DEATH AND MORALITY: PERSPECTIVES ON THE MORAL FUNCTION OF DEATH AMONG THE BASOGA OF UGANDA

Alexander Paul Isiko
Lecturer
Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy
alexisiko@yahoo.com

Paulous Serugo
Assistant Lecturer
Department of Development Studies

Kyambogo University
P.O Box, 1 Kyambogo-Uganda

Abstract
Numerous studies on death in African societies with no doubt have been successfully conducted though their preoccupation has been with the religious and spirituality perspectives. There has been a great deal of theologizing about the spiritual connection between the life here and life after death. Most studies in the humanities have zeroed on burial rituals and rites as means of transition to the spiritual world. Others have concentrated on how different societies cope with the misfortune of death; through grieving, mourning, choosing an heir or heiress and the succession disputes that are always part and parcel of such a culturally acknowledged process. Death is largely constructed as a challenge and misfortune, and many a scholar in the humanities are concerned with how different societies define, perceive, handle and cope with this catastrophe. Most scholarly works have paid a deaf ear to the social value that comes with the demise of an individual. One such social value is the definition and shaping of moral order in society, in which death occurs. Busoga traditional society of Uganda is used as the case study. The authors argue that rather than militating life, death promotes and perpetuates moral values on one hand and discourages vices that destabilize society on the other.

Keywords: death, morality, basoga, moral function, culture, spirituality.

1. Introduction
The subject of death and dying has received considerable scholarly attention from the humanities and social sciences sub-disciplines of sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, theology and religious studies. On one hand, sociologists approach death and dying in terms of individual action (agency) and elements of social structure [1]. Sociological inquiries on death examine the norms and social structures across societies for defining and managing dying and the consequences of death. Sociologists hence, look at death and dying as creation of social problems, which must be managed [2]. To them, the dying process, death, funeral rites and related rituals need to be managed as they emerge with unique social challenges for society [3]. On the other hand, psychological literature on dying, death, and bereavement largely focuses on the individual. Death, dying, and bereavement are emotionally charged phenomena. It is understandable, that a psychological approach to understanding these experiences has proven to be an attractive one [4]. Thus, the relative presence or absence of fear, anxiety, and denial have become reference points, and the prevention or cure of psychopathology its major preoccupation. The psychological perspectives on death provide insight into why humans fear death and how they deal with its inevitability [5]. Anthropological studies on death have been concerned with analysis of diverse cultural responses to death, especially funerary and mortuary practices, rituals and expressions of mourning [6, 7]. The anthropological studies of death examine the diversity and commonalities in how human societies respond to the demise of their members. Anthropologists have documented the enormous cultural variations in the methods for disposing off the corpse, the expected but unique behaviour
of the bereaved, and the existing attachment between the living and their dead [8, 9]. Also, philosophical inquiries on the views and beliefs about death pose philosophical problems, which ought to be investigated to make meaning to mankind. The primary concerns for philosophers have been determination of human death, choosing death and the existence of nature of life after death [10–12]. These inquiries pose metaphysical and epistemological concerns.

Whereas theological and religious scholarship complements sociological, psychological, philosophical and anthropological interpretations of death and dying; its preoccupation with spirituality of death as well as justification for life after death as an existential reality renders the ethical dimension of religion on death futile. Religious perspectives on death center around beliefs and doctrines, rituals, myths and experiences of the different religious traditions. What is central to all the above subdisciplines is their construction of death as not only a misfortune but also an obstacle for individuals and the entire community. These subdisciplines therefore take time to study how different societies define, perceive, handle and brave such a trying misfortune based on their cultural stand point [13]. The African philosophy of death rotates around the spiritual dimension of death, determined by the unique culture of a specific African society [6, 14–16]. Africans look up to supernatural beings as intermediaries in their perception and interpretation of death and dying. The major concern of authors on death in African societies has been that of a rite of passage, which helps one to transit to the spiritual realm, either as an ancestor or malevolent spiritual being [10, 15].

In this article the argument is to the contrary, other than looking at spiritual perspectives of death and its construction as a misfortune, it not only appreciates death as an inevitable transition of life but is also concerned with its contribution in shaping and mediating morality in society. The authors demonstrate the ethics of death and dying, uncovering actions that people fathom out with duality as good or bad, right or wrong, praiseworthy or blameworthy [17].

The authors use the ‘traditional’ African society of Busoga to demonstrate that death and dying are not only a construction of the spirituality beliefs but are also instrumental in determining the moral direction of African societies. The word ‘traditional’ is deployed in this article in a sense that much of what is described and discussed existed before African contact with outsiders, but with some elements, subsisting in newer forms and expressions. Busoga is one of those societies in sub-Saharan Africa with relatively homogeneous thinking about death. Homogeneous in such a way that the sense of purpose surrounding death was reflected in the embodiment of values, institutions and patterns of behaviour, a composite whole, representing a people’s historical experience, aspirations and world view [18].

1. Conceptualising the Relationship between Morality and Death

Morality indicates what is the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to behave, for instance, that one should be fair to others [19]. The concept of mediation is critical here. This is because for an action to be considered ‘morally appropriate,” either by an actor or an observer, a particular meaning must be associated with it [20]. Morality was mediated with the use of words: language (paralinguals inclusive), and forms of moral discourse that enable the person to think, feel, and act in a way that their particular sociocultural context recognises as ‘moral,’ ‘right,’ and ‘good’. The definition and determination of death is usually a moral issue. Questioning what determines that a human being has died is seeking when to discontinue some activities and initiate others, such as burial or non-burial, cremation, grieving, change of a survivor’s marital status, and transfer of property. Defining and determining death therefore brings to the fore the appropriateness of exhibiting ‘death behaviours’. The definition of death is tantamount to saying that certain behaviours are henceforth appropriate while others are not [12].

In this article the authors argue that the concepts and words, as well as actions and activities, associated with death in African societies, point not just to the spiritual and religious understanding of death but rather communicate moral meanings that are important for shaping society. Therefore, the reasoning, intentions and emotions, expressed in behaviours during the dying process and death by both the dying persons and people around them, communicate the moral function of death in that specific society [21]. It becomes unquestionable then that death in its various manifestations determines how people are expected to behave. Largely, there is philosophical agreement that the
The function of morality is to reduce social tensions, thereby enabling a society to efficiently promote the well-being of its members [22]. According to Prince [23], the major function of morality is suppression of selfishness. Morality suppresses selfishness and thus enables social groups to function. To achieve this suppression, morality takes two approaches – the individualizing approach and the binding approach. The individualizing approach focuses on teaching each person to respect the rights of others. This is achieved through the individualizing foundations of harm and fairness. In other words, when people consider the harm they might cause or the unfairness of their actions, they are motivated to act more selflessly. The purpose of morality is to protect individuals from harming or exploiting each other. In contrast, the binding approach attempts to suppress egocentrism and selfishness by strengthening social institutions. By binding individuals into roles and duties that ‘constrain their imperfect nature,’ individuals act more selflessly and benevolently. This is achieved through loyalty, respect, as well as purity. The purpose of morality is to socialize and reshape individuals who if left to their own desires, would pursue shallow, carnal, and self-centred pleasures.

Morality in Africa was life centered. Things that militated life passed for bad character, while those that promoted life were considered good. Life was considered by Africans to operate on a continuum, aggregated by certain stages/phases. These include: conception and birth, initiation, marriage, death and life after death. At each of these stages, life was important and society ensured that it was not only nurtured but also promoted in order to amicably move to the next stage. Death is one of these phases as it introduces one to a deeper function of life. Death must promote life. It leads to abundance of life among those left behind. Staiti [24] has argued that death is the shaper of life as it liberates life from its otherwise inextricable entanglement with the contexts, in which it unfolds. In other words, the body is perceived as a prison for life, for which upon death life is discharged. Although death typifies the soul leaving the body, it is still inherently related to life as opposed to representing the opposite of life [25]. The complications of determining death are intertwined with the complications of determining life and this is even more patent for believers in the notion that both life and death are processes [26].

Of all the phases of life, only death determined how long or short one would have lived. Longevity was a positive aspect in African life, just as shortened life was constructed as ill-fate. Death at a ripe old age was connected with living a morally sound life. Idang [17] argues that keeping moral values earnestly helped one to live long. Among the African traditional societies, death was attached to such sacredness. If it was a bad death that is to say: death after committing suicide, killed as a result of being a robber or witchcraft practitioner, it could do more harm than good to the families and households. Such death was lambasted, since it was not consequent of a natural phenomenon but human induced. In most societies in Africa, when death was perceived to be human induced, there was always a lot of acrimony, which was overtly or covertly shown after burial. In some cases, individuals or even families have to shun the burial scene for reasons, ranging from the fear of being accused to taking precaution against being bewitched at the arena. Out of trepidation, some people decided to draw out of the community during the burial to avoid trouble. In most cases, such deliberate avoidance was interpreted as tacit signs of guilt [27].

Intermittently death plays a major role in shaping morality in two broad ways. Firstly, it affords promotion of dignity and usefulness to life although dignity supersedes the latter. Dignity is the value, which one assigns to entities, following a body of qualities or values they have and which are worthy of esteem and respect. All living entities have a certain basic degree of dignity with regard to their being. These values are neither absolute nor constant. The actions and activities of existing beings are regarded as a criterion for the differentiation of the dignity, which is ascribed to the entity. Dignity, ascribed between individuals, varies consequent of their actions [28]. In circumstances of dying and death, Africans ensure utmost dignity of not only the dying person but also the dead. At this juncture, death presents a reunion of the dying and their ancestors. This is because to Africans, dignity of life is more important than its usefulness. Whereas certain death rituals are done to promote rather than militate what may be considered a useless being in western epistemology, death being part and parcel of the life cycle, Africans undertake to treat the dead person with dignity, accompanied by several ceremonies and rituals that are befitting of a person,
going into another life. In Africa, initiation into each phase of life is celebrated. Death is just an entry into another phase of life. African philosophy of death is premised on the notion that death is not termination of life but rather a mechanism, through which persons enter another life in the spiritual realm. Thus, death is one of the rites of passage. Secondly, the life after physical life of a person plays a positive role among the living. Death has a fundamental form-giving function with respect to all the multifarious occupations and rituals that fill our lives in the overarching whole of culture. It constitutes the form of all forms, endowed with intrinsic necessity, and that on the flow of life can never possibly burst [24]. Death transforms persons into spiritual beings, referred to as ancestors that act as moral agents in the world of the living. Ancestral spirits dictate against those, thought to be moral deviants in the society of the living.

There are three sub-phases in the death philosophy of the Basoga. These are: dying, death and life after death. At each of these sub-phases, life continues to be an important reality, mediated by morality. Death is the cessation of life, while dying is the process that ends in death. Dying is a process, which starts as gradual psychological withdrawal, triggered by the biological system because of illness, sudden deformation of the entire system or vital part of the system or natural termination of the life span of the human body because of old age. This process ends in death [26, 27]. Apart from the things that the Basoga do to promote the dignity, continued value and usefulness of those dying and the dead; it is thought that moral lessons from what is being done at each stage are transmitted to those still living to ensure a stable and well-intentioned society. The authors address two major issues. First, they describe and analyse key concepts in Busoga society, which are used to promote dignity, value and usefulness of those dying and the dead. Secondly, they explicate the moral values, passed on by the various activities and stages in dying and death.

2. Methodology

This article is a product of a qualitative investigation, done in Busoga over a period of four months. The investigation involved documentary review and interviews. The authors collected and reviewed documents of the following categories: African traditional religion of Busoga, death and burial rites and rituals in Busoga and culture of Busoga. Authors also read several journal articles on death, burial and life after death, written on several African societies. The authors were interested in scholarly works on specifically African societies because of their relatively homogeneous nature, especially for African societies south of the Sahara, to which Busoga belongs. Most of these resources on culture and death, they were in abundance at the Cultural Research Center Library of the Catholic Diocese of Jinja (Busoga). The Cultural Research Center has taken exception at researching, documenting and archiving information about the culture of the Basoga with the intent of substantiating an intersection with Christian evangelization of Busoga. The authors’ interest was in information on traditional practices about death and burial rather than contemporary ideas and practices on the same. Through scrutiny of the documents, the authors discovered that although the documents were earnestly descriptive of death and burial rites in Africa, Busoga inclusive, their approach was on analysing the people’s definition, perception, practices and understanding of death with an exclusively religious and cultural perspective. Researchers on Busoga have largely been concerned with people’s attitude towards death as a misfortune, with marginal attention to the observation and transmission of African cultural values.

This is what triggered the resolve of the authors to investigate further the moral dimension of what was being described by previous authors. The authors henceforth carried out interviews with purposely-selected individuals in Busoga. The interviewees were selected from two of the eleven districts that make up Busoga region. These districts were Kamuli and Iganga. The two districts are representative of the cultural divide of Busoga in view of historical ethnic origins of Busoga, with Kamuli district representing northern Busoga subscribing to the Mukama origin and Iganga district representing southern Busoga, of the Kintu origin. The study involved twenty elders as interviewees, who were all male, taking ten from each selected district. These elders were randomly selected from a cohort of interviewees who had taken part in previous studies by the Cultural Research Center. Elders, who are defined as being advanced in age, are important to this study because they serve as leaders and custodians of history and cultural knowledge and heritage, for
which morality is a component. Elders have the ability to tell their stories and challenge researchers
to acknowledge values and world views different from their own [29]. One on one oral interviews
were conducted in Lusoga, then transcribed and translated into English. However, often during the
writing of the article authors found it pertinent to revisit the Lusoga transcripts for clarity and em-
phasis. To ensure anonymity of respondents, the interviewed elders are represented by numerical
codes, ranging from one (1) to twenty (20). Using the thematic analytical approach, the information
from both the documentary reviews and interviews were translated into three major themes, under
which this article is presented. The themes are; morality and dying process, morality and death and
then morality and life after death.

3. Result

3.1. Morality and Dying Process

Dying is a process which eventually culminates in cessation of life. In ordinary usage, the
dying process entails one experiencing some form of illness either for a short or long period of
time. Not all people undergo this ordinary dying process. Some people die suddenly in accidents or
even commit suicide either by hanging or taking poison or even being strangled by another person.
The Basoga categorise two aspects of dying and death. These are: good death and bad death. Good
death is one, which is after one living a long life. Longevity of life, which is the Lusoga concept of
okughangala, is appreciated in society and thought to have a positive message for society. Good
death, after longevity of life, also involves one going through the process of okugenzebwa. Good
death therefore provides an opportunity for the family and society to exercise the much-needed
moral responsibility of okugenza—nursing a dying person, since good death is a process, leading to
eventual termination of life, after enduring a certain period of illness. Termination of life in this
context makes people to sympathise that kibumba amutwaire, directly translated as ‘the creator has
taken him/her’. Good death is perceived to be the will of God. We shall later in this section discuss
the moral significance of okugenza. Good death is also called peaceful death, in which one experi-
ences a pain free death, for example, one dying in his/her sleep as opposed to those, whose eventual
termination of life involves aggressiveness, expression of anger, gnashing of teeth and weeping by the
dying person. Among the Basoga, this determines whether the person has died with bitterness against
unfulfilled promises or dreams on his/her part and those who may have erred against him/her and or
negligence by those, supposed to care for him/her during illness.

On the other hand, the Basoga have what is referred to as bad death. This includes: dying young, unmarried and without children, accidental deaths, dying while engaging or engaged in un-
acceptable and immoral activities, gruesome murder and okufa kw’ekibwatukira (abrupt death) (El-
der 13, Iganga District). Death, whether good or bad, has moral implications for both the dead and
society. The dying process, bad or good, peaceful or violent helps in understanding the Busoga
society’s holistic concern for ethical character. The dying process encompasses the development
of restraint over all forms of extreme behaviours and feelings. Death, which is likely to promote
strong emotions, is screened off as a way of limiting potential emotionally laden behaviours. The
assumed correct patterns of dying and death are in connection with the value of the society. Such
patterns are as much social as well biological. People do not simply die; they die in socially and
biologically interpretable ways [27].

Bad deaths are disgraceful as they deprive one of the essentials that make one dignified.
However, there also exists deliberate disgraceful treatment of the dead in Busoga society. One
respondent mentioned the kinds of persons who are disgraced when dead. These include robbers,
adulterers, thieves, murderers, those who commit suicide and all those who die while commit-
ting any objectionable acts (Elder 9, Kamuli District). Disgrace of the dead may involve denial
of full burial rites and rituals, including decent burial in a grave. Disgracing the dead among the
Basoga has a moral function. It motivates people to live a morally upright life, so as to steer clear
of disgrace on death. Human life is sacred not merely because of the essential dignity of human
personality but because human life itself is removed from human’s dominion and reserved to God’s
own providence [26]. Bad death is connected to immoral behaviour of the deceased and his/her
immediate family members [30]. The fear of dying a bad death is significant to every adherent of
the African Tradition Religion. This is because bad death will not only deprive one of full burial rites but will also deny them a good place in the world of the spirit. One elder said;

For one to live a decent life on earth, one must not be associated with behaviours that torment other persons in society like thievery, infidelity, poisoning, witchcraft and the totality of what is regarded as abominable to the society. He/she can definitely die awfully (Elder 11, Iganga District).

The implication of a traditional adherent eschewing immoral acts is to enable him/her to receive full burial rites and also have a place in the ancestral world, which is the chief goal of rites and rituals for the dead. Death rituals were religiously arranged to foster virtuous behaviour. While a good death offered the possibility of reincarnation and a welcome influence on the world of the living, a bad death brought only the spectre of malevolent ancestral spirits. Indeed, a significant body of literature on witchcraft and spirit possession is concerned with how the ‘unnaturally dead’ exert power over the lives of the living [6]. The Basoga believe in causation of death, all deaths both good and bad are squarely linked to a cause. Natural death especially for the elderly is linked to the will of God -kitumba, while death for the young is often linked to breach of moral codes of society. The breach of the moral code is by either the dead person him/herself or some other envious persons within the community of the dead person. In either case, death occurs when someone would have engaged in something morally obnoxious. In Busoga for example, the most commonly thought about cause of death is witchcraft, a morally apprehensive act.

Those who undergo an excruciating death are believed to have contravened certain moral codes oblivious of community members, but ancestral spirits by their omnipresence nature get to know and penalize the culprit through death. To the Basoga, living long is a reward for one’s uprightness in society.

Taking care of the sick and dying persons is a prime activity in Busoga. Taking care of the sick is known as okugenza, while the caregiver is called omugenza. The description of omugenza is applicable only in circumstances when the ailing person eventually breathes their last. The dying person is called omuyi, literally meaning ‘a critically ill person, with diminutive odds of survival’, while omugenza literally means one who provides company to the one on the journey’ (Elder 3, Kamuli District). The action of allowing to be taken care of while sick is called okugenzebwa. It is also a moral duty of the sick person to allow to be taken care. Okugenza is an obligation of close relatives or any community member who can voluntarily undertake the responsibility of care giving to a sick person. Society turns out to be suspicious of an ailing person who declines close relatives’ offer to attend to him/her during times of sickness. It is deemed by society that he/she who refuses to be taken care of intends to commit suicide, a distasteful act in society. It is also thought, that the ailing person is guilty of some moral offence, which might be the cause of his/her sickness, for which he/she does not fancy other persons to be acquainted with, for example, persons who could have been severely hurt either during a robbery mission, night dancing or adultery feared other society members to know of the wounds they may have sustained as this would bring questioning to the cause of their injuries. These are part of the conduct that is not morally acceptable in Busoga society. To avoid judgement by society, such persons sidestep being taken care of, so that they can eventually die without shame that would arise from their moral misdeeds. Only in circumstances where the sick person does not have close relatives, could he/she be taken care of by friends and or neighbours.

The philosophy of care giving is based on close relationship to the sick person. This is meant to safeguard the privacy of the sick person, so that not anybody could have access to his/her private body. In Busoga, even those who are dying, their privacy is highly guarded against non-family members. It is the moral duty of the children to okugenza their ailing parents and close relatives. The social value of okugenza by close relatives is to aid the sick person enjoy his/her privacy, given the fact that care givers are persons who are known, trusted and liked by the sick person. In the Metaphysics of Morals, the duty to treat the dead with dignity is a specific duty, that is to say, it’s not a duty for all people but only for specific people, for example, the relatives or friends of the sick person, clan members in the absence of relatives and friends [31]. It is highly regarded irresponsible in Busoga society to hire omugenza – to take care of one’s ailing parent for the biological children.
are expected to demonstrate good character by sacrificing all there is to take care of their parents, who are about to die. Okugenza is a social responsibility based on kinship. Using a hired omugenza to take care of one’s ailing parent is interpreted to mean that the biological children are fed up of their dying parent and would want him/her to die faster than it is happening. Using a hired omugenza is not a common practice, however when such is done it communicates the moral intention of the children or close relatives to the dying person and in one way or another signifies the ailing person being abandoned by family and close relatives.

There are gender overtones in taking care of the sick and dying persons in Busoga society. Women and girls share the big responsibility as care givers for the sick. Married daughters are expected to temporary leave their marriages to physically attend to their sick parents or relatives. Failure to do so would be interpreted as lack of respect for parents and denial of the societal belief that a father and mother are more important than one’s spouse. However, the primary responsibility to clean up the physical body of a father lies with his wife as the sons and daughters are prohibited from looking at the private parts of their father, including circumstances of sickness and death. However, daughters can do so with their ailing mother. Mothers have a moral duty to take care of their sick children until the point of death. Okugenza has two dimensions: the physical attention, given to the dying person and the mobilization of resources, especially financial resources, to be able to acquire necessities, required to keep the sick person alive. Whereas it is the responsibility of the females to provide physical attention to the sick, the males, especially the sons, are expected to provide money to secure the necessities. However, physical care, given to the sick, is more pronounced as okugenza than the monetary resources, mobilized to meet medical care expenses.

Both the omugenza and the sick person must be humble, providing a conducive environment for healing to take place. Impoliteness towards the sick by the omugenza is highly disapproved of as this might exacerbate the dying process of the sick. Renunciation of the sick and dead body, known as Okweninala, is unacceptable conduct of both the omugenza and by anybody who comes near, including the mourners. Omugenza is supposed to clean up the sick person’s dirt with gratitude. Ensuring that the dying person is kept in a dignified situation, the Omugenza is expected to feed, bathe and cloth the sick well, so that the sick persons look pleasantly to those coming to check on him/her. A hygienic body and clean environment around the sick is meant to provide hope to relatives and friends that the sick will eventually recover. The people are taught not to spit in case of a decomposing dead body as this is a form of okweninala. It is a taboo to spit in disgust to a decomposing body as this is thought to make the person spit ceaselessly till his/her own death. This taboo is designed to preserve good hygienic practices among the people. Therefore, the likely occurrence of death forces family members or abagenza to adapt to moral expectations of society, even when it might be for a short time. For example, keeping a critically ill patient in hygienic conditions is not done for the sake of the patient but to avoid possible embarrassment from mourners, should the person breathe their last in a filthy environment [32, 33]. It qualifies for an honour to take care of one’s sick parents, wife and or husband till their final breath. It generates emotional satisfaction, peace of mind and no regrets. The wife sits by the bed-side of her sick husband as a sign of commitment to the marriage and also as a moral duty to be a wife-servant of the husband till death [34]. There is glorification of a wife of this nature as the ideal wife, whereas the children are celebrated as being well nurtured and cultured.

All the above point towards keeping human dignity of the sick and the dead body. It promotes esteem for life that is in the process of termination. The ideal purpose of okugenza is to alleviate the pain of the dying person. It demonstrates that the family feels the pain that the dying person is going through, and through okugenza they demonstrate sharing of pain. It is further a moral duty of sacrifice to those who are in need and incapable of taking self-care due to sickness. It is honorable and respectable to die when there are close relatives around one. It is a sign of social cohesion, built by the dying person. This partly symbolises a peaceful and dignified death. It is considered virtuous to kugenza, as a result, relatives feel melancholic to lose a family member without an opportunity to nurse them for some time. Losing a relative without the golden opportunity to nurse him/her easily arouses self-condemnation and a moral failure with regard to caring for the sick. The moral practice of okugenza seems to be in conformity with the theory of ethics of social
consequences, which postulates that protection and support of all human life brings positive social consequences [28]. This makes people to naturally protect and reinforce life in all forms. The basis is not only our awareness of our duty to act towards realisation of positive social consequences but also our predominant compassion with suffering people and the need to help protect and support life. Kugenza is actually ‘social treatment and nursing’ of the sick as opposed to medical treatment, provided in a modern health facility. Okugenza a sick person is a voluntary engagement, which should be out of free will, without expecting anything in return. This however seems to promote moral hypocrisy, a false pretence of moral excellence, either as a cover for actual wrong or for the sake of the credit.

Before introduction of modern medical care, which takes place in a biomedical facility, treatment of the sick as well as kugenza used to take place at home. Modern trained nursing personnel are not designed for the kugenza notion of the Basoga much as they may provide the needed care to the sick. Such professional care is not kugenza. For the Busoga, the construct of kugenza is provided by close relatives, not remunerated in anyway and there has to be that kind of social attachment that the omugenza shares with the sick person. None the less, that specific relative who takes care of the sick either at home or in a hospital, providing company to the sick despite the professional care, given by medical personnel, is the one, taken to be omugenza in the modern days. It is considered virtuous to experience the hard conditions in a modern hospital, setting as one nurses a close relative. Busoga society has sanctions for anyone who faults in performing the duties of okugenza. First, such a person is taken to be an accomplice in the death of the person regardless of the medical cause of death. Secondly, the relative may be denied taking part in the burial and funeral arrangements of the deceased. Voluntary refusal to kugenza a relative is seen as being antisocial, it contravenes norms, values and practices, surrounding caring for the sick. Such sanctions and other condemnations are aimed at making one suffer personal and moral guilt over the death of the relative.

Although the concept and practice of euthanasia was absent in pre-colonial Busoga society, there were circumstances, under which the Basoga ‘wished’ a critically ill person (omuyii) to die in order to escape the pain [35]. It was however inconceivable for anyone to wish death for another. It could not be said publicly but when death eventually happens, people could express their opinions that the dead had been suffering too much to continue with the pain. The Lusoga word ‘awuumule’, literally meaning ‘let him/her rest’, is used after death has occurred for persons who have endured excruciating pain for a long while. It is unacceptable to use awuumule when the person is still alive and anyone who wishes such of the critically ill is believed to harbour ill intentions against the sick and or his/her family, including suspicion that he/she could be responsible for the illness. It would further be an indication that the ill person is no longer conceived as humanly worthy living. This would therefore attract anguish and hatred from those who have close attachment to the ill person. One elder clarified that;

Even when it was obvious that the omuyii was in terrible pain with marginal chances of survival, it was inconceivable that anyone would induce and or accelerate the death of such a person (Elder 16, Iganga District).

This emerges from the Basoga philosophy of life, which dictates no human authority in determination of death of an ill person. In Busoga, life does not stop in the body, considered useless due to the illness and pain, as in western epistemology but rather continues even after death. The authority to take and restore life of an ill person is left to the master creator called Kibumba. In Busoga moral philosophy, the usefulness of the body is not as important as its dignity as human. This again reminds one of the moral pretence, prevalent among the Basoga concerning death. Even when each individual around the critically ill inwardly felt that the best remedy for the ill was death, it was morally bizarre for anyone to insinuate it. However, upon death, there often seems to be communal consensus that death is the best thing to have happened to such a person due to the painful circumstances he/she was undergoing. The Basoga held the wish for the critically ill to die: first when the sick person was experiencing too much pain for quite a long time. Secondly, when it was taking a lot of time to care for the sick (kugenza), depriving the care takers of unprecedented time and opportunities to tend to their productive activities, making other family members to suffer
due to loss of food production and income (Elder 6, Kamuli District). This coincides with the patriarchal nature of Busoga, where it is majorly the female members of the family (wives, mother(s) and daughters) who perform the function of kugenza, yet at the same time they are charged with the responsibility of subsistence production. This also includes situations when the abagenza, especially married daughters, have been away from their marital homes for quite long, taking care of their critically ill parents/relatives, which might lead to marriage conflicts or even dissolution. Thirdly, is the exhaustion of resources, required to take care of the sick person in case of a prolonged ailment. In a more modern monetary Busoga society than the pre-colonial one, this relates to exhaustion of the meagre finances to meet accumulated medical expenses. This thinking happens when much of the finances are being spent on a person when it is already written on the wall that survival chances are minimal, yet depriving the family of finances that would cater for the education of children of a dying parent or even set a project for those left behind.

Preparation for death, locally called okwetegekera okufa, is a held virtue among the Basoga. The literal meaning of this points to the fact that it is the person on the verge of death to do own preparation. It is part of Busoga moral philosophy to prepare for death. This preparation for death is at two levels: the individual level and family level. At the individual level, those who are still healthy but of age are urged to put their families in order by ensuring that family members abide by the acceptable moral code of conduct before they die. This includes the ‘making of a will’, revealing confidential information to some trusted family member(s), recollecting all one’s children to give them wise counsel and or distribution of property among children and or family members to avoid disputes over property after one’s death. Such a person is hailed as ideal for ensuring that there is orderly transfer of property after he/she is dead. Humans who fail to do personal preparation are castigated for having been irresponsible not to have done so. Whenever a person became sick, especially those advanced in age, they called on relatives and or friends they trusted to assist them write a will or verbally communicate last wishes or their will of inheritance. At the family level, it was the responsibility of relatives to prepare an ill member for the eventuality of death. The moral essence of preparation is to give one courage to face death without fear and pain and to curtail feeling of abandonment during one’s last hours on earth. Death preparation involved bringing the ill person from an away place to home (near the family graveyard). This helped to avoid the inconveniences of transporting a dead body, but also it was thought to be ashamed for the dead body to be transported from one place to another, given the rudimentary means of transport like transporting a dead body by bicycle, lorry truck or motor cycle. Such occurrences are prevalent in this society. It also allows time for the ill person to make confession over ones’ misdeeds and seek for forgiveness from those one might have offended during one’s life journey. It is a time one seeks reconciliation with those he/she has disagreed with over the years. The last days of the dying person is time when he/she expresses gratitude to the care giver(s) and those who might have made enormous effort in providing the medical, material and moral support needed. Also, the ill is expected to reveal and or clear any debts he/she might have incurred, so that he/she dies in harmony. When a person dies while at peace with him/herself and others, it is believed that one’s spirit enjoys peace in life after death. To the contrary death when in antagony and loggerheads with others forces their dissatisfied spirit to come back to disturb the living.

The last words of a dying person are consequential in the moral philosophy of the Basoga. The significance of the last words attests to the value and usefulness of a dying person. These are part of death preparation as the ill person is always expected to convey some message before he/she dies. This is partly the rationale behind having omugenza or one of the close relatives beside the ill person till death, so that society is in a vantage position to pick up those valuable ultimate words. The last words contribute to the way those still living are expected to conduct themselves after the person is gone. The last words of a dying person are treasured and can be used as an arbitration yardstick in case of any conflict that could emerge within the family. They become point of reference for judgement. The last words may include the desires of the fallen, involving but not limited to his/her burial preference. They are words and instructions that ought to be religiously adhered to. There is a moral imperative and duty to fulfil the wishes of the dead, especially if they are achievable [36]. One interviewee detailed the contents of last words of a dying person as follows;
They instruct how people should behave after the lifetime of the person. Usually, such last words and instructions are thought to be morally edifying and full of truthfulness. They speak words that can alter and influence the destiny of someone. They contain blessings to the virtuous, especially those who sacrificed for the deceased and his/her kinsmen. They may reveal secrets that the dying person may have kept for decades. It is an honour to grasp the last words of the dying person (Elder 7, Kamuli District).

Usually, close relatives and family friends are entitled to hearing these last words because they are the abagenza (plural of omugenza). Some of the last words of the dying person are so confidential that he/she may want a specific person to not only hear but keep them as such. It is therefore interesting to note that there are certain things of the dead that have to be kept confidential even when he/she is long gone. Death in Busoga henceforth promoted the moral aspect of confidentiality. Confidentiality is not only important in the life of the living but also the dead. The Basoga maintained and learned confidentiality because of the fear of the spirit of the dead haunting them should they happen to break that confidentiality promise.

3.2. Morality and Death

Immediately after the occurrence of death, termed to as okufa in the Lusoga language, the dead body is treated with utmost dignity and respect as though it were still alive. This is premised on the belief that the dead has not lost life but rather has changed into the form of a spirit. At the moment of death, the Basoga ensure a serene environment, in which the dead body is to be kept, to lay prostrate, before they can notify anybody, usually through loud mourning/weeping. One interviewee gave a detailed description of the way a dead body is handled immediately upon death, as follows:

The body is straightened and cleaned. The mouth is closed. The nosal openings are closed with cotton wool. It is dressed in the best attires there are, then covered with bed sheets and other such elegant garments (Elder 12, Iganga District).

It is disrespectful to expose the dead body’s nakedness to mourners other than those who are entitled to doing the cleaning and dressing. It is usually those who value one most and upon whose life one has left an indelible impact, who will at all odds work tooth and nail to ensure a dignified treatment of one’s lifeless body. The desire to be treated with dignity upon one’s demise forces one to ensure harmonious living with relatives in order to curb possible abandonment. It enlists family shame if the dead body is not clothed in befitting garments that earns it respect. The clothing and beautification of the dead body indicates the desire to dignify the deceased. It is however obvious that this honour is not bestowed on the dead body but on the personality, which it represents [37].

This relates to the understanding that the dead body has moral standing and moral value [36, 38]. Moral standing can be based on intrinsic value. For the dead, it means that they have value in themselves and not in relation to their significance now. Given that human life is valued in itself either as an anthropocentric ethics or as part of a biocentric ethics, it means that human life has intrinsic value. Intrinsic value in the first sense is referred to as final value. Although many philosophers have assumed that being valued for its own sake must be equivalent to being valuable in itself, a position called intrinsicism, this is not the case with the dead among the Basoga. Final value is equivalent to non-instrumental value. Instrumental value means that something has value, related to its use (as means only), in order to attain some other value. With this terminology, final value may be intrinsic or extrinsic. The respect, given to the dead body, is respect to the dead person rather than respect to the family. This final value is extrinsic since what we value is life and the dead body is a sign, a trace of someone who once lived. This respect is more readily given to recently deceased persons, who share one’s own time and culture. The dead body has value as ends in itself because of the unique and direct relation to the person who once lived. On this analysis, the dead would have moral standing. Their final value would be based on the extrinsic value of respect of human life [36]. Indeed, to the Basoga, this reflection is on the basis that in spite of death, robbing them of a living person, the body remains a dignified creation of Kibumba [32, 33].

The death of a person, especially if it is a good, requires an elaborate organization of a funeral, locally referred to as okukuma olumbe. Bad deaths don’t involve elaborate funeral organization
and there may not be a funeral at all, with the exception of express digging of the grave. Okukuma olumbe involves several activities, including weeping, making a bonfire (okukuma ekisiki), preparing the grave, performance of burial rituals and rites as well as burial protocol, preceding the actual burial (Elder 2, Kamuli District). Each of these carries moral implications for the people of Busoga. The mourning style in terms of shedding tears and wailing differs between young and long-lived lives. The mourning style is mediated by the gendered culture in Busoga. Female mourners, especially relatives, sit around the dead body all night and day until the body is laid to rest. Expression of dread for the dead body especially by close relatives is prohibited. This is to illustrate that they value the dead person as though he/she was still alive. It is being respectful of the dead to sit around the lifeless body as a demonstration of love to the dead person. Failure to shed tears, especially by close relatives, is interpreted as a wish that the person dies anyway. Owing to such a setup, female relatives and friends cry and wail not only because of the loss of a member but also as a duty, expected of them. The mourning style of close family female members to the deceased is unique. They wail, amidst mentioning the noble deeds, executed by the deceased. Widows usually mention the palatable character of the dead husband, mentioning his qualities and his hard to forget contribution. Mothers also cry, mentioning the good character of their deceased child and the now lost hope they had vested in the dead child. This compels those living to do ethical deeds, so that these could be mentioned in exaltation during mourning. Such exaltation is a true signification that one’s true disposition, especially the laudable, is always vehemently unmasked without fear when they depart. In the same vein, despair is expressed in case one passes on in case no child or relative shows signs of emulating such plausible demeanour. In this case, death of such a person signifies lost leadership and guidance.

On the other hand, the men are charged with the responsibility of making a bonfire in the middle of the compound of the home of the deceased. The number of days the bonfire is kept burning correlates with the value and worth of the deceased. Customarily, the bonfire lasted over a week if the deceased had been the head of the family. For the women as well as the youngsters, the born fire lasted about three days. Around the bonfire constituted the arena, in which the young men of the family and clan sat to embrace moral education from the elders. Moral education at death is discussed in the next paragraph. The bonfire also became a place for guiding young people regarding the morals of society, knowing each other and sharing both despondent and light-hearted experiences. Just like in other several societies of Africa, the congregation around the bonfire reaffirmed formidable social ties since the death of a significant figure in society risked a rupture in the network of relations [39]. But a bonfire was denied for suicide victims and other such deaths that were considered a disgraceful to the family. These were deaths, whose genesis did not conform with society morals. The digging of the grave is a communal affair just like the entire burial ceremony. Even though the grave could be dug by a handful, all able-bodied men were encouraged to play a part in the activity. Grave digging epitomised communal work as a virtue and whoever dodged was castigated. The fear of being abandoned by the community at a loss of a family member coerced renegades into ensuring their recognition during grave preparation. It was shameful to demand finances for grave digging, a moral duty to the dead person. ‘Communal refusal’ to appear for grave digging was sometimes used in revenge towards those who perpetually absconded the activity. It was interpreted to be antisocial when village members shunned a specific family’s burial ceremony and more especially participation in grave digging.

The Basoga were contemptuous of procuring funeral service firms to prepare someone’s grave and handling of the dead body as this was synonymous with undermining the communal approach to life. This also detached the community and family members from their dead who were simply transiting to another world. Institutionalization of burial ceremonies was against the moral values of the Basoga thus, the death process was managed and handled communally. The communalistic nature of funeral practices in Busoga discouraged atomistic individualism [25], in which the isolated individual was the only fundamental reality and that the individual was the natural atom in artificial social composite. In most African set-ups, individuals were brought up from childhood with a sense of belonging and relatedness with others. Individuals, thus, had a sense of obligation to a larger set of other individuals [25]. For the same reasons, the Basoga condemned whoever
prepared his/her own grave in prior to one’s own death. Work was postponed till after the burial was over; those who continued to work when a dead body was not buried were lampooned. The participation in burial activities fostered community togetherness. Failure to attend burial and or participate in burial arrangements of a community member led to retaliation when the sidelined experienced death in their homestead. Attending burial was a moral obligation to all family members, relatives, friends and entire community. Failure to do so would be construed as disrespect to the dead and the entire community, requiring an inquiry in one’s misconduct and subsequent reprimand. In such situations, community members questioned the sense of belonging and moral judgement of people who never attended burial ceremonies.

Whereas the English words ‘dead body’ mean no more than a lifeless being, in Busoga ‘dead body’ has been conceptualized beyond ‘physical being’ to construction of morality in society. In Lusoga, dead body is called omulambo. Among the Basoga, Omulambo is both a physical reality and a concept. As a physical reality, death (okufa) transforms the construct of a person from a living to a non-living being, which eventually transforms into a spiritual being. The yet-to-be buried dead person is called omulambo. The lifeless body no matter the circumstances of the death is often a reminder to the Basoga to remain modest in society. An interviewee postulated;

To us, the Basoga, the physical appearance of the dead body is an epitome of humility. Death reminds us to live a life of harmony with everybody, for these are the ones who will carry your lifeless body to the grave. The lifeless body reminds us that all is vanity in this physical world, and therefore the need to live in peace with others is paramount. (Elder 8, Kamuli District).

The presence of omulambo in a community is an urgent reminder for the living to refrain from the morally retrogressive tendencies and embrace commendable moral standards. Conceptually, the Lusoga word ‘omulambo’ is related to Kisoga moral concepts of okulamba and okulambira. The word okulamba denotes to teaching youngsters, especially about the moral code and integrity even in privacy. It is about showing the juniors responsible living. On the other hand, the word okulambira involves teaching moral conduct and rebuking delinquency. Therefore, okulamba is re-emphasis of moral conduct to the morally unblemished, whereas okulambira is for moral defaulters who deserve rectification, guidance and rebuke. In the process of okulamba, the guide/mentor is expected to be articulate, locally called okulambika (stating with clarity the specific moral codes and how one is expected to meticulously live by them).

It was at the omulambo, during the funeral period that the Basoga edified the young not only the genealogy of their clans but also the values, expected of them in society. It was used to okulamba and okulambira (Elder 5, Kamuli District; Elder 13, Iganga District). Teaching moral values was carried out at the omulambo because burial ceremonies made everyone to be easily reachable. This was done usually deep in the night before and after actual burial. Only members of the clan and in some cases family members attended this lesson on expected moral conduct. It was done deep in the night to avoid mourners who are non-family members, sharing in what was being taught because some issues were only confidential to those, belonging to the family and or clan. Teaching moral values was done at the funeral because the death of a family member required all relatives to pay their last respects and stay a little longer at the home of the deceased. This provides an opportunity for family members who reside and work far away to come with their children to receive this education. It was an opportunity for family reunion, learning, re-collecting past experiences and building social networks. During the night, preceding burial, the young men would be taught the dos and don’ts of their society.

Okulamba during a funeral was always for the young men as opposed to women. This is because Busoga, being a patriarchal society, attached more privileges to men than women. The men were bestowed with the duty of maintaining the family lineage. The death of a family member, especially the head of a family was believed to bring uncertainties regarding the continuity of that family. Continuity of the family and or clan depended on male members, expected to provide leadership and maintenance. Male children therefore had to be tutored and mentored well, to be able to take on these responsibilities of the family. Girls were not tutored at the funeral because they were expected to marry into another family/clan with its own moral codes, whereof she would be expected to adopt and adapt. It would therefore be wastage of time to tutor her on topics around
burial. Some of the unruly members of the family, and those who were reported as going against the set moral norms received rebuke, earlier referred to as *okulambira*.

It is the responsibility of elderly male relatives to teach these moral codes to the young men at the funeral. The tradition of teaching moral values at the funeral has been adapted to the changing burial customs in contemporary Busoga. For example, other than the teaching of family/clan values, civic and political leaders find burial ceremonies a rare opportunity to communicate government programmes and commitments to society. They use burial ceremonies as an avenue to *kulambika* citizens about what they ought to do: justifying government actions. Popular religions, especially Christianity and Islam, use burial ceremonies to teach moral values to those in attendance. Christian priests and Moslem clerics take the opportunity to castigate the public on their moral standing. It is usually a time of calling people to moral renewal and commitment in preparation for eternal life and Jannah respectively. The burial rite was punctuated with several rituals, especially for those who died a good death. Some of the rituals have already been alluded to in the previous paragraphs. But to mention a few: they include lighting a bonfire, keeping a vigil, the ceremonial ground breaking of the grave, done by children of female members of the clan, also known as *Abaigha*, last funeral rites, involving slaughter of animals and feasting [33]. Preparation of food and general comfort for the mourners brings honour and respect to the person, being mourned and the bereaved family. It is considered unethical not to feed mourners, however destitute the family of the deceased may be. It is also a social responsibility of the community members to extend material assistance in form of food, water, firewood and money to facilitate the burial rituals. The family of the dead person is expected to ensure comfort for mourners. This includes but not limited securing seats and temporary shelter for the mourners. It is dignifying to slaughter a bull if a man has died in the family, more so a family head. It would on the other hand be befitting to slaughter a cow if the departed is a woman. This further demonstrates the gendered nature of funeral activities in Busoga and African societies in general. Other rituals include invitation of religious leaders to preside over burial ceremony, involving recitation of prayers.

Speaking virtuous things about the dead at a funeral is glorified, yet unconventional to blame the dead at their funeral. A study by the Jinja Diocese Cultural Research Center advanced that there was dire necessity of the Basoga to remember the good deeds of the deceased despite the loss of battle to death. Eulogies at funerals served to challenge the living to emulate the exemplary character of the deceased, with specific emphasis to the orphans and close relatives not to depart from the treasured moral aptitude of their deceased parent or elder. Emulation of deceased’s moral aptitude is keeping the legacy of the dead, and allowing them to live in posterity. Leaving behind a legacy of moral aptitude permanently stamps one’s name in the hearts of the living [33]. People endeavour to applaud the dead during the funeral. The Basoga’s attitude towards the dead is in line with the philosophical thought of conserving the status quo and continuing to respect the dead. There are both indirect and direct reasons for protecting the dead. The most direct reason is that the dead have interests, one possible interest is in one’s worthy reputation. The indirect reason is with regard to respect testaments and therefore one should continue to talk as if the dead have interests. The intuition that the living may have moral duties to the dead appears too solidified to be discarded. The main stumbling block in this debate is how the dead could have interests when there is no one to be harmed or benefit any more. Some philosophers argue that if the dead cannot be harmed, then they cannot have any interests. Although it can be agreed, that the dead are beyond harm, it is questionable that interests only relate to questions of harm or benefit. Actions can equally be morally significant when no one is harmed or is at risk of harm. For example, slandering or breaking a promise are prima facie wrong and demand justification if they are done. Since the good name of a person carries on as a unique reference to that person, then slandering is wrong when it concerns the dead. A good name is proposed as a salient chunk of a surviving property of the dead. The living has a duty to the dead not to do prima facie wrong actions without giving a justification [36]. In most African human moral decency, it is obscene to mock anyone in death even when that person happens to be your number one enemy. It is morally reprehensible to do so and must not be done whatever the circumstances could be [40].
Death rituals had a latent function of promoting good moral behaviour. This was because the rites were limited to people who lived a fruitful life. This ritual was more effective during the pre-colonial era with evidence of high moral value to showcase. Some demographic characteristics like age, gender and status of the deceased as well as the cause of the death were some indispensable conditions that determined the appropriate rites and rituals for the deceased. Apart from gender, the three other conditions greatly centred on the moral behaviour of the deceased. Rites and rituals for the dead were not all about the dead, rather in addition to burying the dead they went a long way in reminding the living of the need to embrace good moral behaviour. This was because the denial of some rites and rituals to the deceased was an exasperating and strange experience to the family, kindred and friends of the deceased. This was also a warning and a lesson to the indigenes of the community who might be living immorally like the deceased [30]. Denial of some burial rites would prevent the soul from attaining the status of ancestorship. Also, this would prevent the deceased from reincarnating into the family or community. Initially rites and rituals for the dead were limited to the people that exhibited satisfactory moral behaviour in the society. Suicide victims, robbers, adulterers, witches and other disgraced deceased were denied such rites [30]. The denial of burial rituals was based on the argument that whereas every person attained the value of human dignity as a human based on their mere physical existence, this was however cemented by living in concordance with the cherished moral code [28]. Deviant actions robbed one of such entitlements. Treatment of the deceased according to the life they had lived inculcated in the Africans the desire to live a good life, so that they would be dignified in death and initiated in the world of the ancestors. This is what to date propels an innumerable number of Africans to lead decent lifestyles to achieve a dignified burial [37].

3.3. Morality and Life After Death

Lusoga language expression of the fact of death was determined by the dead person’s character and repute while living. Usually, the Basoga would be tremendously saddened by the demise of persons of noble demeanour. They would express their sadness through several terms. They would, for example say; agoloire obutaira, literary meaning that one has gone never to return; azize emere, directly translated as ‘You have refused to eat food’ atwegaine, literary meaning one has denied us; omusango gutusinze to denote ‘we have pleaded guilty’; atuviire ku maiso, to assert that we can no longer see him/her [33]. In contrast, to those who were met with distaste by society, two major concepts were used after their death and burial. These were: tumuwonhye, literary meaning that we are relieved; ajje agasimbigane nhi Kibumba ghe, literary meaning ‘let him go and face prosecution before his/her God (Kibumba) (Elder 15, Iganga District). Firstly, the earlier set of concepts, used after death, communicated the desirable character and repute that society would be deprived of after one’s demise, whereas the second contrasted concepts portrayed the bad character and reputation of the deceased and that death did society a favour by taking him/her away. The second category therefore conveyed a connotation of condemnation and relief [33]. Secondly, the living strove to do good, so that pleasant words were used upon their death. At the same time, they abstained from evil-doing to preclude societal retribution, effected upon meeting Kibumba. Therefore, among the Basoga, death was a credible litmus test for drawing a line between the mischievous and the well-intentioned.

However, due to the Busoga societal restriction of public condemnation of the dead, the negative connotations about the dead are uttered pretty cautiously to prevent the relatives of the departed catching wind of it. The restriction is premised on the notion that although the dead might have had a repulsive character, the death of such a person luckily enough marks the end of his/her bad record, therefore, causing no need for alarm. In the modern times though, Busoga society seems to have developed exceptions to this norm. Drunkards are for example, fond of gathering around the bonfire while drinking and singing songs of praise, mocking or abusing the deceased depending on their ‘legacy’ [33]. Whereas this is a form of self-entertainment during the night vigil, it has become a tolerable mechanism, through which society imparts morals to the living, especially relatives of the deceased, not to emulate the bad character of their deceased relative. On the other hand, if the deceased had been of noble character, the songs and praises expressed worry/grief whether or not...
the living family of the deceased will be in position to exhibit such good character of the deceased. Indeed, this was an indirect admonishment of the relatives of the deceased to live by the good principles of the deceased.

The passage of death did not climax in normal burial or disposing off the body to the grave but also included the second burial. This involved processes to ensure that the soul of the deceased enjoyed continuous existence in ‘ancestral paradise’. This second burial ensured that the soul of the deceased was enjoined with the ancestors, as well as securing reincarnation [30]. The Basoga believed that upon death, one joined the spiritual realm either as an ancestor or a malevolent spirit. Whereas the spiritual dimension of ancestors has received amplified scholarly attention, their duty as custodians of the moral order in society has not received much attention. The status of ancestorship or distressed spirit was determined by one’s conduct while still living. Those who lived a righteous life, according to societal norms, promoting life cherished ancestral stardom. The Basoga maintained good relations with the dead, since ancestors were viewed as custodians of the moral order [33]. Ancestors protected and provided guidance to those in the material realm and therefore were highly respected, venerated and very important to the community of the living [16]. According to the African belief system, life did not end with death but continued in another realm. Becoming an ancestor was a desirable goal of every individual, a feat which could hardly be achieved if an individual prayed for an unnatural death [25]. In Busoga society, ancestors bore the duty to punish those who contravened the society’s moral code. Thieves and adulterous persons could experience intolerable suffering, caused by their ancestral spirits due to their undesired moral conduct (Elder 4, Kamuli District; Elder 15, Iganga District). The belief in life after death was a driving impetus that deeply and perpetually influenced people’s lifestyle. Death rites and rituals were not all aimed at celebration but equally called for a moment of sober reflection. It awakened respecting one’s own life and anticipation of how theirs would turn out to be if they lived recklessly. The fear of rejection by the ancestors and the resultant effect on the spirit of the deceased, hovering around, made everyone cautious about the quality of life led. Such beliefs and practices helped to propel one to do virtue, consequently upholding the moral values in society [30]. The Basoga believed that the death of one’s parents, especially the mother forced a previously mischievous son or daughter to deeply reflect on life without parents. In Busoga, the experience of death in a family was punctuated with high levels of humility of the deceased’s kin. They were expected to exhibit high levels of unity and family cooperation during the subsistence of the funeral period. Family members who misbehaved during the funeral period were regarded as an embarrassment not only to the family but also to the deceased.

Renaming after the dead, also known as Okuggulika, was part of a cherished belief system of the Basoga, through which communion with long dead members of their society continued. This would happen immediately or a while after one was buried depending on how fast living members gave birth to young ones (Elder 1, Kamuli District). Renaming after the dead was believed to spontaneously transmit those attributes of the dead person. Failure to be renamed meant that one had perished completely, which coerced Basoga to live virtuously to earn this feat. Not being renamed was tantamount to natural extinction. No one wished to rename their children after disgraced late relatives. Children were expected to replicate those, whose names they took on. Only the virtuous deserved passing on their names after death [33]. Society anticipated to enjoy the good character of the dead reincarnated through the newly born and named. Okuggulika provided hope for the Basoga in preserving and perpetuating moral values, espoused by those who would have departed the world of the living. Although the replication of the traits of the earlier name-bearer was believed to be spontaneous, the renamed child was socialized into the moral character of the ancestor and time and again reminded not to behave in such a manner that contravened the virtues that were espoused by the ancestor while living. Renaming ensured posterity as the living dead were reincarnated, so that their personalities or traits visibly manifested in their descendants [33]. Renaming after the dead was therefore a whole institution, through which moral character was not only moulded but also transmitted from long dead persons to the living. The refusal to rename after ill-intended dead persons aimed at curtailing transmission of evil hearts to future generations.

4. Discussion
Whereas we have attempted to do a concurrent presentation and discussion of findings in the three subsections above, in this section, we present and discuss two major issues that we think
are more significant. These are: firstly, the moral significance of death processes over their spiritual imperatives; secondly, the limitations, pertaining to the study findings. The results indicate a significant contribution of death practices to moral development, observance and protection among the Basoga. The activities right from the dying process up to last funeral rites, aim to communicate morality as the central theme of life in this society. The findings suggest that whereas many African societies are preoccupied with the spiritual dimension of dying and death processes, the moral dimension of these death processes are a determinant of the spiritual direction and state of the living and dead respectively. Contrary to previous perceptions and presentations of death as a misfortune [13, 34], this study has established dying and its associated processes as regulatory mechanisms of morality in society, without which people would be living in dire disharmony, expecting no consequences. This study therefore goes against long held perceptions about death as a bad thing, and instead asserts that the experience of seeing and nursing a dying person; the treatment and rites accorded and or denied to the dead; as well as the uncertainties that the living envisage pertaining long after they die provide the moral foundations of society, dictating to them to live a morally acceptable life.

These findings differ from orthodox African philosophy of death, championed by African scholars like John Mbiti, who interpreted death from spiritual perspectives, known to differ from one African society to another [6, 14–16]. Whereas previous studies from psychology, sociology and anthropology looked at mourning and grieving practices as psychological processes that help societies to cope with the misfortune of death, this study has on the contrary established that such practices help society to determine appropriate behaviours and whether or not the dead are worthy celebrating [7]. The desire to be treated with dignity at the time of death and the expectations to receive full rites of the dead as well as the perpetuation of personal legacy many years after one's burial make the Basoga not to desert from moral conduct befitting to receive such rites.

The reliability of these findings was limited by the fact that the authors are ‘insiders’ to Busoga society. Whereas as inside researchers, we had a better understanding of the cultural processes of the Basoga, we may have blindsided some issues, taking them for granted, which could have limited an objective analysis [41]. We also realised a methodological limitation where the study relied on interview respondents who were only advanced in age. Their narrations of the burial processes and rites in society were not always coherent due to memory loss. They may have left out some information, which would have enhanced the validity and objectivity of information. Moreover, studies have showed that as age increases, older respondents appear to differentiate less sharply among different aspects of their lives [42]. However, we suggest further research to be carried out about the changes that have occurred in the death, mourning and funerary practices of Busoga society with a view of making a comparative analysis between the past and the present. It will be enriching to African scholarship to analyse the impact of globalisation, modernisation, education and revolution of the information age upon death traditions of the Basoga.

5. Conclusion

Dimensions of death present a moral consciousness in African experiences. The moral consciousness lays a foundation, upon which people were judged in the context of either having fulfilled the moral obligations or failed to uphold the obligations in handling the process of dying, death and accompanied practices, behaviours, values and norms. Being homogeneous just like many other African cultures, the Basoga in Uganda possess an outlook on death that owes its guidance to moral consciousness. Henceforth, this article engrossed into analysing the moral function of death among the Basoga of Uganda. Dying and death are viewed as processes, whose guiding principles are the moral values, ascribed by the society with an ultimate goal of ensuring social order and harmony. Harmony thus was the resultant effect of the moral function of death in Busoga. A household or family that effectively took care of a dying person and also ensured decent burial fulfilled their moral obligation hence one rested with satisfaction and peacefully too as opposed to the neglected one who would die violently and feeling resented. Failure to take sufficient care of the sick would attract judgement and scorn. This shows how death influenced the moral behavior of people in Busoga. To comply or not in looking after a sick relative bore on moral decisions, for which society expected compliance from everybody since death is not a choice but a pathway to the world of the ancestors. These values constituted the ethos of
the Basoga in the context of culture, given its being intricately linked to the way of life of the people of Busoga. The ethos provided the category of reflection on the fundamental nature of morality and moral values, surrounding illness and death. The authors therefore assert that, moral knowledge in Busoga was embedded in the actions of the community members and institutions and not necessarily taught. In this, both the descriptive and normative perspectives form the moral function of death in Busoga. This is in the context of providing codes, put forward by society and accepted by individuals. At the same time, the function of death in morality is reflected in providing what is and what ought to be done during illness until one breathes own last. Moral knowledge hence has a function of making people of Busoga live in harmony in all the phases of life. In this, the article has succinctly elucidated on the sensitivity and importance of death in shaping morality among the Basoga.

References


Received date 22.08.2021
Accepted date 21.09.2021
Published date 30.09.2021


© The Author(s) 2021
This is an open access article under the Creative Commons CC BY license