similar reasons. Manguliechi points out the need to sum up his oration by calling on the audience and the society to be brave in the event of death. He observes that given the social vacuum that death creates when it strikes, there is need to encourage people to accept it as a force beyond human control.

It is quite significant to note the way the ritual performer moves. Normally, he moves from North to South until he creates a tiny path.

Picture of the ritual performer moving to create a path.



Interviews conducted with most of our respondents reveal that the *Babukusu* community attach a lot of importance to this path such that it would be quite unfortunate if the ritual performer fails to create one. This path, it is believed, paves way for the dead person to the world of spirits (*emakombe*). It is also a symbol of continuity whereby the audience is supposed to keep on procreating to counter annihilation as result of death. The belief in the world of spirits (*emakombe*) is metaphysical among the *Babukusu*. Most of our respondents were generally vague about '*emakombe*.' For instance, whereas John Kiwanuka was confident that '*emakombe*' was somewhere in the air, Felistus Nekesa could not tell whether it was actually in the air or in the underworld.

However, the exact place notwithstanding, the respondents concur that there is indeed '*emakombe*' where life continues after the physical existence on earth. A deeper analysis about the belief in '*emakombe*' will be examined in our latter chapters.

The path, it is believed, should be quite clear in the course of *khuswala kumuse*. The ritual performer has to move up and down as he addresses the audience until a straight path is created. According to Manguliechi, interviewed on 20th Dec. 2003, this path symbolises the male reproductive organ. The significance of this path therefore is to remind the audience and the *Babukusu* at large about the vital role of procreation. To this end, the chauvinistic tendencies of the *Babukusu* revealed. They look at life from a male point of view. To them, it is males who are regarded as the source of life. The ritual performer as a result encourages people, in particular males to ensure that they counter death through continuous procreation. It would therefore be a mistake if the ritual performer fails to create a path during his oration.

The *Babukusu* encourage the ritual of *khuswala kumuse* in the event of death because this provides a forum for different groups of people to meet. People of all walks of life come to pay their last respects to the deceased irrespective of their relationships while he was living. This is generally because death in the *Babukusu* community brings reconciliation. Among the *Babukusu*, it is taboo to utter something bad against the dead. This is my personal view based on the funerals attended in the community. This view is shared by Ongong'a (1978:51) thus:

On such occasions, the Luo put aside or soften the bitterness of quarrels. Mourners are expected to forget their past and like at birth and marriage fulfil their function by virtue of their kinship with the deceased.

Death therefore temporarily brings reconciliation thus encouraging peace in the community. During *khuswala kumuse*, the ritual performer as such takes the advantage of this gathering to not only talk about death but also the need for peaceful co-existence in the community. He calls upon the relatives to the deceased and the entire community to take good care of the bereaved family. This reveals the communality that characterise the *Babukusu*. The *Babukusu* encourage unity amongst themselves both in happy and sad moments.

The ritual performer many times focuses on the achievements of the deceased while alive. For instance, if the deceased was a successful farmer, the ritual performer coins his oration in such a way that it touches on the importance of hard work in farming. Equally if one was a king or a politician, the content of the poems has to change to suit the deceased. When asked to give an example of an oration in the event of the passing on of a prominent politician, Kilwake interviewed on 24th April, 2004, chants:

<i>Aluno ari embogo yakonile</i>	<i>Today the buffalo is asleep</i>
<i>Embogo yatangasianga bulala</i>	<i>The buffalo used to preach unity</i>
<i>Bumicho bwayo bulandale</i>	<i>Let its seed spread</i>
<i>Omukhale abola ari</i>	<i>Forefathers said thus</i>
<i>Tondo wafwa tondo wakobola</i>	<i>'Tondo' dies and 'tondo' resurrects</i>
<i>Khulume kimioyo bana befwe</i>	<i>Let us be brave my brothers and sisters</i>

In the above poem, the ritual performer refers to the deceased as a buffalo. It should be remembered that this animal is known for its strength and bravery. The decision to refer to the deceased as a buffalo therefore is hard to unravel unless one goes back to the context in which it is used. Possibly, the deceased would have shown the quality of bravery while still living or he may have been a die hard supporter of his community. To answer this question, Foley (1995:49) suggests that one has to get back into the performance arena, the context of the performance to investigate why the deceased is portrayed so. It is only then when we can construct the meaning of the message presented in this verbalised part of the text. The ritual performer ends his eulogy by using the image of the potato tuber (*tondo*) which regerminates even after being cut. This image is a pointer to the possible achievements or aspirations that the deceased stood for during his life time. It is therefore the hope of the community that the good work of the deceased continues manifesting itself in other members of the community.

The following is another poem by Manguliechi interviewed on 31st Feb. 2004.

<i>Babukusu lekeresia mubolele</i>	<i>Bukusu</i> 's listen I tell you
<i>Efwe khuli ne kimisambwa ngano</i>	We have different sprits
<i>Kwe bweni bung'osi</i>	The first one is prophecy
<i>Kwa khabili kamaya</i>	The second one is magic
<i>Kwa khataru bubasi</i>	The third one is blacksmith
<i>Kwa khane bufumu</i>	The fourth one is divination
<i>Kwa kharano bukhebi</i>	The fifth one is surgery
<i>Kwa sita bukimba</i>	The sixth one is rain making
<i>Kwa saba kumuse</i>	The seventh one is ritual performance

In the above poem, the ritual performer enumerates the basic occupations among the *Babukusu*. These occupations, it is believed, are found among different people in the community in form of (kimisamwa), spirits. Consequently, in most cases an individual may have only one of the above occupations.

The belief in bung'osi, (prophecy) attests to the seers mentioned in the previous chapters. According to our respondents, the spirit of prophecy is the greatest of all. The *Babukusu* believe that their seers were in a position to communicate directly with God, hence the greatness of this spirit. This explains why the words from these seers were regarded as absolute truth. The *Babukusu* also believe that the spirit of prophecy is a rare one. Mukhwana interviewed on 11th December, 2004 says: '*kuno kuli kumusamwa kumusiro. Sekunyolekhanga bwangu tawe.*' This is a strong spirit. It is not easily found.

The spirit of magic is not prevalent among the *Babukusu*. However, it is witnessed among few clans. A magician was believed to be in possession of supernatural powers, which enabled him to perform extra-ordinary things. For instance, it was said that one could sit on the pointed edge of a spear without being pierced or walk in the rain without being rained on. This spirit, however, is quite often confused with black magic which involves the use of evil forces to cause harm. This then explains its unpopularity in the contemporary *Babukusu* community.

Blacksmith is an important occupation among the *Babukusu*. Normally, blacksmiths were drawn from certain clans among the *Babukusu*. These were people whose work

was to manufacture weapons like spears, bows, arrows among others. They also manufactured other domestic tools for farming and household. With the invention of iron, the blacksmith played a crucial role and are still important in their contribution to the industrialisation of the society. Today, most blacksmiths among the *Babukusu* are found engaging in activities like bicycle repair, hoes, pangas among others. These people have therefore largely infiltrated the 'Jua kali' sector in Kenya.

Divination is regarded as one of the central spirits among the *Babukusu*. An individual who is possessed with this spirit is called omufumu, a diviner. The work of a diviner is basically to foretell both the present and future happenings. He can also talk about the past. In most cases, the *Babukusu* visit diviners in moments of crisis. Quite often, in case of impending danger to the life of an individual, assistance is sought from diviners. One of the reasons that make people to do so is the need to ensure a happy life. This implies that the *Babukusu* always look forward to a prosperous life on earth. However, as they live, they are wary of possible enemies. Consequently, they always have to seek the diviner's guidance. Such possible enemies include witches, sorcerers as well as people with evil eyes. When death occurs, it is normally attributed to these enemies who are believed to have evil powers that pose a threat to the society.

This view on death is shared by other scholars like (Mbiti 1975), (Gehman 1989), (Shisanya 1993) as well as (Alembi 1998). Gehman (1989:104) observes:

From time immemorial, peoples of all races and denominations have believed in the mystical powers of magic, witchcraft and sorcery. Africans are not alone in their traditional fear of mystical powers.

On a similar note, Shisanya argues that death is unnatural and it can be prevented since its cause is a human agent. On death among the *Abanyole* Shisanya (1993:87) says: “the *Abanyole* consider *lifwa* to be unnatural and preventable on a personal level because it is mostly caused by another agent.” This view is supported by Alembe (1998:32) when he posits: “no death in *Bunyore* occurs naturally. Most of the different causes of death are attributed to magical and evil powers of the witchdoctor.”

From the above examples, it can be argued that the *Babukusu*, like many other African communities, believe in the existence of magical powers. This belief instils fear among the *Babukusu* prompting them to seek the assistance of diviners.

In general, the poem given by Manguliechi elucidates different occupations among the *Babukusu* community. It emerges that different occupations have been set aside for different people. Through this poem, people are reminded about the need to specialise in whatever occupations they belong to.

Among the audience, there are respected men who are endowed with wisdom and are versed in the ways of the community. These men at times call upon the ritual performer to explain to the audience some pertinent issues. For instance, one may ask the ritual performer to talk about the wars that the *Babukusu* fought with their enemies. Equally, another would ask to be reminded about the migration of the community or even the different occupations of the community. However, it should be noted that these people are not allowed to explain their position to the audience.

They only remind the ritual performer in case they feel the need for the audience to be educated on specific issues.

During the funeral of Justus Kuloba in Tongaren Division of Bungoma District, one of these men, Joram Mayeku intervened when Manguliechi was in the process of his oration. He said:

"Khubolekho kimiatikho ne kamaya ke Babukusu" meaning
"Please tell us about the migrations and wars among
the *Babukusu*."

After exhausting what he was saying about the deceased Manguliechi then complied by swiftly turning to Mayeku's question. He elucidated how the *Babukusu* moved from their ancestral home in Esibakala, modern day Ethiopia, through Sudan and Uganda to settle in Western Kenya. He also pointed out the wars that they fought on the way to their present region. He pointed out that wars with their neighbours especially the Nandi and *Sabaots* was one of the prime causes of their migration. Manguliechi went further to present the *Babukusu* as a daring community full of brave warriors. To attest to this claim, he mentioned the war that the *Babukusu* put up against the white administration in Kenya at Lumboka, in Webuye Division of Bungoma District. During this resistance against the whites, many members of the *Babukusu* community lost their lives.

Picture of Wanyonyi Manguliechi during Kuloba's funeral in Tongaren



One of the most pertinent issues that the ritual performer always reminds the audience is the community's social-cultural background. He quite often talks about rites of passage like birth, naming, initiation and death and the ceremonies that accompany such rites. He reminds the audience of the need to respect the community's cultural practices.

The ritual performer takes this opportunity to elucidate the social-economic aspects that make the mainstay of the *Babukusu* community. These aspects which the ritual performer refers to as five banks of the *Babukusu* are: cattle, goats, sheep, chicken and plants.

At this funeral in Tongaren Manguliechi had the following to say:

Babukusu khuli ne chebenki chirano The *Babukusu* have five banks

Engokho bali sitandati Chicken are Standard

Likhese bali komasio Sheep are Commercial

Embusi bali bakilesi Goats are Barclays

Ekhafu bali koparetifu Cattle are Cooperative

Bimelwa bali nationo Crops are National

From this analogy, Manguliechi vividly brings out the values of the *Babukusu* community through the image of the bank. The term bank is a new phenomenon to the *Babukusu* given that money as a medium of transaction came into existence with coming of the Europeans. By alluding to the bank, the ritual performer by and large refers to the societal values among the *Babukusu*. It is important to observe that the *Babukusu*, just like other African communities had their own set of beliefs and value systems. Among the *Babukusu*, wealth was highly valued since it was a sign of prestige. Mulati, one of our respondents interviewed on 31st Dec. 2004 says: "A man's worth was judged by the amount of wealth he had acquired while still alive."

Prompted to substantiate on what was actually regarded as wealth, Mulati is quick to answer. According to him and by extension the entire community, children formed the core of a man's wealth. A man who failed to bring forth children was not honoured irrespective of the other forms of wealth that he may have acquired. Having many children then was a sure way of encouraging polygamy. In essence, children meant that a man had to have more than one wife as a form of prestige. It is however imperative to observe that having many children and wives demands that the man has to provide for them materially. Consequently, wealth did not stop at children and

wives; one had to have steady means of providing for his family. A rich man hence was expected to be in possession of livestock, poultry as well as enough crops. This would ensure that he supports his family fully. A person who met the above conditions qualified to be a rich man and he earned the respect of the society.

It is worth noting that children in the *Babukusu* community formed an important investment to the parents in that they assisted in the continuity of the family lineage. A man who had many children would die happily because of the belief that his children would ensure his name remained living in generations to come. This was done through naming of children after the dead. From the foregoing, it is clear that children formed the core of a man's wealth and by extension the society. Given their importance, children could be likened to a bank where people invest money with the aim of attaining interests. "Children are also a form of investment in that parents rely on them during their old age."

Manguliechi's reference to the five banks of the *Babukusu* is a pointer to the fact that the poetry within *khuswala kumuse* is dynamic in that it directly touches on contemporary issues in the society. In the contemporary society and in particular Kenya, agriculture forms the economic mainstay of the country. Planting of both subsistence and cash crops as well as animal husbandry provide the base for agriculture in Kenya. Among the *Babukusu* it has already been pointed out in the introduction that they cultivate a variety of crops and rear domestic animals for economic stability. The reference to these crops and livestock as different forms of banks reveals the extent to which the *Babukusu* value hard work and self reliance. An

individual who owns a lot of livestock and has planted a variety of crops stands a greater chance of becoming successful than one who doesn't.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the poetry within the funeral ritual of *khuswala kumuse* is relevant to the contemporary society. This view on funeral poetry is shared by other African communities. For instance, writing about the funeral poems among the Acoli, p'Bitek (1974:147) observes:

These poems celebrate the suffering of the living. The funeral dance provides the opportunity for self-contemplation, the picture of man's suffering is portrayed in these terrible songs of cruel fate.

Among the *Acoli* therefore, the poems sung during funerals do not confine themselves to talking about death and the dead. They are a source of self-reflection and soul researching. This then makes funeral poetry a living experience.

A glance at the poetry within *khuswala kumuse* reveals that the poems in this ritual touch on a number of issues that affect both the living and the dead. Some of the issues dealt with in these poems include rites of passage in the life of an individual. These rites of passage among the *Babukusu* include birth and naming, initiation, marriage and death.

These poems aim at enlightening people on the need to co-exist peacefully in the society. The following poem was given by Manguliechi on 2nd Jan. 2004 during Waswa's funeral at Chwele.

Efwe <i>Babukusu</i> khuli ne bikhulia ekhumi	The <i>Babukusu</i> have ten different
	food crops.
Bulo	Millet
<i>Kamaemba</i>	Sorghum
<i>Kamakanda</i>	Beans
<i>Kamahindi</i>	Maize
<i>Kamaondo</i>	Pumpkins
<i>Kimioko</i>	Cassava
<i>Kamatore</i>	Bananas
<i>Kamapwoni</i>	Potatoes
<i>Chibalayo</i>	Peas
<i>Chikhanu</i>	Simsim
<i>Newenya kumutambo</i>	If you want poverty
<i>Yombaha litala khumeno</i>	Build the cattle shed on
	your teeth.
<i>Newenya kumutambo</i>	If you want poverty
<i>Yombakha litala khumakusi</i>	Build the cattle shed on
	your testicles
<i>Kumunwa kwa angaki rarao</i>	The upper lip is your
	father
<i>Kumunwa kwa mwalo mao</i>	The lower lip is your
	mother.

From the above poem the ritual performer enumerates the major food crops cultivated by the community. This serves to remind the audience and the society at large to invest in farming since it is their source of livelihood.

The ritual performer goes further to warn the would be extravagant people. To achieve this, he employs heavy imagery. He likens such extravagant people to those who build the cattle shed on their teeth or testicles. In this case, he warns against greed and immorality respectively. A person who builds the cattle shed on his teeth, according to Manguliechi is *omundu we kumuliungo* thus a greedy person. Such a

person is likely to spend all the riches he has on personal and selfish interests. Through the image of the teeth such a person is bound to 'eat' everything at his disposal without caring for what awaits him in future.

The image of the testicles is used to warn the audience to guard against yielding to immoral acts in particular sexual immorality. There is need for people to spend their hard earned resources wisely. Among the *Babukusu* sexual immorality involves engaging in extra marital sexual relations. It is worth to note that although polygamy is allowed prostitution is highly discouraged in this community. People always strive to remain morally upright in order to obtain societal respect.

The ritual performer stresses the significance of parents in life when he says:

"kumunwa kwa angaki raro noba ne liliasa ne kubimbao, ne kumunwa kwa mwalo mao, kukhingilila lulekhe" loosely translated as:-

"Your upper lip is your father when you have a gap it covers it, and the lower lip is your mother, for it prevents saliva from flowing out."

It is clear from the words of the ritual performer that parents are seen as being central in the life of an individual. By reminding the audience on this significant role played by parents in ones life, the ritual performer seeks to cultivate the culture of discipline and respect among young people. The youth in particular learn to appreciate the need of respecting not only their parents but also senior members of the community.

When asked to elaborate on the reasons behind bringing such issues in a funeral context, Kilwake interviewed on 1st Jan. 2004 points out that the poetry within *khuswala kumuse* is basically about life; both physical and spiritual. To him, failure to

talk about such issues will be tantamount to demeaning the purpose of the poetry within *khwasala kumuse*. On birth and naming, the ritual performer for instance elucidates how different seasons and events determine the naming of young children. He reminds the audience that names in the traditional community were not just given for the sake of it. Often than not, they were given in line with particular events in history, seasons or departed members of the community. Among the *Babukusu*, it is common to find children who are given names after their departed ancestors. However, these ancestors must have exhibited admirable attributes during their life on earth. Basically, people who were associated with anti-social characteristics like sorcery or witchcraft among others were not named after. Naming children after such people, according to most of our respondents, would amount to welcoming their traits to the children in question. Equally names were given according to events in history. For instance, names like Wasike for boys and Nasike for girls refer to a point in history when swarms of locusts invaded most parts of Western Kenya and caused a lot of havoc on crops.

Some names are also given according to specific seasons in the community. For instance, a boy born during the rain season is named *Wafula*, and equivalent for '*efula*' which mean rain. A girl on the other hand is named *Nafula*.

Our respondent, Kilwake interviewed on 5th Feb. 2004, argues that reminding people about birth and naming is a way of educating them on their history and value systems. I concur with this view in the sense that it is important for an individual to be aware of his or her origin. By understanding our origin, we are bound to appreciate who we are in our respective communities.

Equally, on initiation, Kilwake observes that the audience should be reminded about the origin of circumcision among the *Babukusu* community. In this community, circumcision of males started when one of the earliest patriarchs, Mango wa Neala killed a fierce python (*endemu ya bebe*) which had caused untold suffering to the *Babukusu* and their neighbouring *Sabots*. This, python, it is believed, had killed or swallowed livestock and even people. Mango, an uncircumcised young man was angered when the python killed one of his daughters. His anger was so great that he swore to kill the python. When he eventually killed it, to the disbelief of his neighbours, the *Sabaots* decided to honour him by circumcising him and giving him a girl for marriage. This marked the beginning of circumcision among the *Babukusu*. It is clear from the above that the ritual performer reminds people on the importance of circumcision. This is a stage which marks the beginning of responsible adulthood.

Death marks the final stage in physical existence in the world. Consequently the poetry within *khuswala kumuse* has to touch on death and the beliefs surrounding this phenomenon.

During the funeral of Kuloba in Tongaren, Bungoma District, Manguliechi said the following about death:

<i>Bamasika rekeresia</i>	Mourners listen
<i>Lifwa lino liliefwe likhale</i>	Death has bedeviled us since time immemorial
<i>Lifwa lili nende embelekeu</i>	Death is cruel
<i>Likesa bilabile nende bikhalabile ta</i>	It reaps both the ripe and unripe ones

From the above poem, Manguliechi has employed personification in reference to death. To start with, he reminds people about the inevitability of death by saying that it has bedeviled human beings for many fears. This reminder serves to encourage the audience to remain calm in the face of death since it is an eventuality for all mankind. By referring to death as being cruel, the community's dislike for this unwelcome phenomenon is revealed. This explains the bitterness that characterizes the bereaved families and mourners in the event of death. Among the *Babukusu*, mourners express their anguish openly through wailing and calling death all the bad names. A deeper analysis of the community's perception of death as a cruel experience will be elucidated in our later chapters. Finally, death has been given powers to reap both the ripe and unripe fruits. This brings out the fact that death indeed takes people indiscriminately. It neither respects age nor social status.

From the above, it is clear that the ritual performer is serving the role of a public comforter by reminding the audience of the fact that death has bedevilled human beings for a long time and it does not select who to die or live.

All in all, the decision to have the poetry within *khuswala kumuse* going hand in hand with death has crucial reasons. It has already been pointed out that human beings in general and the *Babukusu* in particular have not fully accepted death. As a result, it is common for people to come up with different causes of death when it strikes. Among the *Babukusu* community, death is more often than not attributed to an enemy. Normally, one person or another will be blamed for causing death to the deceased either through sorcery, poisoning or some other evil means. Death is therefore not natural according to the understanding of the community. The view about death is

shared by among others Alembi (1998). In his monograph about the Abanyole Oral Poetry, Alembi (1998:32) observes:

No death in *Bunyore* occurs naturally. Most of the different causes of death are attributed to magical and evil powers of the witch doctor.

Such belief is likely to bring disintegration in the community in the sense that people are bound to accuse one another when death strikes. Death therefore poses a threat to peace in the society as it can easily breed animosity among members of the same community. Consequently, there has to be a way of ensuring that members of the community remain united even in the face of the enemy death.

The poetry within *khuswala kumuse* then becomes valid in the event of death. Through this poetry, the audience and the entire community is reminded about the need to maintain a peaceful co-existence. The poems within this ritual also remind people that death is caused by forces beyond human comprehension and people should not take advantage of it to intimidate others. To this point then, the poetry within *khuswala kumuse* is necessary in the event of death.

2.9.1 Conclusion

This chapter has shed light on a number of issues that characterise the content within which the poetry in *khuswala kumuse* is realised.

The chapter has elucidated the content of some poems within this ritual. It has also described the structure of performance of these poems as well as their intentions. Lastly, this chapter has also talked about the composition of the audience during *khuswala kumuse* as well as the time and place when these poems are disseminated.

To wind up this chapter, it is imperative to point out that for effective scholarly interpretation of the meaning of the poetry within *khuswala kumuse*, there is need to understand and appreciate the context that gives rise to this poetry. This context will thus form the core of our analysis of the poetry within this ritual. A deeper insight into the significance of context will be dealt with in our subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THE POETICS OF KHUSWALA KUMUSE POETRY.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an answer to our objective (c) on analysing the poetic features within the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse*. To achieve this, a critical analysis of the poetic features within the ritual is provided. The relevance of these features to both the *Babukusu* and the general readers is provided. In particular, this chapter aims at examining the significance of this poetry to the audience and the readers. An analysis of these features emanates from the fact that poetry indeed employs a literary tailored language to pass across information. In the ritual of khuswala kumuse, the ritual performer employs literary features like euphemism, diction, personification and repetition to pass across his message on life and death. Writing on oral poetry in Africa, Finnegan (1977:224) posits:

The convention by which things can be said in a poetic medium that could not be uttered in a more 'direct' form, is a widespread and interesting one. It is as if expression in poetry takes the steam out of communication and removes it from the 'real' arena. And yet of course it does not- for communication still takes place.

Poetry is therefore artistically presented to the audience thus failure to unravel the poetic features defeats the purpose of poetry. A number of these features have as a result been analysed in this chapter.

3.2 Euphemism

3.2.1 Introduction

Euphemism is one of the poetic features that is used in the ritual of *khuswala kumuse*. This is an important poetic device that brings out the community's attitude towards death. In discussing euphemism, we regard it as an expression that is mild or less direct than the one normally used to refer to something unpleasant. In this study therefore, it has been used in reference to death which is regarded as a monster in the eyes of the *Babukusu*. The numerous expressions adopted with regard to death are euphemistic in order to play down the tragic effects of death. The common euphemistic expressions in the ritual are given below:

<i>Kakonile</i>	He/She is asleep
<i>Kachile emakombe</i>	He has gone to the world of ancestral spirits
<i>Lwamupile asi</i>	It has knocked him down
<i>Wele kamulangile</i>	God has called him
<i>Lwamufumbile</i>	It has overpowered him
<i>Liloba liamumilile</i>	The earth has swallowed him.

A close examination of the above euphemistic expressions reveals that the *Babukusu* regard death differently.

3.2.2 Euphemism of death as transition.

In *kakonile*, he is asleep; the euphemism in this context is symbolic in that it refers to a life experience. Normally sleep is associated with the living and not the dead.

Consequently, by using an event that happens to the living people, the *Babukusu* imply that life continues to exist in the deceased. Death only brings to an end the physical existence. This euphemism also makes death mild since it means sleeping. Consequently human beings can cope with it in this form.

In *kachile emakombe*, he has gone to the world of ancestral spirits; the aspect of movement from one place to another is vividly brought out. The destination of this movement is *emakombe*. It has already been pointed out that the belief in the existence of *emakombe* as the final destination of the spirits of the dead poses a challenge in terms of location. However, it is a common belief that at death, the dying person transforms into a spirit. Whereas the body of the dead is buried, the spirit travels to join other ancestral spirits in *emakombe*. To the *Babukusu*, therefore, death marks a transition to the next level of existence.

The aspect of movement of the spirits among the *Babukusu* is further supported by studies from other different communities. In these communities, it is believed that the spirits travel long distances to reach their destination. According to Alembi (2002: 146-147), in those communities: “--- the spirits live far away and must journey sometimes through dangerous places to get there.”

This explains why the dead in these communities was buried with foodstuffs. A good example of a community whose members were buried with foodstuffs is the *Chagga* of Tanzania. Writing about them, Mbiti (1969:159) notes:

--- to make the journey less demanding, the corpse is anointed with fat, 'given' milk in the mouth and wrapped with hide, to provide it with food and protect it from the scorching desert sun.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the *Babukusu* and other African communities do not regard death as a complete end of life. To them, death is a stage in life that prepares one for yet a different form of existence - in the world of spirits.

In "*Wele kamulangile*" God has called him, the community's belief in the supernatural is revealed. The *Babukusu* liken death to a call by God. Normally, it is common for the junior members of the community to heed calls from their seniors. Given that death is considered as a call from God serves to bring out its inescapability. The *Babukusu* hence view God as the Supreme Being who gives and takes life. This view is supported by Gehman (1989:192) when he says: "as Supreme Ruler over earth, God is known as King, Lord and Judge. His will is absolute and He rules with power."

The belief in life after death brings hope and helps in minimizing the impact of death

3.2.3 Euphemism of death as destructive

Saying that death has "knocked him down", the destructive aspect of death is revealed. By saying that death 'knocks' people down, its cruelty and inevitability is clearly revealed. The communal perception of death is also brought out. To the community, death is a cruel enemy. Normally, an enemy is a person whom one is

bound to be wary of all the time because such a person is bound to do anything with the intention of hurting his adversary. He can steal, rob or even kill hence the need for one to be extremely careful.

This perception of death as an enemy is supported by p' Bitek (1974:130) in the poem below:

Death burned the body of the young woman
 Death burned the body of the young woman
 Like fire, she cried with pain in her chest
 Beloved of my mother, oh death burned your body
 At last today it has taken you.

Death from this poem is presented as an enemy because of its destructive nature. The poem builds on repetition to emphasise the destructive effects of death; it is likened to fire which burns to destroy.

In *Iwamufumbile*, it has overpowered him; the euphemism reveals the immense power associated with death. Death destroys an individual leaving him powerless and hopeless. Death's power puts an end to physical existence. It is important to observe that human beings do not appreciate failure in life. As a result, something that overpowers an individual is often feared. The *Babukusu* as a result fear and hate death for its immense powers. It is also evident that death is regarded as an all powerful eventuality. All the living have to encounter this powerful enemy at one point in their physical existence. As a result of the helplessness that people are faced with in the face of death, the *Babukusu* simply resort to saying that death has overpowered an individual. This clearly reveals the mighty power of death.

In *liloba liamumilile* the earth has swallowed him, the community's belief in the destiny of the spirit of the deceased is revealed. According to Manguliechi, the spirits of the dead rest in the underworld. The imagery brought out in this euphemism is one of a destructive power characteristic of death. Death is equated to a super-human being that swallows people. A creature that has the power to swallow human beings is indeed a dangerous one hence it is feared by human beings. The fact that death is given the characteristics of swallowing people points out to the fear that is inherent among the *Babukusu* in the event of death.

This fear is also witnessed among the Ngoni people. A vivid example is exemplified in the following dirge from Akivaga et. al. (1982: 60-61):

The earth does not get fat,

It makes an end of those who wear head plumes.

We shall die on earth

The earth does not get fat. It makes an end of those who act swiftly as heroes.

Shall we die on earth?

Listen O earth. We shall mourn because of you

Listen O earth. We shall die on the earth?

The earth does not get fat. It makes an end of chiefs

Shall we die on earth?

The earth does not get fat It makes an end of the women chiefs

Shall we die on earth?

The earth does not get fat. It makes an end of royal women.

Shall we die on earth?

Listen O earth. We shall mourn because of you.

Listen O earth. We shall die on earth?

The earth does not get fat. It makes an end of beasts.

Shall we die on earth?

Listen you who are asleep, who are left tightly closed in the land.
 Listen you who are asleep, who are left tightly closed in the land
 shall we all sink into the earth?

Listen O earth, the sun is setting tightly
 We shall all enter into the earth.

From the above poem, it is evident that a state of fear and hopelessness in the event of death is revealed. The *Ngoni* people, just like the *Babukusu* express their fear at the thought of death. However, they too have yielded to the fact that death is indeed a reality

3.3 Diction

Diction or choice of words simply refers to the use of language in a particular way to convey intended message. According to Alembi (2002:171): “Language is the main medium of the oral artist in conveying his/her message to the audience.”

The skilled performer/artist hence has to manipulate language in such a way that he/she is able to psychologically and physically capture the audience and transport them into the world of the chant/song. Consequently, a performer does not use the language of everyday discourse. He or she has to select words unique to the art in question in order to communicate the message effectively. A performer of oral poetry therefore uses language that is unique to his art as well as the audience. Foley (1995:49) refers to this as register.

The ritual performer in *khuswala kumuse* heavily relies on language to communicate. In his choice of words, he is always aware of the expectations of the audience as well as the dictates of the society. The ritual performer therefore has to adopt the language

that calls for interpretation. Quite often, the language used within the poetry in *khuswala kumuse* is full of imagery, symbolism and allusion. These words are used not only in talking about death but also different aspects of life.

The following are some of the words that one of our informants Manguliechi interviewed on 29th Dec. 2004, provided as examples of the words that are carefully selected in the performance of *khuswala kumuse*:

<i>Ekhobe yola eng'ana eng'ana</i>	A rabbit breast feeds its young one and later it
<i>yelao yola ekhobe</i>	breast feeds from the young one.
<i>Nandabilika alia che kamake</i>	She/he who doesn't trap white ants eats those
	full of termites.
<i>Embwa embunyi ekhila endimi</i>	a sniffer dog is better than a fast running dog.
<i>Sichikhi sie khungila wetuyakho</i>	You can hit on a tree stump by the road but it
<i>wecha webiala</i>	won't move
<i>We khatiti akhinia we kubofu</i>	One who has a small baby makes the baby
<i>yesi akhinia</i>	dance just as one with a big one.
<i>Emakombe niyo engo</i>	The world of the living dead is our home
<i>Ekwa atayi yarera kubeo</i>	It may rain far and bring wind.
<i>Endekelesi embi</i>	Negligence is bad.

The above are some of the commonly used words during the ritual of *khuswala kumuse*. Some of these words have already been examined in the previous chapter. These words are carefully blended to meet individual and communal expectations since they are addressed to a diverse audience.

There is heavy symbolism in the words "*ekhobe yola eng'ana eng'ana yakelao yola ekhobe*". From these words, comparison is made between a rabbit and human beings. It is clear that the responsibility of breast-feeding the young ones lies squarely on mother rabbit just the way it is with human beings.

However, it emerges that later in life mother rabbit turns to breast feeding from the young ones probably its offspring. The reasons as to why it does so is its inability to fend for itself due to advanced age. Breast-feeding in this case is used symbolically to refer to an act of being dependant. Manguliechi vividly draws an analogy between this situation of dependency among the rabbits to human beings. He rightly points out that human beings are likely to be reduced to the level of dependants during their old age. When such a time comes, it would not be a wonder for the old generation to wholly rely on the support of the young ones. These words are crucial in the sense that through them, the community's regard and appreciation of children is revealed. The importance of children is realised when they take on responsibilities of assisting their parents physically, financially and morally when the latter become old. This explains why Manguliechi is quick to point to our research team that:

"Mayi ne rarako nga bakhusomia, bakhulinda, wanyola kimilimo wesi balinde."

"Your mother and father educated you, took care of you, you got a job also to support them."

From the above, it can be argued that the *Babukusu* regard children as a form of investment where the parents turn to for support in their old age. Moreover, children are a sure way of guarding the society against annihilation that may be brought by

death. This general belief perhaps elucidates why the *Babukusu* regard children as belonging to the community but not an individual.

This view of the *Babukusu* concerning the importance of children is shared by Alembi (2002). Writing about children among the *Abanyole* of Western Kenya. Alembi (2002:91) observes:

---- through children, the threat of the family or even the community being annihilated by death is countered. This explains why children are central to the community.

In *nandabilika kalia che kamake*, heavy symbolism in reference to white ants and termites is brought out. Most of our respondents observe that one who does not go out to trap white ants for himself but instead waits to borrow from others is bound to receive the remnants of the white ants, which are in most cases filled with termites. The symbolism in these words is in reference to an individual who does not prefer going out to work but opts to move around borrowing from others.

Such an individual is warned of failure in that one cannot wholly depend on begging. Through these words, the communal values of hard work and self-reliance are revealed. Among the *Babukusu*, laziness and over-dependency on others are some of the highly detestable vices which should be shunned by all.

The words "*embwa embunyi ekhila endimi*" - a sniffer dog is better than a fast running one, are carefully chosen. These words have been used to depict the *Babukusu* as a community that values the domestication of dogs. However, it should be made clear that a sniffer dog is preferred to a fast running one. Giving preference to a sniffer dog then presents the *Babukusu* as a community that practices hunting.

Consequently, during hunting expeditions, a sniffer dog is likely to be of great help in that it will be able to detect the destination of its prey.

This is in contrast with a fast running dog which will end up running very fast without the success of getting the direction that its prey has taken. The concept of hunting is not unique to the Babukusu community. This practice cuts across most communities in Africa. This is well illustrated by Finnegan (1970). In her writing about the *Akan* community of West Africa, she presents some of the common songs that are sung during hunting expeditions. An example of such songs is given below:

It's boiling and boiling,
 The hunters are cooking in a big pot.
 It's boiling and boiling,
 The hunters are cooking in a big pot.
 Truly it's boiling hard,
 I'll kill two head tomorrow"
 Finnegan (1970:230).

The above poem is sung after a hunting expedition. The hunters have brought home their game which they are boiling to feast on. Consequently, they feel encouraged by their success and vow to continue hunting. Hunting therefore is one of the social activities that brings members of a community together.

In the modern world, Manguliechi is quick to pinpoint the analogy in the above words concerning a sniffer dog and a fast running one.

He observes rightly that in the contemporary society, there is need for each individual to be responsible for his/her actions. He argues that there is need for one to choose the right path to take according to the expectations and dictates of the society. To those working for example, honesty and hard work is expected; to the youth, discipline and hard work is equally important. These words hence encourage the *Babukusu* to remain focused on whatever they do and strive to maintain societal norms since we all owe allegiance to the society.

The words *wa khatiti akhinia we kubofu yesi akhinia* are full of symbolism. These words, according to our respondents refer to children. It is quite natural that all children hence human beings are unique in their own perspectives. It is therefore impossible to find two individuals who are exactly the same in all aspects of life. The *Babukusu*, hence believe that every mother has to be proud of her child irrespective of the child's physique. This perception helps in guarding against petty jealousies in the community. On a more symbolic note, Kilwake interviewed on 31st Dec 2003 observes that every member of the community has to appreciate his role in the society.

From these words, the *Babukusu* and the readers are called upon to learn to accept who they are and aim at improving their current status instead of feeling envious about the success of others. In any given society, people have different forms of occupations. However, there is need for a healthy relationship among people, their occupations notwithstanding.

In *ekwa atayi yarera embeo*, the words used in this case are metaphorical. The ritual performer draws an analogy between rain and wind and the problems that affect people in the society. In essence, he reminds the audience that in life there are myriad problems, some of which we do not know their origin. By alluding to wind that is experienced when it rains in places far away from our locality, the ritual performer implies that in life there are a number of shortcomings that are bound to come our way though their origin is far from us.

A typical example according to Kilwake is in reference to the deadly disease, AIDS. It is believed among the *Babukusu* that AIDS originated from unknown sources, particularly far away from the Babukusu community. The ritual performer uses these words to warn and advise the audience on the dangers of embracing foreign ideologies and tendencies that are likely to bring untold problems to individuals and the community at large.

The word '*embeo*' in the *Babukusu* community refers to wind. Normally the spillover effects of rain to a neighbouring region is likely to be wind.

Among the *Babukusu*, it is common to hear people talk of AIDS as "*bulwale bwe embeo*" meaning the disease brought by wind. It should be remembered that as air in motion, wind moves at a very fast speed. Consequently anything that comes very fast and from long distances can be likened to wind. This is according to the interpretation of our respondents. AIDS as a deadly disease as well as many other foreign ideologies and tendencies can be regarded as wind.

Given that the statement it might rain far and bring wind thus *ekwa atayi yarera embeo* applies to current issues affecting people not only among *Babukusu* community but the entire world is worth reckoning. The society at large is reminded about the need to exercise self-responsibility and accountability in order to avoid falling victim to dangerous foreign influences.

In *endekelesi embi*, negligence is bad, the societal values among the *Babukusu* are revealed. Among the members of this community respect is a necessary virtue which has to be embraced by all. The *Babukusu* are widely known for their hospitality particularly to strangers. This stems from the belief that a stranger might turn out to be of great help in time of need. Members of this community are therefore advised to exercise respect to others. The young generation is expected to respect its seniors because the latter are an embodiment of the wisdom of the community. This respect does not stop at the community level. Any member of the community has to respect the leaders of the society and the laws that govern this society. One who fails to live to these expectations is warned of dire consequences. Through the use of these words, the ritual performer aims at encouraging a harmonious existence in the society since people who have embraced respect are unlikely to pose danger to the peaceful existence in the society.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the ritual performer coins his words artistically to convey a wide range of information that touches on both the living and the deceased. The context of *khuswala kumuse* hence provides a conducive forum since it is in such an occasion that people of all walks of life come together.

destroys life. As already mentioned, death is considered an intruder that comes to disrupt the otherwise peaceful co-existence in the community.

In *lifwa simala bandu*, death finishes people, the personification given to death presents it as a dangerous phenomenon that eliminates people. The human attributes accorded to death in this case explain the mystery surrounding it. By yielding to the fact that death eliminates people, the *Babukusu* have by inference succumbed to the powers of death. They have grudgingly accepted the reality surrounding death. I have used the term grudgingly because the *Babukusu* regard death as an enemy hence it is unlikely that they can welcome it. The *Babukusu* perception of death as an enemy contradicts their belief in life after death in *emakombe*, as pointed out in the previous chapter. This perception of death is perhaps due to the general fear of the unknown. The prospect of fear in the event of death is shared by other communities. Writing about the *Abanyole* of Western Kenya, Alembi (1998:42) says: "*Abanyole* funeral songs express people's fears of the unknown - the hereafter."

The *Abanyole* community acknowledges that death is indeed a reality, but they still fear it because they cannot tell what awaits them after death.

The *Babukusu* just like the *Abanyole* and most other African communities believe in the continuity of life in the hereafter. However, when death strikes, they express their bitterness due to the uncertainty of what happens in *emakombe*. This explains why they assert that death finishes people. It 'finishes' people because the ones who die will never come back to life to tell of their experiences in the hereafter.

In *lifwa lialia Mwambu*, death ate Mwambu, death is considered as having powers to eat. Death, it is said, "ate" Mwambu, one of the earliest patriarchs of the *Babukusu* community. We have already mentioned Mwambu as having played a vital role in the origin of the funeral ritual of *khuswala kumuse*.

Most respondents appeared to have a clear picture of who Mwambu was in the history of the *Babukusu*. In their views, this was a man who was destined to stay forever as per the wishes of "*Wele*," God the Creator. However, Mwambu's life was terminated when he disobeyed God. This then meant that all his descendants had to die. The personification in this context, as such, is a reminder to the community that every individual will die when his/her time comes.

In *lifwa lialia bang'osi*, death ate the seers, the ritual performer reminds the community about the great seers that ever lived among the *Babukusu*. When asked to name some of the reknown seers among the *Babukusu*, both our ritual performers as well as our adult respondents seem to concur on the names of these seers. The most acknowledged names include: Mutonyi wa Nabukelembe, Maina wa Nalukale, Elija wa Nameme, Joash Walumoli and Israel Khaoya.

The community believe that these men contributed a lot to the welfare of the *Babukusu* community hence their histories are quite long. However, it will be important to briefly mention what the *Babukusu* believe about each one of these seers.

Mutonyi wa Nabukelembe is believed to have been one of the earliest seers in the history of the *Babukusu*. This great seer, it is believed, had immense powers in that he

could sit on glowing fire without being burnt. Equally, he is also credited for having predicted the coming of the white administrators in Kenya more than one hundred years before the colonisers finally landed in the country.

Maina wa Nalukale has already been mentioned as having been one of the key figures surrounding the origin of the poetry within *khuswala kumuse*. The *Babukusu* believe that Maina later deliberately abandoned his home the *Babukusu* when the community failed to reconcile him with an errant son who had committed an abomination by having carnal knowledge of his step mother. It is believed Maina passed among the *Nandi's* and settled among the *Agikuyu* of central Kenya.

The last three seers; Khaoya, Walumoli and Elijah wa Nameme are believed to have exposed their talents at the same time; all living during colonial and post-colonial Kenya. Of the three, Elijah was the most outspoken and abrasive seer who was always viewed as a rebel both by the colonial as well as the independent Kenyan governments. All the seers mentioned above have so far died.

Consequently the personification in reference to seers who have been eliminated by death is equally a reminder to the audience and the entire society that death is indeed unavoidable. Irrespective of one's powers on earth, he/she is bound to die.

The ritual performer equally talks about death as if it were a human being when he says that it reaps both the ripe and unripe ones. Death is given the qualities of a reaper. To reap simply means to cut or gather. Mostly farmers reap grains like maize, millet, sorghum among others. In reaping, it is expected that the farmer only reaps ripe grains. However, the decision to reap either ripe or unripe ones solely lies in the

hands of the farmer. It can be deduced from the above that death is being likened to a reaper because it can strike at any age in one's life. Death takes away both the young and the old; the weak and the strong as well as the rich and the poor. It therefore makes all of us equal.

In the face of death, therefore, all human beings are equal irrespective of their age, sex or social status. This view on death is shared by other communities in Africa. A notable example is the *Luo* of Kenya. Writing about the perception of death among the Luo Ongong'a (1978:1) observes that "in the face of death everyone is equal and powerless." The personification employed in reference to death has been used to effectively bring out the community's perception of death. On a more general note, it can be concluded that the *Babukusu* fear death yet they have yielded to its inevitability.

Another form of personification is realised in the following song by Manguliechi on 31st December 2003 :

Wanakatwa kalila ali ee x 2 The white ant mourned ee x 2

Mwikulu bulilo In the air I am eaten

Asi bulilo In the trap hole I am eaten

Mwiloba bulilo Underground I am eaten

This poem clearly brings out the predicament of the white ant. This is a creature that is fated to be eaten wherever it is. Among the *Babukusu*, white ants known in the community's language as '*chiswa*', plural for "*wanakatwa*" are *delicacies* for many people. Some people go to the extent of eating them raw. However, in most cases

these ants are trapped in a hole where they are picked from, boiled, then dried before being eaten.

This poem then presents a situation where the white ant is in a state of hopelessness because it lacks a place that guarantees it safety. The poem points out that the white ant mourned out of self pity because its life was endangered wherever it was. Normally when *wanakatwa* flies, it is bound to be eaten by the birds. Equally in the underground, it is eaten by termites while on the ground it does not receive any mercy from human beings. Manguliechi's poem draws an analogy between the white ant and human beings. It is evident that people are indeed an endangered lot just like *wanakatwa*. All have to die whether they look forward to death as a reality or not. Consequently, this poem is important in that it prepares the audience and the entire community to look forward to death from a personal point of view. Death comes to take each one of us as individuals when our time comes.

Another song that Wanyonyi sang at this funeral went thus:

<i>Kuka njikulile engila (x2)</i>	Grandfather open the way for me (x2)
<i>Kuka moyo kwalila engo (x2)</i>	Grandfather my soul longs for home (x2)
<i>Siebulile engila</i>	Open the way for me

According to our respondents, the driving force behind this poem is the perception that human life is made up of the body and the spirit. It is therefore acknowledged that after the physical existence in the world, one's spirit continues to exist in a different world, which the *Babukusu* refer to as 'home', *emakombe*.

The *Babukusu* find solace through the conviction that though their physical existence on this earth will come to an end through death, they still have hope of existing in the spirit world. It is believed that this form of life is full of happiness as pointed out by our respondent, Nekesa interviewed on 10th October ,2004 when she says:

"Buindilifu buli ekombe" meaning all the riches are found in the spirit world.

This view on life in the spirit world seems to have taken root in most African communities. On this same note, Mbiti (1969:30) observes:

As far as one has been able to find out, the belief in the continuation of life after physical death exists among all African peoples though certainly with varying degrees of emphasis.

Perhaps, this belief in the existence of the spirit world among different African communities is one way of allaying the fear that surrounds death. It can be argued that the *Babukusu*, like other African communities, have embraced this idea as a form of escapism from the reality that death indeed marks the end of life both physically and spiritually.

From the short song, there is mention of the grandfather as well as the uncle to the deceased. Through this song, it is brought to our attention that the grandfather and the uncle to the deceased are higher in rank to the deceased because they died earlier than him. As a result, the spirit of the deceased pleads with the spirits of the two to prepare a 'way' for it to reach 'home'.

This then implies that the *Babukusu* regard the dead as being directly involved in the day to day activities of the living. Given that the dead are also higher in rank than the living, the latter can turn to them when calamities strike. This belief about hierarchies in life complements the views of scholars like Mbiti (1969), Gehman (1999) among others.

Mbiti (1969:51), for instance, gives a hierarchy of life as starting from birth and naming, initiation, marriage, death, the living dead and the ancestors. According to Mbiti, therefore, the ancestors are the senior most members in any given community and they provide a link between human beings and the supernatural world.

Gehman (1999:19-20) equally elucidates the importance of the living dead whom he describes as those members of the community who died in the recent past and they therefore still have an influence in our daily activities. An analysis of the above short songs has revealed that they are not a mere means of entertainment. These songs embody the Babukusu beliefs with regard to death. They elucidate and encourage people to acknowledge their present status and look forward to death as a transition to a new form of life. These songs, thus, communicate societal values and aspirations of the *Babukusu*

3.5 Repetition

In this context repetition is looked at as the recurrence of mood, idea, sound, word or line in a poem. Repetition is a significant technique in the poems where it is employed. In poem 1.1 for instance, the ritual performer repeats the word (efwe), we ,thus:

Efwe Babukusu khwama Esibakala

We the *Babukusu* came from Esibakala

Efwe babana be lirango lie enjofu

We are the children of the thigh of an
elephant

Efwe siyanja barende

We the lovers of strangers

It should be noted that the word *efwe* refers to the *Babukusu* in general. By repeating this word, the ritual performer stresses the common aspirations and experiences of the community. He calls on the mourners and the entire community to embrace the idea that they share a common origin and they should always be united..

In poem 1.8 on *Biakhulia bie Babukusu* thus the food crops of the *Babukusu*, the ritual performer repeats the words *Newenya kumutambo*-if you want poverty, as seen below :

Ne wenya kumutambo If you want poverty
Yombakha litala khumeno Build the cattle shed on your teeth
Ne wenya kumutambo If you want poverty
Yombakha litala khumakusi Build the cattle shed on your testicles.

It is clear that human beings by nature would wish to lead a comfortable life. As a result, the ritual performer warns them against the possible causes of poverty. He captivates the attention of the audience by mentioning poverty repeatedly. Through this repetition, he asserts the communal values. In this community, poverty is regarded as a setback to societal development and prosperity. In so doing, he reminds the audience to be wary of this barrier and do everything possible to avoid falling victims.

In poem 1.9, the words *lifwa lino*, this death, are repeated. In this case, the performer invites the audience to share with him the devastating effects of death to the community. He laments the cruelty of death which takes people indiscriminately.

Repetition is put to good use in bringing out the loss that death brings to the society. Through this feature, the attitude of the Babukusu towards death is clearly revealed.

The perception of death as cruel and inevitable is further revealed through poem 2.0 as shown below :

<i>Wanakatwa kalila ali eee</i>	The ant mourned eee
<i>Wanakatwa kalila eee ali</i>	The ant mourned eee
<i>Mwikulu bulilo</i>	In the air am eaten
<i>Asi bulilo</i>	In the trap hole am eaten
<i>Mwiloba bulilo</i>	Underground am eaten.

Through this repetition, the helplessness of the ant is likened to human beings in the face of death. It is worth observing that the use of repetition in the above poem is not superficial. The performer employs this feature to emphasise particular feelings or ideas that affect people either individually or communally.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an analysis of the basic poetic features within the funeral ritual of *khuswala kumuse*. The analysis has revealed that the *Babukusu* express their world view concerning life and death through the poetry within *khuswala kumuse*. It has also been established that the message within these poems is not confined to the *Babukusu* community. This message is quite significant to the general readers in that it talks about pertinent issues in the contemporary society.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 MEANING.

This chapter answers objective (d), which is the analysis of meaning of the poetry within the ritual. Meaning in this sense is looked at as the messages that are derived from the oration by the (*oswala kumuse*). The poems in this ritual are not for fun but are intended to pass specific messages to the members of the *Babukusu* community. In examining meaning, this chapter draws its materials from the following sources:

- a) the *Babukusu* ritual performers
- b) opinions from respected *Babukusu* elders
- c) authors own observation during *khuswala kumuse*
- d) the reactions of the audience during *khuswala kumuse*
- e) the author's critical analysis and context of the collected poems.

It is however worthwhile to observe that the most authentic criteria for the analysis of meaning is derived from the ritual performers. This is because these are people who are not only the custodians of the wisdom that is contained in the ritual of *khuswala kumuse* but also the principal composers of the poems within this ritual. These people are under obligation to ensure that the poems delivered have clear messages to the audience and the entire community.

The ritual performer uses the occasion of *khuswala kumuse* to educate people on a number of issues affecting the society at large. The content of his poems ranges from social issues, economic prosperity to the political state in the society. Other scholars of African oral poetry share these sentiments. On oral poetry among the *Abaluhya* of western Kenya, Nandwa and Bukenya (1983:85), state:

Songs performed at particular functions do not necessarily deal with the activities that go with those functions. A song sung at initiation for example, may deal with general social criticism or political developments.

Presenting the ritual performers as the most authentic source of information in regard to the analysis of meaning does not, however, mean that the rest of the sources are invalid. These other sources are quite significant in that they help complement the interpretation of the ritual performers in the analysis of meaning. It is crucial to point out that the poems were collected in vernacular, the *Lubukusu* dialect. This dialect is not accessible to all the readers. Equally, it is important to note that both the ritual performers and the adult respondents are not literary experts. However, those respondents provided our research team with a clear picture of the meaning of the poetry within the ritual. As a result, the researcher's work is in essence a literary interpretation of the communal interpretation of meaning.

In poem 1.1 *Babukusu khwama Esibakala*, the *Babukusu* came from *Esibakala*, the ritual performer not only elucidates the origin of the *Babukusu* community but also highlights the basic tenets necessary for a peaceful co-existence in the society. He calls on the mourners and the members of the community to embrace virtues like love and unity as they shun vices like jealousy. In doing so, Manguliechi our leading ritual performer, says that our days on earth will be multiplied. It is worth noting that human destiny is in the hands of *Wele*, the Supreme Being. Other ritual performers like Kilwake and Saenyi share this view.

These performers appear to agree that the *Babukusu* have a tendency to wish their relatively well endowed neighbours ill luck. However, these same people exhibit a completely different attitude when they treat 'strangers' to the community with

incomparable hospitality. Our respondents then feel that there is need for members of this community to cherish one another's prosperity since that is a sure way of pleasing God.

Some of our respondents like Mukhwana, Mulati, Walela among others echo the sentiments of the ritual performers concerning the *Babukusu* as a community. They all agree that the *Babukusu*, despite sharing a common origin, tend to extend their generosity and hospitality to strangers at the expense of their fellow members. In this poem of *khwama Esibakala*, the themes of unity, cultural identity and religion are clearly displayed. The ultimate message is that the *Babukusu* share a common heritage and therefore they should remain united.

In poem 1.2 *omundu mukhasi* (the woman) the place of the woman in the *Babukusu* community is put into focus. According to Kilwake interviewed on 1st Jan, 2004, and Manguliechi on 12th Feb, 2004, the woman among the *Babukusu* is by nature inferior to man. Manguliechi says of women: "*omundu mukhasi kenyokha oli kanja khuloma esachi yatikha*"

This is loosely translated as:

"A woman stood to speak and the calabash broke"

In reference to the women's menstrual cycle, Manguliechi uses the diminutive image of a calabash. In this case, he observes that women are indeed just as weak as calabashes. To him women should not participate in important matters that affect the society. To assert his position, he says that at no single time will he be called upon to offer his last respects to a departed female member of the community. He argues that in case of the passing on of a woman who has embraced social values like

generosity, hard work among others, a ritual performer who has to be relatively young in the profession presides over the ritual of *kumuse*. However, this performer has to sit as he addresses the audience.

The idea of discriminating women on the basis of their menstrual cycle is indeed retrogressive. It should be borne in mind that without this biological cycle, there would be no family and by extension the community. It is therefore ironical and quite disturbing that the *Babukusu* can dismiss the very base upon which the community has its roots.

The ritual performer in poem 1.7 *chibenki chirano*, the five banks, brings out the dynamic nature that characterises the ritual of *khuswala kumuse*. In this poem, he enumerates the banks of the *Babukusu* as Standard, Commercial, Barclays, co-operative and National. It is important to note that banks among the *Babukusu* came into existence during the coming of Europeans. When asked to explain why he employs this analogy, Manguliechi interviewed on 1st Jan, 2004, poses:

*Ewe noli ne chisilingi choo mubenki soba omundu
we lusabe tawe. Nono noli ne engoho yoo namwe
likhese lioo solekomba bia omuchesa tawe.*

This is loosely translated as

“If you have your money in the bank ,you won’t be a beggar, so if you have reared a hen or sheep, you would not covet your neighbour’s property.”

The ritual performer observes that this poem encourages the *Babukusu* to be self-reliant. To achieve this goal, they have to work hard. This poem reminds the mourners and the entire community that they largely rely on agriculture as a means of their livelihood. People are reminded that they have an obligation to not only rear the livestock mentioned in the poem but also cultivate different types of crops. By emphasising the significance of agriculture, the question of food is clearly brought out. Among the *Babukusu* it is the duty of the man to provide food to his family. Failure to do so is bound to bring ridicule to such a man in the face of the community. In this poem, the virtues of hard work and self-reliance are esteemed while vices like laziness and greed are frowned at.

Poem 1.8 *Bimelwa bie Babukusu*, the food crops of the *Babukusu* further emphasises the aforementioned virtues. In this poem, the ritual performer enumerates the different food crops grown by the *Babukusu*. The most common ones are; millet, sorghum, beans, maize, pumpkins, bananas, cassava, potatoes, peas and simsim.

It is apparent that the different types of food crops mentioned in this poem take different times to mature. Some of these crops like millet; sorghum and potatoes are much more resistant to drought than others like maize and beans. Consequently, in the event of a drought setting in, a person who has been wise enough to plant different types of food crops has high chances of harvesting at least one of these crops. He will thus save himself from starving. Through this poem, both our ritual performers and other respondents agree that the audience and the entire community should not only engage in farming but also chose wisely on the types of food crops to be grown. I totally support this view bearing in mind that there are times when the

annual rainfall becomes unreliable. In such a situation, a farmer who would have invested in different food crops is better placed than one who only planted either maize or beans.

In this poem, the ritual performer goes further to sound a warning about possible setbacks in an individual's life not only with regard to farming but also in general life.

In reference to these setbacks Manguliechi interviewed on 23rd Dec, 2003, notes:

“newenya kumutambo yombakha litala khumemo, newenya kumutambo yombakha litala khumakusi”

Translated as:

If you want poverty build the cattle shed on your teeth, if you want poverty build the cattle shed on your testicles.

In this case, Manguliechi employs deep imagery. By referring to the cattle shed, he observes that any respectable man should rear livestock. This necessity is shared by our respondents like Mulati, Kimokoti and Mukhwana. Given that livestock forms the basis of a man's wealth, it calls for a high sense of responsibility for one to maintain his wealth. However, the ritual performer is quick to point out that many times, male members of the community fail to manage their wealth due to irresponsible behaviour. He observes thus:

“Newombakha litala khumemo aba oli ne kumuliungo. Ne wombakha litala khumakusi aba oli ne chimoni chinjoki yaani omundu omueyi”

Thus translated as:

(Building the cattle shed on your teeth means you are greedy. Building it on your testicles means you have sharp eyes thus an adulterous person.)

To this end, the ritual performer takes it as his responsibility to warn the community against engaging in vices which are detrimental to development. This view is shared by other members of the community. According to Kiwanuka interviewed on 20th Dec, 2003, greed and immorality are the two major obstacles to prosperity in the society. To him, both vices call for one to spend a lot of money which may not be available. This then is the beginning of one's downfall.

To sum up the meaning of this poem, it is equally important to observe the great significance that it attaches on family relationships. The ritual performer metaphorically likens the upper lip to one's father and the lower lip to the mother. When asked to unravel this image, Kilwake interviewed on 2nd Jan, 2004, retorts: “*kumunwa kwa angaki nikwo rarako sikila kufunikha kamento ne kwa mwalo mao sikila kukhingilila lulekhe. Rarako nakhukosela otimanga ebumao.* This is translated as:

“The upper lip is your father because it covers your teeth while the lower one is your mother because it protects saliva from coming out of your mouth. When you differ with your father you run to your maternal side.” At this point, it emerges that the ritual performer and the *Babukusu* in general are unknowingly acknowledging the significant role played by women in the society. By referring to the mother as a lower lip, and the father as the upper lip, the *Babukusu* are by inference pinpointing the importance of both parents in protecting and bringing up children. Kilwake observes that it is the duty of the head of the family, the husband, to ensure that harmony prevails in the family. Children are however encouraged to appreciate the important role played by both parents.

Among the *Babukusu*, maternal uncles are very important in one's life. For instance, during circumcision, the initiates are sent to their maternal uncles on the eve of circumcision. It is believed that these uncles have to offer their nephew final blessings before he faces the knife. To express their love to their sister and nephew, the uncles encourage the initiate to emulate their virtues like bravery and hard work. They end up slaughtering a bull in honour of the initiate and his family. This is one of the events in which the significance of maternal uncles is depicted. This poem then comes out very strongly in fostering positive relationships in the community.

I agree with Kilwake on the important role played by both parents in the sense that family stability is indeed a pre-requisite to prosperity not only in a family set up but also the entire society. To this end most of our respondents share the position taken by Kilwake.

The poem on the food crops of the *Babukusu* has therefore played an important role in educating the entire community. This poem, apart from enumerating the different food crops, has also elucidated the societal values. Through it, the *Babukusu* are brought out as people who are not only pre occupied with the acquisition of wealth but also a people who cherish societal values.

Being a ritual performed in the event of death, the ritual performers always have to talk about the phenomenon of death. This is witnessed in poem 1.9 *lifwa lino*, thus this death. In this poem, the ritual performer reminds the audience about the inevitability of death by calling it 'our death'. He however, goes ahead to bring out the cruelty of death by alluding to its immense powers. Death, the ritual performer

says: “reaps both the ripe and unripe fruits”. According to Manguliechi, once death ‘knocks’ one does not have a chance to say no. This makes it cruel since it takes both the young and the old indiscriminately. The community’s fear is clearly revealed in this poem. The presentation of death as being an unwelcome phenomenon is shared by different African communities. Among the *Abanyole* of western province of Kenya: “Death is a cruel phenomena that inflicts pain and torture not only the on the dying person but also the living.” Alembi (2002:142.)

On a similar note, p’Bitek (1963:22) states: “death is not a gateway to some sort of desirable external existence, but a cruel monster which strikes down a member of a family and lineage.” This makes people dread death. Gehman (1999:5) summarises the experiences of death well when he notes: “but death is more than a transition. It is feared and resented.”

Consequently by referring to death as being cruel, both our ritual performers and respondents support one another in condemning death as an unwelcome monster that comes to distort the peaceful co-existence in the society. However, despite its cruelty, the community at large has grudgingly accepted it as a reality and an eventuality in one’s life.

As one of our ritual performers Saenyi interviewed on 23 Dec. 2003 notes: ‘*buli omundu niye kamolu kalola asi ali we khufwa*. Thus everybody whose nostrils faces down is bound to die. From his point of view, the fact that our nostrils point down is an everlasting reminder to our eventual death and destination. He observes that in the long run one has to die and be buried and his or her destination is likely to be the underworld. As already observed in the previous chapters, the destination of the

spirits of the dead has remained mysterious despite the fact that there is a general consensus on the existence of life after death.

The presentation of death as cruel and yet inescapable is clearly captured in poem 2.0 *wanakatwa kalila* thus the ant mourned. In this poem, Manguliechi vividly uses the image of the ant to refer to the hopelessness and helplessness of human beings in the face of death. It is important to note that the *Lubukusu* word for the ant is *eswa*. However, in this poem, the ritual performer refers to it as *wanakatwa* which is a diminutive term. According to Kilwake, interviewed on 1st Jan, 2004, ‘*khulanga khuli wanakatwa sikila khali khatiti mala niyo khabirira bulilo. Nono khaloma khali abanakosa si?*’ Translated as:

We call it *wanakatwa* because it is tiny and yet everywhere it goes it is eaten, so it wonders what wrong it has committed.

On a similar note, Manguliechi likens the white ant to human beings. According to him, man is generally helpless when death strikes. Indeed, just like the ant, human beings wonder whatever mistake they committed to deserve death. Manguliechi, just like members of the society feel that death is an unwelcome phenomenon in the community. It always comes to destabilise the social set up by robbing people off their loved ones. The ant’s cry is therefore the cry of human beings.

It is crucial to note that the ant is used symbolically. Among the *Babukusu*, this insect is associated with bravery and determination. This sentiment is revealed in one of the songs: ‘*oluma kumwoyo enga eswa*’ thus be brave like the ant, sung by a renowned musician in the community, Wanyonyi in his band ‘*Tindikiti*.’ In this song,

Wanyonyi urges the *Babukusu* to embrace the spirit of determination that the ant exhibits. By referring to the predicament of the ant in reference to death, the ritual performer is by and large encourages the audience as well as entire society to embrace virtues determination and bravery in life. He reminds people that despite the reality and inevitability of death, the living must continue struggling to achieve their aspirations.

4.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, it emerges from the analysis of these poems, that they communicate important messages in the community. Though set in a funeral context, they communicate issues that touch on the entire spectrum of human life. Some of the pertinent issues brought out include the origin of the *Babukusu*, the relationship between the *Babukusu* and the neighbours' as well as important values of the community. These poems also shed light on important activities like agriculture which forms the source of livelihood in the community. The poems further talk about the significance of peaceful co-existence in the family and society. The question of death is equally brought out in these poems. Death, it emerges, is an eventuality that all human beings are bound to face. However, these poems underscore the need to remain focused in whatever we aspire to achieve in life despite the sad reality that death indeed awaits us.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction.

This study investigated three aspects of the poetry within the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* funeral ritual: description of the social context within which this poetry is performed, exploration of the poetic features that characterise this ritual and the analysis of the meaning of these poetic features. These components were studied by observing the oral performances during *khuswala kumuse* and through interviews with the ritual performers and adult members of the community.

The specific objectives were: to describe the social context within which the poetry within the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* funeral ritual is disseminated, to collect and record the poetry performed within *khuswala kumuse* to identify and discuss the poetic features within *khuswala kumuse* and to carry out a textual analysis of the meaning of the poetry within this ritual.

The study was guided by three premises: the *Babukusu* funeral poetry within *khuswala kumuse* ritual is dynamic and it has pragmatic value, the nature of the social milieu influences the content of the oral poetry within *khuswala kumuse* ritual; and it is possible to construct the context and meaning of the oral poetry within *khuswala kumuse* without necessarily attending a funeral.

5.2 Contributions of the study

This study has established that oral poetry within the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* funeral ritual is dynamic and has pragmatic value. It has also been revealed that the custodians of this poetry are the ritual performers as well as adult members of the community. The ritual performers who are sages in this community coin their words poetically depending on the nature of the social milieu.

This study has exhibited the importance of the poetry within *khuswala kumuse*. Among other things, it has been pointed out that this poetry is crucial in educating not only the bereaved family and the audience but also the entire society on a wide range of issues that affect them as well as providing an elucidation of the final stage in human life, death.

The findings of this research are an important contribution to the hitherto neglected field of funeral poetry among the *Babukusu*. This study has been a pioneer work in the study of funeral poetry within the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* ritual. The study is therefore significant in that it has opened up avenues for further research in the field of oral poetry, in particular funeral poetry among this community.

5.3 Recommendations.

This study recommends that the poetry within the *Babukusu khuswala kumuse* ritual be preserved. This is in line with the findings of the study which have revealed that this poetry is essential in the sense that it does not only talk about the dead but also the living. Given its dynamic and pragmatic nature, the poetry within this ritual is of

great significance in enhancing a harmonious existence in the society. We recommend that this poetry should be preserved as a work of art to be referred to by literary scholars. It should also be preserved for aesthetic purposes both to the community and the reader.

In conclusion, we suggest that follow up research may be carried out on the analysis of style and performance in this funeral ritual. Research should also try to establish the predicament of the context through which this poetry is realised in relation to the fast changing world. We also recommend that similar studies be conducted in different cultural backgrounds for purposes of comparison.

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7.0 APPENDICES

7.1 Information on Respondents

No.	Name.	Village	Age	Occupation
1.	Wanyoni Manguliechi	Miruru	74	Ritual performer
2.	Patropa Kilwake	Wambukonyi	75	Ritual performer
3.	Yona Saenyi	Milo	64	Ritual performer
4.	Felistus Nekesa	Khwiroro	63	Peasant farmer
5.	John Kiwanuka	Mukuselwa	50	Teacher
6.	Rael Mukhwana	Misikhu	73	Peasant farmer
7.	Walela Wakulo	Makuselwa	68	Peasant farmer
8.	Paul Munyakho	Naitiri	26	Teacher
9.	Abdi Kundu	Kimilili	53	Business man
10.	Zakayo Mukhwana	Ndivisi	36	Driver
11.	Peter Wanakuta	Sango	32	Photo/Camera man
12.	Elizabeth Mulati	Mayanja	44	Teacher
13.	Musa Yohana	Chebukora	74	Peasant farmer
14.	Emmanuel Simiyu	Makuselwa	26	Teacher
15.	Elijah Lukoye	Buko	43	Farmer
16.	Rose Wanjala	Chebukwabi	30	Nurse
17.	Masika kimokoti	Namarambi	67	Peasant
18.	Rebecca Nalinae	Kamukuywa	21	Student
19.	Jonathan Obae	Bahayi	79	Peasant farmer
20.	Jafred Kimokoti	Naarambi	45	Accountant
21.	Everlyne Silomelo	Kikai	25	Teacher
22.	Joseph Lubekho	Kakamwe	60	Peasant farmer
23.	Pauline Wakukha	Kimaeti	23	Teacher
24.	Joseph Mulati	Namarambi	70	Peasant farmer

7.2 Oral funeral poems analysed.

1.1 *Efwe Babukusu Khwama Esibakala*

We babusuku come from Ebasakala

Efwe babana be lirango lie enjofu

We are children of the elephant's thigh

Efwe siyanja barende

We the lovers of strangers

Bana befwe chino chindalo chimbi

My brothers these are bad days

Khukhoya Kwaba ne bulala nga kamake

We are be as united as termites

Khuleke Likhalkha

Let us avoid jelousy

Manya we Mungaki akhuwekho chisiku chimbili

So that the one above may grand us two more days

1.2 khale omundu mukhasi kenyokha musikhasio

In time memorial a woman rose to speak in public gathering

Noli kanja khuloma

Upon delivering her speech

Esachi yatika

The calabash broke

Ne Babusuku bolala bali

So the Babusuku said that

Khukhwama lumo

Henceforth

Henceforth

Omukhasisaloma ebanduta

A woman will never speak before people

1.4 *Babukusu khuli-ne kimisambwa ngano*

The Babukusu have different occupations

Kwe beni bung'osi

The first one is prophecy

Kwa khabili kamaya

The second one is magic

Kwa khataru bubasi

The third one is black smith

Kwa kane bufumu

The fourth one is divination

Kwa khataro bukwebi

The fifth one is surgery

Kwa sita bukimba

The sixth one is rain making

Kwa saba kumuse

The seventh one is ritual performance

1.6 *Alumo ari embogo yakonile*

Today the buffalo is sleeping

Embogo yino yatangasianga bulala

The buffalo used to preach unity

Bumiho bwayo bulandale

Let this seed spread

Omukhale abola ari

Our forefather said thus

Tondo wafya tondo wakobola

“Tondo” dies and “tondo” resurrects

Khulume kimioyo bana befwe

Let's be brave at hearth brothers and sisters

1.7 *Babusuku khuli ne chibenki chirano*

The Babusuku have five banks

Engokho bali standard

Chicken are standard

Likhese bali comasio

Sheep are commercial

Embusi bali bakilesi

Goats are Barclays

Ekhafu bali koparetifu

Cattle are Cooperative

Bimelwa bali nasiona

Crops are National

1.8 *Efwe Bbusuku khuli ne biakhulia ekhumi*

We the Babukusu have ten different food crops

Kamasina biakhulia bali

Their names are:-

Bulo

Millet

Kamaemba

Sorghum

Kamakanda

Beans

Kamaindi

Maize

Kamaondo

Pumpkins

1.9 *Bamasika rekeresia*

Mourners listen

Lifwa lino lilifwe kikhale

Death has bedeviled us since time immemorial

Lifwa lili nende embelekeu

Death is cruel

Likesa bilabile nende bikhlabile ta

It reaps both the ripe and unripe ones

2.0 *Wanakatwa kakilia ali eee*

The ant mourned

Wanakatwa kalila ali eee

The ant mourned eee

Mwikulu bulilo

In the air I'm eaten

Asi bulilo

In the trap hole I am eaten

Mwiloba bulilo

Underground I am eaten

2.1 *kuka njikulile engila*

Grandfather open the way for me

kuka njikulile engila

Grandfather open the way for me

Kuka kumoyo kwalila engo

Grandfather my soul longs for home

Kuka kumoyo kwalila engo

Grandfather my soul longs for home

Siebulile engila

Open the way for me.

7.3 Interview Questions.

1. (i) *Kumuse sina nisio?*

What is *Kumuse*?

(ii) *Kumuse kwanja kurie?*

How did *kumuse* start?

2. *Nanu niye baswalilanga kumuse na sikila sina?*

In whose honour do we have the *khuswala kumuse* performance and why?

3. *Omuswali muse akholanga sina khukhwerekekhera kuswala kumuse ?*

What does the ritual performer do in preparation for the performance of *kuswala kumuse*?

4. *Chingubo cho Omuswali kumuse chili nende sifunane sina ?*

What is the significance of the costumes worn by the ritual performer?

5. (i) *Lomakho mu bwimbwi kimise nikio omanyile.*

Briefly describe the types of *kumuse* .

(ii) *Bise sina nibio balomelanga kimise kino?*

Under what circumstances is each type of *kumuse* used?

6. *Omuswali muse kanjanga ariena khuswala kumuse ne sifunane sina ?*

How does the ritual performer begin his oration and why?

7. *Makhuwa sina niko omuswali muse arumikhilanga sana ne bukhala bwako sina?*

What are the most common words used by the ritual performer and what is their meaning and significance?

8. (i) *Lomo sina niyo khunyolanga khulondekhana nende kumuse?*

What messages are underlined in the ritual of *khuswala kumuse*?

(ii) *Sina sikilanga nakhunyola elomo yino?*

What factors determine the choice of these messages/themes?

(iii) *Chilomo chino cha kalukhane chiriena nende bise?*

How have these messages changed with time?

9. *Sina sikila Omuswali muse nakekulanga engila?*

What is the significance of the path created during the *khuswala kumuse* performance?

10. (i) *Kumuse kuli nende sifune sina mu Babukusu?*

What is the role of *khuswala kumuse* among the *Babukusu*?

(ii) *Kumuse kuno kunyala kwaba nende bukhala sina mubise bino?*

How can this ritual be utilized in social development in the contemporary society?

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