

Symbolism and Death: Class-based Ritualised Performance in the Basukuma Burial Ceremonies

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Abstract

Guided by a Marxist perspective on literature, and Muleka's Performer-centrism, this paper highlights and discusses different manifestations or gestures that covertly suggest that there are elements of classes in some of the burial ceremonies, which are accompanied by performances among the Basukuma ethnic group of Tanzania. It reports the findings of a study whose data were collected using interviews held with respondents selected via snowball sampling. Note-taking served as a prominent data collection tool. Documentary review supplemented interviews, especially to collect data on the traditions of the Basukuma as one of the ethnic groups in Tanzania found predominantly in the Lake Victoria Zone. The study found that the burial ceremonies of the Basukuma are class conscious as manifested by their symbolic, incantatory, and invocatory performances. Indeed, when chiefs, singers, breech-birth and twins die, their burials require special burial ritual performances such as incantations, invocations and symbols that differentiate them from other rank and file individuals whose burial ceremonies lack fanfares characterising privileged individuals. Overall, these burial ceremonies graced by symbolic gestures among the Basukuma also help to unify the community since individuals define themselves in terms of who they are and what to expect from them and the community as a whole.

Keywords:

Burial ceremony, class, fanfare, incantation, invocation, performance, ritual
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Introduction

Death is a phenomenon that befalls all and sundry. It is an experience that is always new, fearful and sorrowful wherever it strikes since humanity can never get used to it despite its inevitability. Okpewho (1992, pp. 123-124) summarises death and what transpires to individuals in society thusly:

The last state in the journey of life is death. The occasion is generally accompanied by a sense of loss and sadness. In many communities the traditional observances range from the laying out of the body and the lamentation obsequies (especially the women around the laid-out corpse) to the final obsequies preceding the deposition of the body into the earth. The obsequies vary, depending very much on factors such as the age of the deceased, his status in the society, his professional or cult affiliation and so on. Children and adolescents are usually buried with more ado than the sorrowing of their parents and immediate relatives in a sense, the mourners are thankful that God has seen fit to take the young one away before he or she showed any promise and meant anything to relatives. Titled men and women are usually mourned with fanfare and extensive ceremonies lasting several days.

In the African context, funeral and bereavement occasions, as elements of oral literature, are characterised by different performances/ceremonies that mark such events. They include eulogising the dead, what they did when they were alive, and the possibility of what they might have done had they lived longer. Based on these events, Okpewho (1992), with reference to death and different rituals that accompany them among the Banyoro of Uganda, proffers that this ethnic community performs periodic rituals to appease and placate the spirits of the dead once they become angry. These rituals usually have recourse to oral materials such as songs, invocations and incantations. However, he does not detail any gesture of class existence and differentiation during such burial rites even though he recognises that such reality exists in some African societies.

Similarly, Finnegan (1970) illustrates how elegiac poetry is an integral part of the death rituals of the Akan of West Africa, the Yoruba (also of West Africa), and the Acholi of Uganda, East Africa. Such elegiac poetry includes poems or songs performed at funeral or memorial rites accompanying such ceremonies; however, she does not situate these in the class context.

Explaining the continued interaction between the dead and the living, Baloyi (2014) contends that for traditional Africans, the dead are an inseparable and influential part of their being. As a result, when Africans perform rituals by the grave side, for example, they do not

refer to the connection with the dead person's spirit; rather, they communicate with the living dead usually through songs and incantations and, sometimes, invocations. Moreover, in the traditional African thought of death, the grieving process is characterised by rituals requiring the bereaved family members to shave their hair and slaughter of a domestic animal. The performance of these rituals is important in maintaining balance and harmony between the living and the living dead (Baloyi 2014). However, the study does not situate the ritual performance, which contain oral literature elements in African communities, in the context of classes.

In the context of the Chewa ethnic group in Eastern Zambia, Zampi (2001) elucidates that, immediately the death of a husband occurs, the widow is expected to mourn clad in black dress and squat on the floor in the funeral house. As a sign of mourning, the widow desists from bathing, changing clothes, wearing shoes, smiling, talking loudly, cooking or eating too much. Moreover, the widow should always tie a black scarf across the head. After the burial of her deceased husband, family members including the widow and orphans shave their heads and bath together as a sign of grief. Closely examined, this burial ceremony is akin to a ritual performance that—to a certain extent—is based on class since the widow is exposed to stringent observance of rituals from which other members of the family are excluded. This treatment of the widow suggests the subordination of women in the Chewa class system.

Also among the Luo of Kenya, Shiino (1997) observes that the performance of death rituals depends on the personal attributes of the dead person such as gender and age. In this society, when children and unmarried young girls die there are no rituals or performance such as songs, incantations or invocations that take place. In other words, death and burial ceremonies among the Luo are tailored around social status since children and the unmarried have yet to attain a social standing of note in their society. Moreover, a single young girl is buried on the left side of their mother's house with no ritual to denote that she is still insignificant in the social ladder.

Based on the empirical literature review, this study was motivated to focus on the ritual performance of the death and bereavement among the Basukuma as expressed in songs, incantations, and invocations or

symbolic representations for any manifestation of class differentiation since there is a paucity of such studies particularly among the Basukuma community.

Theoretical Framework

The Marxist perspective and Muleka's Performer-centrism informed data analysis of this study. The Marxist perspective sheds light on how the burial ceremonies among the Basukuma are based class differentiation with the upper class commanding enormous power during their burial ceremonies or rituals that differ from those in the lower echelons of society. Muleka's Performer-centrism perspective (2014), on the other hand, is premised on African oral literature placing the performer at the centre of a given oral literary work. This perspective informed the analysis of the songs, invocations, and the incantations that feature in burial rituals among the Basukuma as oral literature that is solely dependent on performance.

The Marxist perspective needs further elaboration since it is central to understanding the class differentiation of the Basukuma. To begin with, the death and burial rites of the Basukuma are elements of culture. According to Marx, culture is inseparable from the historical conditions in which human beings create their material lives, and the relations of exploitation and domination governing the socio-economic order of a particular phase of human history can determine the whole cultural orientation of the society (Selden et al. 2005). For Marx, the society comprises a superstructure with religious, ideological and the educational institutions determining the position of individuals. Since religion, ideology, and the education system, may serve as determinants of the dominant culture of a given society, including what people believe in and do, Marx claims that the society as such is made of strata with those more powerful ideologically or culturally belonging to the upper-class wielding power and, hence, are treated differently from those without such power.

Avineri (1968) argues that modern society treats people not according to their immanent attributes but according to their external connection with social class. In addition, a person is treated for example, as a land owner or a worker rather than as a human being who happens to own land or physically work on it. Implicitly, human being is not a

subject in modern society but one identifiable with his or her true class. Jefferson and Robey (1997), on their part, argue that one of the things, which distinguished Marx's view of history and society from that of his antecedents and contemporaries' emphasis on class, are the socio-economic elements in any society as an ultimate determinant of the society's character. In this regard, the basic economic structure or base engenders a number of social institutions and beliefs which regulate or dissipate the conflict and keep the mode of production alive.

This Marxist description of the presence of classes in society and the relation of production also applies to the Basukuma ethnic community, which also recognises social strata and the associated power. In traditional Basukumaland, the *Batemi* (chiefs) belong to the upper echelon followed by the *Banang'oma* (the main chief's advisors) and others follow in descending order. Makoye (2003) describes this reality by saying that the chiefs (*Batemi*) were the ideological clan leaders whose primary functions were to safeguard the clan emblems and royal drums that symbolised the power and strengths of the clan; to keep the peace and harmony existing in the community (*mholo*); to protect the clan against intruders such as the Maasai; to provide the means for long storage of grains; and to control natural resources such as rain by having their helpers or advisors known as *bafudi ba mbula*, that is, rain-makers play their role effectively.

The *Batemi*, as the upper class, wielded both political and economic power. Indeed, this power was ideological as well as economic one. Makoye, (2003) explains that it was the duty of the chief to do everything in his power to deliver his subject from calamities of any description. To execute this noble task, one of his functions entailed finding out the cause of the misfortune by sending his *Banang'oma* (chief advisers) to diviners/healers/medicinemmen known in Kisukuma language as *Bafumu*. The prescriptions given by the *Bafumu* had to be worked upon by the chief (*Ntemi*). If the chief failed in his duties, he was summarily dethroned. Apart from the *Banang'oma*, Basukuma chiefs appointed representatives to take charge of villages where they would exercise subordinate judicial and executive power delegated to them by the *mtemi*. Below the *Banang'oma* there were headmen known as *Banangwa* (Makoye 2003). Under *Banangwa*, there were *Banamhala* (village elders). These were helpers to the *Ng'wanangwa* (a head man with

quasi-judicial and executive powers) in his daily administrative matters.

Another stratum in the traditional Basukuma power set up comprised the *Bafumu*, for example, healers, magicians, or diviners who held a special place in the chief's activities consulted on grave issues likely to pose a threat to or befalling the wellbeing of the chief or his chieftainship. They also advised the chief on matters such as supernatural communication with the ancestors and on how they could win a war if it happened. In addition, to *Banang'oma*, *Banangwa* and *Bafumu*, Basukuma peasants had organisations that served as a counter balance to the exercise of the chief's authority, which keenly observed what was going on in the chieftainship. In discharging their responsibilities, they did so independent of the chief (Makoye, 2003)

Currently, this traditional political organisation and administration of the Basukuma has become partially extinct (Songoyi 2005). It has been replaced by a modern political and administrative machinery following the official abolition of traditional system from 1953 until 1963 (Songoyi 2005). Even though this ruling system among the Basukuma has been abolished, the reality of socio-economic classes among the Basukuma persists., Songoyi (2005) further explains that among the Basukuma, there are persons who occupy high positions and command great respect in the community regardless of their gender or age. These are the *Bafumu* (diviners, healers, or magicians) and the *Balingi* who are singers and dance leaders. The *Balingi* (singers/dance leaders) are specialists who also occupy a high position in society and command great respect regardless of their gender or age. Like the *Bafumu*, the *Balingi* have great influence and power over the lives of the people in the community (Songoyi 2005).

Besides, in modern Basukuma way of life today, there are *Mabhasa* (twins) and Breech-birth children (*Bagashinje*), that is, those children who are unusually born with their legs coming out first instead of the head. These are influential and occupy a high-class status among the Basukuma because, if their demands are not fulfilled or met, the Basukuma believe that they can affect production, acquisition of wealth, education and fertility of both women and men. In other words, the Basukuma call such children *Basewu* (that is, hot children who can burn anyone upon touching them). Like the twins, the *Bafumu* as rain-

makers, fortune tellers and healers hold immense socio-economic power because they serve as the source of economic prosperity since, according to Basukuma belief, they can make people wealthy by ordering or advising them to follow some special instructions.

The Marxist theory also applies to the interpretation of the burial and bereavement rituals of the Basukuma because they tend to reflect a class or status the deceased person occupied while still alive. For example, a diviner will be accorded some grand burial unlike the common man. He may be buried with fanfare, which may comprise songs and performance of some rituals such as putting some protective medicine (*lukago*) on his body before he or she is buried. Moreover, he or she could be buried while seated on a traditional stool. In contrast, an ordinary man or woman cannot enjoy such a privilege. Coupled with the symbols, incantations and, sometimes, songs and invocations, the burial and bereavement rituals and ceremonies among the Basukuma reflect classes that finds ready explanation under the Marxist theory.

Methods

This qualitative research aimed to examine the class-based burial and bereavement rituals of the Basukuma. The data were collected from 30 respondents drawn using snowball sampling. The study area was Igunga district in Tabora region of Tanzania. The respondents were drawn from 10 villages involved in the study. The area is largely populated by the Basukuma ethnic group, hence its selection to get pertinent data to meet the objective of the study. The data were collected orally using notebooks to jot and record information gathered from the respondents. The researcher avoided tape-recording to ensure the respondents remained at ease because, among the Basukuma, matters related to death are grave issues that individuals are not always free to discuss. Thus, tape recording them could make them uneasy, with the likelihood of compromising the findings. In fact, many of them could have even desisted from volunteering to participate and be tape-recorded in the study. Consequently, jotting down what the respondents said guaranteed maximum co-operation from them.

The study used interviews that Kothari (2009) calls focused interviews. These unstructured interviews focus on the experience of the respondent and the effects. Unstructured interviews give an interviewer enough freedom to decide the manner and sequence of asking the questions. Moreover, they allowed the respondents flexibility in providing as much information as possible regarding the research problem.

Due to rapid changes in many African traditions, some oral literature elements of those traditions have become increasingly difficult to obtain. The urgent alternative is to trace them by examining various documents that have recorded the variables of interest to the researcher. Thus, the study had to take recourse to print and other sources that talk about the Basukuma oral traditions even though those specifically on the burial ceremonies were rare. The researcher also reviewed sources on burial and bereavement rituals from other ethnic groups in the African context to draw some parallels or differences from the practices of the Basukuma.

Finally, the data collected were subjected to qualitative analysis, which focused on manifestations of classes expressed during the burial and bereavement rituals of the Basukuma. Specifically, from the data collected the study analysed the songs, symbolic gestures, invocations and incantations characterising the death burial ceremonies of the Basukuma. The presentation of verbatim quotations is accompanied by explanations.

Findings and Discussion

The study found that the Basukuma burial and bereavement rituals are characterised by classes with some individuals being accorded more respect and observance of rituals than others. For some, there was a complete absence of such aspects. Implicitly, the way a person dies among the Basukuma affects the manner or how that person will be buried and whether there will be any performing of burial and bereavement rituals or not. The presentation and discussion of the findings starts with the type of deaths among the Basukuma which are devoid of any burial or bereavement rituals, followed by those deaths characterised by performance of burial and bereavement rituals. Juxtaposing these two categories of deaths helps to account for

both scenarios of burials to determine how classes among the Basukuma ethnic group influence death ceremonies.

Deaths Devoid of any Ritual or Fanfare

The following category of deaths lacks any substantial observance of rituals among the Basukuma burial and bereavement ceremonies.

Death by Drowning

When a person dies by drowning in a well or a river, the body once recovered is buried near the spot where it happened. For example, if a person fell into a well and drowns, he or she will be buried just near the well. Similarly, the body of a person who drowns in a river will be buried near the river the place where that body was retrieved. Explaining why such deaths are devoid of ritualised performances, one of the respondents revealed during an interview:

A person who dies by drowning in a well or in a river, will not be buried at home or at the cemetery where other dead persons among the Basukuma may be buried to avoid bringing bad luck to the family concerned. Other members of the family might also end up dying in the same manner. Once we bury such a body, we just disperse. We go on with our businesses as though nothing has happened. We even avoid mentioning the name of the deceased who has been buried that way. It is important to observe these restrictions to stave off misfortunes. Once my uncle drowned in a well when he was returning from a nocturnal drink at some spot in our village. We buried him in this manner. Personally, I would have wished to have my uncle buried in his cowshed. But that is a traditional Basukuma norm (**Interview with a respondent in Igunga District, September 2021**).

The assumption is that such a person has lost the original station in life of normality and becomes an abomination, hence a liability to the wider society, which also explains the lack of traditional burial rites.

Murder and Suicide Cases

Other types of deaths that fall under this category and treatment involve an individual who is killed in the field, whether in a fight or by robbers; someone killed by a dangerous animal; and a person who commits suicide. It emerged that such burials are devoid of any rituals and no funeral wake and bereavement observance. Community and family members go about their daily activities as though nothing has happened. One of the elders explained that there was no such observance and no one was allowed to cry no matter how touched this person was by the tragic event. The treatment of deaths of this kind draw some parallels with findings recorded by Nwokoha (2020) who calls them "bad deaths" based on the rites and rituals in Ezzaland, Nigeria. His list of these bad deaths include death from leprosy, accidents, suicide, small pox, falling from a tree, swollen abdomen, and dying from a chronic disease. Such bad death would not only deprive one of full burial rites but also deny them a 'good place' in the spiritual realm (Nwokoha 2020).

Burials and Bereavements that are accompanied by Rituals or Fanfare

On the other hand, burial and bereavement events accompanied by songs, invocations and incantations as part of the ritualised performance among the Basukuma vary. The study found differences in the performance and observance of these rituals to be class-based. For example, only some people such as the *Bafumu*, (diviners or medicine men), *Balingi* (dance leaders) and some adult men and women merited the singing of songs, saying of some prayers in terms of invocations and incantations upon their demise. They may also be buried with objects such as a local wooden stool upon which they are seated for burial or a stone which is placed atop the grave to symbolise that the buried person was an adult with children. Others may not be so lucky. The following categories of people varyingly attract some ritualised burial with some fanfare:

Death of an Adult Individual

When an adult person dies, people living within that locality usually gather for the funeral at the home of this dead person. In a traditional setting, this is done through *Basumba Batale* (senior young men) who go round each family conveying the information about the death of the given individual. The burial act may occur on the same

day the person dies or the next provided the dead person's body is within the compound and there are no barriers as to its burial. Usually, the grave is dug within the cowshed if the dead person had cattle or simply within the compound if the person did not own or raise any livestock such as cattle, sheep or goats. If the dead man had cattle, one of his cattle is killed by being hit on its head, skinned and the body to be wrapped in it for burial in the grave. A poor man, who dies without possession of any livestock, is usually covered in some green fresh leaves or *ngh'ale* of a tree known as *Ikalinga*. The two burials expose the social status of the two deceased.

Once the mourning is over, a *Ng'weeja* (purifier or cleanser) usually comes to the deceased's family very early in the morning of the second or third day. This cleanser is usually one of the *Basumba Batale* (senior young men). He usually comes with the following materials: some barks of the *iponda* tree, leaves of some strong-smelling plant (*Ilumba*), some bitter fruits of a certain creeper plant (*salyungu* or *itolo ilulu*). He will find the elders (*Banamhala*) sitting in a circle at the door of the dead person's house. The cleansing ritual begins with his plucking some grass from the usually grass-thatched house and then gets inside the house and takes a live firebrand to blow into a flame. At this juncture, all the dead person's clothes will have been taken out and gathered at a certain spot. This process goes together with the shaving of hair of all family members closely related to the dead. This hair is put into a pot. Then he cuts the ingredients that he comes with and mixes them with water in the *Ilangahe* (wooden big bowl). He then starts sprinkling the dead person's clothes. After this activity is over, he then moves westward where he throws the firebrand and the bunch of grass plucked from the door top. After this ritual *kuponya mabhi* (throwing away evils), he returns to take the pot with the shaven hair with the ingredients remaining from the purification exercise and walks to the cross-roads where he smashes the pot in the middle of the junction. This act is accompanied by the following incantation:

*Nashiga henaha ha nzila maka
Natula mabhi genaya henaha,
Nungu yeniyi nitalija henaha,
Mabhi gaayo gapandwe na gusolwa na bhabhiti bha hanzila,*

Gache na gushila
Guti nungu yenyi

Translation :

I have arrived here at the cross-roads,
I leave all the evils here,
All its evils be trampled upon and carried under the feet of the
passers-by
Evils that should die and vanish
Like this pot.

This incantation as performed at the crossroads is highly symbolic since it represents the taking away of death from the family and throwing it at the cross-roads where it meets its fate by being trampled upon by the feet of many passers-by. Such an incantation with its symbolic gesture of the crossroads as a meeting point of cultural reality is performed only to mark the death of male adults, and not for young adults or children. Once the purifier has finished performing this cleansing rite, he goes back home without turning back—a symbolic gesture—since that he would bring misfortune to the family if he looked back.

Death of an Unmarried Young Person

The death of an unmarried young man/woman, on the other hand, is observed in a somewhat the same way as the death of an adult person. However, a notable difference is the absence of substantial ritual with no songs, or an incantation performed. Whereas a dead adult person—whether a man or a woman—enjoys a *lishigo* (a stone) that is placed on top of the grave mound, young people or individuals who die without ever having children, do not enjoy such a privilege. Instead, they get only a small, extinguished firebrand (*gajitinde*) placed onto the grave. Such individuals are soon forgotten as their names do not live on in children born in each lineage or family in future. Their extinction is called *gucha malali* meaning ‘dying for ever’ since the lineage is broken and can never be resuscitated. This act shows that Basukuma burial ceremonies believe in a class continuum. Their social standing determines the kind of ritualised performance to accompany their passing including songs and incantations.

These findings are congruent with the burial practices of the Luo ethnic group of South Nyanza in Kenya where Shiino (1997) reported that when burying dead unmarried women and young girls, they face some negative discrimination. Traditionally, women are not supposed to be buried at their natal home. As such, when a woman dies before marriage, her parents will ask any of her elder sisters' husbands or a male immigrant in their community to bury her body so she would be treated as if she were his wife. Furthermore, if her parents cannot find anybody willing to honour their request, they would bury the body outside the compound. In that event, the dead woman is believed to be a bad omen for her living family members. Her burial outside the compound symbolises a gesture of classes among the community members of this ethnic group since the rituals characterising different deaths are not performed at the same level (Shiino 1997). Such discrimination indicates that the unmarried women belong to a class that is lower than the married ones who command respectability and a sense of belongingness to the families to which they were wed.

Death of Twins and Breech-birth Individuals

Once one of the twins dies, she or he is usually buried by the *Bakango* (individuals who have ever given birth to twins in their lifetime). Once the grave has been prepared, these *Bakango* tell the *Basohola* (those who have never given birth to twins or breech-birth children in their lifetime) to give them room to bury and perform rituals. The symbolic implication here is that twins (*Bakulwa na Doto*) and breech-birth individuals (*Ligashinje*) can only be buried by those who ever sired such children in their lifetime. Usually the *Ngangi* (*Bakango's* midwife) goes to the bottom of the grave and performs some rituals such as putting some local medicine on the dead body, and utters the following words/invocation in the process:

Yiise Bakango bajisusubya balogi
Datula wuganga wise,
Oose oose uyualize higulya ya mili gwenuyu,
Alabuke, apandike jilabi,
Agwe abinzike nhingo yaakwe,
Ateng'we lukuba agwe ache,
Ulu ali nkima ading'we ngajigaji,
Ulu ali ngosha ache wimilile.

Translation:

We begetters of twins, witches' nightmares,
We place our medicines here,
Whoever comes, over this body;
He or she be afflicted with acute pains
He or she should collapse and break one's neck,
He or she should be struck by lightning, should fall, fall, and die.
If she is a woman, she should have unending menstruation
If a man, let him die a cruel death.

This prayer of the midwife seeks to protect the dead twin through symbolic references to breaking someone's neck to mean death as well as being struck by lightning as well as the repetition of the word fall, contextually suggest that no one should tamper with the twins because they belong to a high class in the community. When the *Ngangi* performs the ritual in the grave, other *Bakango* stand outside of it singing a short song accompanied by drum beats. The following is a typical example of such songs:

*Kulwa/Doto ng'wanone nafuma gulufu
Nayuluchola ulufu nakija gulubona
Gulwanguno lutiho
Kulwa/Doto ng'wanone ulufu ludabulagwa,
Nayuluchola ulufu nakija gulubona gulwa ngunio lutiho
Kulwa/Doto ng'wanone ulufu ludabonagwa na munhu*

Translation:

Kulwa/Doto my child,
I have come back from my search for death,
I have looked for him in every place but I did not find him,
Because he does not exist,
Kulwa/Doto my child, even if you happen to find death,
He is never spoken of his existence.

This song as sung during the burial of a twin tries to underplay the power of death. Even though the singers recognise the existence of death, they pretend that it does not exist, hence their search for it. The parent here does not believe that twins die, hence the use of the apostrophe. In this context, the dead child is being addressed as

though he/she were present and still alive. Among the Basukuma, twins are believed to be very powerful demi-gods who cannot die, hence the use of the apostrophe in the song. Indeed, among the Basukuma, no bereavement is observable for such kind of deaths. When twins die, it is not literally mentioned that they are dead or one of them is dead. Such kind of death is usually metaphorically referred to as *olalaga* (she/he is only sleeping).

Breech-Birth Individual (*Death of Li Gashinje*)

The death of *Li Gashinje* is similarly observed as that of twins. Every aspect of the ritual is the same—even the song. What changes is simply the name. Instead of the dead person being addressed as *Kulwa* or *Doto*, he or she is addressed as *Gashinje*. Among the Basukuma, twins and breech-birth individuals belong to a high respectable class since they wield unequalled power that other normal human's lack. They can, under the Basukuma belief, deny a person success, for example, getting wealth, crop harvests or begetting children when angered. One of the respondents said:

We highly respect these persons. Even when they die, we do not say they are dead but *olalaga*, that is, they are only sleeping. When we want to go to the mines, we ask for their blessings. When we want to cultivate our farms, we pray for them to intercede so that we can get bountiful harvests. When it does not rain, we approach and ask them to open the sky so that it rains. When a woman does not conceive, we approach and ask them to open such a woman's womb. These individuals are highly respected among the Basukuma (**Interview with a respondent in Igunga District, September 2021**)

Similarly, Mtaku (2016) had found the Bura, an ethnic group in North-eastern Nigeria, believed that the twins were born with supernatural powers. Such powers under the local belief system include their ability to die and be re-born by another woman, the use of scorpions to harm people at will and the ability to feign sickness. Mtaku (2016) also contends that the Bura believed that twins possessed extra-ordinary powers that can harm their sibling, an individual or a society as a whole.

Death of a Medicine Man

Under this death category of medicine-men falls various types of medicine men (*bafumu*) and dance leaders (*balingi*). The classification of medicine-men under the Basukuma taxonomy include fortune tellers (*bahangi*), rain-makers (*bafudi ba mbula*) healers (*basimba mizwi*) and other types. Generally, the *bafumu* are buried while seated on a wooden stool; strapped in a black wrapper, which denotes the cult to which they belong among the Basukuma.

The death ritual of different categories of *Bafumu* gets similar treatment accompanied by songs. Generally, when they die, members of the cult bury them and not other people external to the cult. The Basukuma fear that the *bafumu* could be targets of evil people such as witches. Since the Basukuma treat death as a transition to another state of being in their cosmology, the *bafumu* should be protected against evil forces even when they die. When the *Nfumu* dies, the selected member of the cult descends into the grave to perform a ritual as expressed in the following incantation:

Natula bugota, bugota bo bagalu
Mili gwenuyu nagukaga
Munhu ose ose uyo ankalalitwe,
Adume gunsola
Ulu wize alabuke ,ume uhama guti linti
Mabi gose gose gampandike ha mili gokwe
Asade chembamoyo
Alung'we nzoka, ache malali, aliwe na ng'wina na mbeshi
May

Translation:

I here put my *bugalu* protective medicine,
I hereby protect this body,
Whoever is eyeing it,
Should not succeed in taking it,
If he/she comes here, he/she should be injured,
Should dry as a tree dies by drying,
Evils of every kind strike his/her body,
He/she be struck by a heart disease
A snake bite him/her such that he /she dies in a foreign land
Crocodiles and eagles eat his/her dead body.

While performing this ritual down in the grave and administering the necessary charms, his fellow members of the cult stand outside the grave singing the following song:

*Duli yise bajihulya bapandigila mhuge ng'wadulumbila ki?
Mahona hii!Ng'wadulumbilwa ki?
Sugambaga hituli ilo lyamulaga ng'wanaginhyali
Igulangamilaga ng'wilunde inhungulume yaza mnhingo
Sugambaga hituli ilo lyamulaga ng'wanaginhyali
Mahona hii!Ng'wadulumbilwa ki bana ba sale?
Igulangamilaga ng'wilunde ngoko yaza mnhingo
Mahona hii!Ng'wadulumbilwa ki?
Duli yise bajihulya bapandigila mhuge ng'wadulumbila ki bana ba sale?*

Translation:

We are aggressive people, men who smash wild dogs under their feet
Why are you jealous of us?
Oh, Mahona! Think of that! Why are you jealous of us?
Let me kneel under the pounding mortar that killed Ginghinyali's son,
A red-necked cock is peering persistently at the sky,
Let me kneel under the pounding mortar that killed Ginghinyali's son
Oh, Mahona! Think of that! Why are you jealous of us we royal family children?
A red-necked cock is peering persistently at the sky,
Oh, Mahona! Think of that! Why are you jealous of us?
We are aggressive people, men who smash wild dogs under their feet
Why are jealous of us we royal family children?

This incantation highlights the pre-eminence attached to the *bafumu* as a high class among the Basukuma. Even though he is dead, this *nfumu's* body gets the protection of the charms administered to ward off any devilish people who might be eyeing it. This special treatment is reserved for such a cult group, not to a dead rank and file person.

Moreover, the *bafumu* are not buried by just anybody but their own cult members, hence accentuating their importance and status. The song the cult members sing is accompanied by protecting the body against evil intrusion highlighted by phrases such as aggressive people, smashing wild dogs, pounding mortar and a red-necked cock that persistently peers at the sky. These metaphorical references underscore the importance of the *bafumu* as a special group among the Basukuma who wield the power of healing people in addition to possessing protective charms that attract evil people such as wizards and witches to their burial sites to siphon off such powers for nefarious intentions.

Death of a Chief

When wielding power among the Basukuma traditional setting, the chiefs (*batemi*) would be buried seated on a wooden stool. A cow would be slaughtered and some songs would accompany such a ritual. Nowadays, the power of the *batemi* has largely diminished because of state intervention and little recognition paid to their unique socio-economic status. As a result, the researcher could not get any song pertaining to the burial of chiefs as they were being buried in yester years. This was a big blow considering that these were placed at the loftiest station in the Wasukuma society. This anomaly was largely attributable to this practice having largely become extinct for years, thus making it hard to derive songs that were usually being used due to lack of preserved written records.

Other Deaths which are treated on Class Perspective

Furthermore, among the Basukuma, some individuals who travel or go to work somewhere, for example, in mines or fish in lakes never return home. They may meet death while working but the information does not reach their relatives. Such deaths among the Basukuma are known as *gucha malali* (dying for ever). However, such people may reappear in a form of spirits (*masamva*) that end up possessing some family members and issue demands that must be fulfilled to recognise the death of a family member. However, the exact time and place of its occurrence remains largely unknown. The person who dies thusly belongs to the highly sensitive group among the Basukuma. Since everyone can be guided by spirits (*masamva*) in the Basukuma traditional world, these spirits can seek to make him/her recognised in the community.

On the role of spirits in the Basukuma world, Hatfield (1968, p. 65) contends:

Some *masamva* are ancestors who over time have been forgotten or neglected by the descendants. They contact the living because they feel lonesome or are angry at such neglect among the living and they want to remind the living that they are still wielding some influence in their lineage...

The re-appearance of a presumably dead person in spiritual form possessing a family member denotes power, that the dead person might have returned to the community, for example, the *mfumu*, a dance-singer or a rain-maker. In this regard, a respondent said during an interview:

The act of re-appearing in spiritual form that results in the possession of a certain family member to which the dead person belonged, denotes that such a person was potentially powerful and had he or she lived, would probably be somebody in the community of the Basukuma such as a *mfumu* [medicine man], a *ningi* [a dance singer] *mfudi ombula* [a rain maker] or any other of high-class individuals. For those people who might not have such a status, their spirits are believed to be weak and, therefore, never possess any family member to claim anything (**Interview with a respondent in Igunga District, September 2021**).

A person possessed by spirits reports that so-and-so who had gone to work elsewhere had died and, thus, rituals ought to be performed to appease and placate these spirits. Such burials rely on the directions provided by the *mfumu* (medicine man). Such ritualised burials may include undertaking the following:

First, it involves the brew (*walwa*) that should be prepared and poured into a gourd that is then carried by a delegation to a designated place to make a sacrifice. This delegation consists of a person possessed by the spirits. When they reach a certain point, they stop for the invocation. This journey is a welcoming event (*gunsung'wanha* or *gung'wegeleja*) that allows the family to welcome symbolically the dead person into the family to banish loneliness or unrecognition. The exact place where such a person died is not important (after all it is

unknown), hence not a preoccupation of such a delegation. What is important is to walk over a distance and then perform the required ritual. After the brew had been sprinkled at that spot of the performance, the possessed person has a *masamva* (stone of a considerable size) strapped on his or her back (*gwibalikijiwa*) and the delegation then heads back home. This stone is then buried half way at the back of the house once the delegation returns. A small shrine (*ga numba ga iholelo*) is then erected to accommodate such a half-buried stone, which serves as a substitute for unfound dead person. Once this has been done, the dead person has symbolically been brought home under the Basukuma belief. Alternatively, this ritual can be performed by slaughtering a he-goat with black patches (*mbulu ya matemi api*), which is then offered as a ritual sacrifice. The delegation can perform an invocation while surrounding the animal and laying their hands on it by making the following utterance:

Ubebe mbati dagubonile bubamanga
Imbuli/ngholo yako iyi lelo aha
Duriiya henaha
Duligulumba udiginije mbeho
Diyagalule uduhendele uzubuku
Digashe mhola duhangame

Translation:

[You] so-and-so, we have seen you through the medicine-men
Here is your sacrificial goat/sheep here today
We are eating it here
We implore you that you take away from us any sickness
likelihood
That we become free, take away from any sickly conditions
So that we live well and long.

While uttering these evocative words, they wash this animal with water and rub it with butter extracted out of skimmed milk (*maguta a chaba*). The head of the delegation leads the invocation (*gwihonga*) as others repeat after him. This ritual requires the following ingredients: An eagle's feather (*loya lo mbeshi*), which symbolises an unburied dead person and, possibly, was eaten by eagles or other birds. Other requirements include a rectangular wooden dish (*ilangahe*) and *lwanga* (an infusion made of millet and water). After the performance of an invocation, which

also involves praying to the *masamva*, the infusion prepared is then spat into the air and onto the goat. Subsequently, the he-goat or the sheep (ram) is then released. Then everybody makes a dash for the released sacrificial he-goat or sheep now running while wailing (*gulija ng'wano*). This chase continues until one of the chasers kills it with a spear. The animal, thus killed, is then skinned and eaten after being roasted on an open fire. Performing this death ritual as typified by the incantation highlights the class realities among the Basukuma during death and burial ceremonies, with some getting more attention (of higher social standing) than others (of lesser standing)

Conclusion

The examination of the death and bereavement ceremonies among the Basukuma of Tanzania reveals that the associated rituals are class-based whereby some individuals in this community get preferential treatment and fanfare following their demise. In contrast, some individuals from ranks attract no rituals since their deaths command no social capital, let alone social prestige based on social standing and respectability. The Basukuma socially stratified burials fit into the Marxist modicum that treats societies as comprising socio-economic classes—those belonging to the high and low classes. Based on its findings, the study calls for other studies to be conducted by involving other communities to examine their death and bereavement rituals using other literary lenses, for example, psychoanalysis.

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