



## Death, Burial and Associated Rituals Among the Banyakitara

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### Abstract:

This article essentially deals with the different rituals that are usually performed when someone dies among the Banyakitara. After a brief discussion about the African's attitude to death in general, the article particularly examines what happens when different categories of people die, including babies, the youth, childless adults, twins, a mature woman, a family head and a king. The influence of modern life, foreign religions and death exacerbated by recent pandemics is also discussed. Most of the description pertains to what happens among the Banyankore and to some extent, the Bakiga, but what transpires among the Banyoro and the Batooro is also alluded to.

### 1. Introduction

Death is one of the most feared life experiences that is met at the end of one's life. Death is defined by the New Oxford Dictionary of English as the end of life of a person or organism. It has remained mysterious to mankind as no one can tell when it will strike. One of the things that seem to characterise death in Africa is that Africans take particular care of their dead. Generally speaking, according to African beliefs, there is a close connection between the living and the dead and interaction continues between the living and our ancestors (*Emizimu*) in the spirit world as pointed out in previous studies. This is in line with what the great Senegalese poet, Birago Diop, was saying in his poem entitled *Les morts ne sont pas morts* (The dead are not dead). We provide below the second stanza of his poem in form of illustration (Birago Diop, 1960):

*...Ceux qui sont morts ne sont jamais partis:*

*Ils sont dans l'Ombre qui s'éclaire*  
*Et dans l'ombre qui s'épaissit.*  
*Les Morts ne sont pas sous la Terre:*  
*Ils sont dans l'Arbre qui frémit,*  
*Ils sont dans le Bois qui gémit,*  
*Ils sont dans l'Eau qui coule,*  
*Ils sont dans l'Eau qui dort,<sup>1</sup>*  
*Ils sont dans la Case, ils sont dans la Foule,*  
*Les Morts ne sont pas morts. ....*

A casual translation would give:

Those who are dead have never left:

They are in the Shadow that is lighting up

And in the shadow getting thicker.

The dead are not under the Ground:

They are in the Tree that is shivering,

They are in the Wood that is sobbing,

They are in the Water that is flowing,

They are in the Water that is sleeping,

They are in the Hut, they are in the Crowd,

The Dead are not dead. .... (Translation by the authors of this article) (1).

The author here is definitely emphasising the fact that the departed are with us since after all the spirit world is not known to have a specific place. Besides, stories of the apparition of the departed as ghosts or spirits abound in probably all human societies. Those left behind usually do what they can to continue pleasing the departed who,

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<sup>1</sup> The full poem has 8 stanzas and 71 verses. It can be found at Lumière sur s/s: Birago Diop

apparently, can become nasty if not properly handled by the living. The often elaborate burial ceremonies in Africa are usually, at least in part, carried out in fulfilment of the above preoccupations. According to Lee and Vaughan, quoting E.E. Evans-Pritchard, the main intention why Africans carried out these elaborate funeral rites was “to cut the dead from the living (Lee & Vaughan, 2008). Although this may sound contradictory bearing in mind the close relationship that is supposed to exist between the living and the dead, the authors point out the following:” But as Evans-Pritchard’s very direct statements imply, if African societies evolved elaborate and complex rituals to manage death, this was because, for them too, death provoked fear and revulsion and posed a problem for the living. The ultimate purpose of mortuary customs was to allow the living to get on with living. “.....the dead could only find their place as ancestors rather than vengeful ghosts, if their loss had been properly registered, not only by the individuals closest to them, but by the social groups of which they were members” (Birago Diop, 1960 p.343).

Evans-Pritchard’s reflections are in line with Kiiza (2005, pp 120-126) who says that among <sup>2</sup>the Banyankore, once a person dies, the reaction among those around is that of sadness and fear, No matter how close one was to the deceased, the natural reaction upon someone’s death is to have that person buried. The decomposition and stench that ensues after someone’s death <sup>3</sup>is enough to want to have that person buried, As for the elaborate funeral rites that follow, the author adds that “The funeral arrangements were done in such a way that the Banyankore aimed at showing that death is part of life’s transitional stages. They knew that death stands between the world of the human beings and that of the spirits; between the visible and the invisible. For this matter, they believed that death does not put an end to the life but that this life continues in the hereafter. The funeral was therefore a ceremony to prepare the life of the deceased for a warm reception in the next world (op.cit pp139-140). The author adds that according to information received from his informants, the Banyankore believe that when a person dies, he goes to another world and his spirit may come and visit the living members of the family any time it wants. Because of this, the banyankore try their level best to please and remember the deceased person.

Although the above assessment is given by Western writers, it more or less

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<sup>2</sup> See Van Baal, J. pp.76-78.

<sup>3</sup> See Van Baal, J. pp.76-78.

summarises the African's attitude towards the dead. One of the authors of this article lived in Eastern Nigeria for a reasonable period and he noted that among the Igbos, at practically all social gatherings where there were celebrations, it was practically a must to pour a drink on the ground as libation so that the ancestors can also share in the feasting. Clearly, the ancestors had to be kept happy so that they don't feel jealous or envious and so that they can leave the living to enjoy themselves.

Another belief which seems to recur in many African societies is that an African does not die without someone causing their death. The Batooro and the Banyoro put it very clearly when they say: *Omuntu tayefeera*, in other words, someone does not die "on their own" or for the sake of dying. This is corroborated by Jan Vershueren (2) talking about death rituals among the Yéi-nan of Western New Guinea who points out that after the burial of a husband, his wife has to lie on the husband's grave because "The husband is supposed to whisper to her on who caused his death..."(3). She would usually announce who caused the death, and the male members of the deceased's totem would then organise revenge either through sorcery or through an act of violence. The Banyakitara's reactions may not be as sophisticated but the concerns were more or less the same.

The discussion in this article applies particularly to the Banyankore and to some extent to the Bakiga, with some aspects also pertaining to the Banyoro and the Batooro. In order to somewhat balance the presentation, further information will be provided at the end of this paper pertaining to some death customs among the Batooro and to some extent to the Banyoro. Generally speaking, when a person died among the Banyakitara, his or her body was straightened with the arms resting straight on the sides, an activity called *okuhinya*, and is made to face upwards while the eyes are closed in what is traditionally called *okuhenda amaisho* in Runyankore/Rukiga. He or she would be wrapped in a mat in preparation for the burial. The process of burial varied from one person to another depending on age, position in the family or nature of birth, as explained below.

### ***Death of a Baby***

Traditionally, and this is the practice even today, when a baby died before the due date of delivery (known as *okwihamu enda* in Runyankore/Rukiga and *okutorooga* in Runyoro/Rutooro), that child was buried immediately. Most relatives would know the sad news when the burial had already taken place. If the child had been produced and died on the same day when the pregnancy was due, that child was also buried that same day. However, if it was late in the day, the child would be buried the next

day in the morning. If a child had lived for over a week, relatives would first be notified before the burial could take place. The days of mourning were only two. It should be noted that traditionally, if a woman lost many children, she would be hated as if she was responsible for the death of her children. Most relatives of the husband would shun her, and would encourage the husband to marry another wife, as Mubangizi (1963) affirms. This practice of looking down upon such an unfortunate mother, has, however, fully ceased to exist.

### ***Death of a Youth***

The death of a child or of a person who had reached the youthful age was handled more or less like that of an adult except that the seriousness and gravity of the occasion would increase with the increase in age. It goes without saying that things like the period of mourning or succession issues could not apply to a one-year-old child as they would to a family head as described in the subsequent paragraphs (ibid).

### ***Death of a Childless Adult***

If the person had reached the age when he or she should have been married, that person would never be buried on the same day. All relatives that could be reached were notified either by word of mouth or they sent someone to convey the sad news, if they were living in a distant area. The message taker is called *omubiki* and the action is *okubika*. The body would never go through the main door but a hole behind the house had to be made through which it was carried on the way to the grave. Traditional house had only one door. It was round in shape, made of thatch from the roof-top to the bottom (in Runyankore-Rukiga called *Enju y'Ekifuuha* or *Enju y'Ekinyankore* and in Runyoro-Rutooro called *enju y'ekisu*). It was therefore easy to create a hole in it which could be easily mended so that the wall becomes intact again, after the burial. With modern houses that have both front and rear entrances, the practice is still upheld and the dead body has to be taken outside for burial through the rear door.

The dead body of a person qualified to be married is buried with herbs that are thought to stop the bad spirit of the dead (*omuzimu*) from coming back to disturb the living relatives, especially the immediate siblings. For a girl, she was buried with a small banana plantain or a banana sheath that is placed along the body and the reasoning is that she would not make the siblings fail to produce or become barren.

If a girl died when she was an adult but she had never given birth and yet staying at her parents' home, a hand axe would be brought and passed over her body as if they were going to dissect her before burial. The dead body would also be taken through a hole dug at the back of the house. Burial took place two days after but in case it necessitated quick burial, it was done after one day while the mourning period lasted two or four days. The death of a woman that was married or had been married was similar to any other normal death and no special rituals were involved. On the other hand, if the person being buried was an adult man who had never produced children, his material possessions like smoking pipe, spear, walking stick, *emandwa* (spirits) and other personal belongings were buried with him (Mubangizi 1963).

### ***Death of a Twin***

This is associated with unique rituals. It is believed that when one twin dies, both have died. Traditionally, and even today, a twin does not cry when his or her twin sibling dies. He or she does not bury his twin sister or brother and does not see the coffin when it is being taken outside for burial. Alongside the coffin of a twin in the grave, another similar but smaller coffin is also placed and the grave is dug in such a way to give the impression that there are two people being buried. Among the Batooro, it should be noted that when twins died in their infancy, they were not buried but placed in branches of a tree in a swamp. Special terminology is also used for twins as for kings. For instance, *omurongo tafa, aguruka*, 'the twin does not die, s/he jumps. The term for 'to die' is therefore not *kufa* but *kuguruka*. This section on twins, both for the Banyankore and Bakiga as well as for the Banyoro and the Batooro, will require a more elaborate study to be made just as was done for the kings.

### ***Death of a Woman***

Mubangizi (1963) points out that when a married woman fell sick and it was noticed that she was about to die, she would be taken to her bed and be left to lie there. All her children and daughters-in-law would be summoned, they would sit around her and care for her as she uttered her last words on earth. Those surrounding her would ask her if there was any child she had cursed and in case there was any, she would tell those around her whether that child should bury her or not. Her word was respected. However, this was an opportunity for reconciliation before a person died. The cursed person would request for reconciliation, pay a fine of a goat called *empogano* and would be forgiven. After her death, the main supporting pole for the house would be removed as it was thought that that was the pillar of the home and should go with her. If she was already a widow, the house was pulled down

altogether. In some instances, if the husband had died first, a new house would have been built for her. But in most cases, the clansmen renovated what the husband had left, re-roofed it and made it look more habitable.

In case the woman had separated from her husband, permission was asked for from the former husband to determine where she should be buried. This is because every woman whose bride-wealth is paid is considered to belong to her husband and that is where her grave has to be, except if the bride-wealth had been refunded. Mourning lasted two or four days. On the last day of bereavement, all dead woman's clothes were brought outside and shared amongst the daughters and daughters-in-law.

### **1.1 Death of a Family head and the Rituals Associated with the Death**

This was unique and still remains so even today in some aspects. When a man fell sick and it was felt like he would not recover, he was taken to his home to die. He would be made to lie in his bed to die from there. His wife and children would remain by his bedside monitoring because they never wanted him to die like someone who had never had children, which was referred to as *okufa encwekye*. According to Mubangizi (1963), the family members had to keep vigil all the time to ensure that upon his death, he is made straight, to avoid a situation of dying with legs apart and eyes facing the sky. The eyes were closed, traditionally called *okuhenda amaisho*, and would be covered.

Immediately after his death, his eldest son and daughter would go and milk one of his cows, bring some milk and put it on his stomach. If he had no cows, they would prepare millet porridge and place it there. The purpose was to show everybody that he had not died of hunger or lack of care. This was also to show that he owned property which was being shared even after his death. It was also a sign of honour and bidding good bye. His senior wife, in case he had more than one, would sit by the bedside together with his eldest son, daughter and last born to keep guard of the body so that nobody from outside tampers with it to cut off any of the charms he died wearing. They also guarded it against being eaten by ants or rats. The body would take two days inside the house before he was buried.

Upon the death of the family head, banana stems of all bananas harvested at that time had to remain half cut and facing downwards until the day of the last funeral rights. The wife and children were not allowed to bathe until the body was buried. His body would stay in the house for at least two days. During that time and days after the burial, no digging or weeding in the gardens took place among the people adjacent

to his home, his relatives and all the clansmen. A bonfire had to be lit in the compound until after the last funeral rites when the heir had been installed (Mubangizi 1963).

The head of the family was buried at a place of his choice but would not be buried in a place where cow dung was heaped, called *orubungo*. If he died while still able to speak, he identified the place where he wanted to be buried. It was a common practice in the past, especially among the widowers, to direct that he be buried in his house. Sometimes, he would direct that he is buried in his bedroom and his wife in the sitting room when she also died.

During the digging of the grave, those participating, according to Mubangizi (1963), were not allowed to smoke the pipe or drink water. The reason was that digging a grave was not an honoured type of work that would bring happiness. However, if there was alcohol, it was given to the grave diggers. The body of the family head was taken outside, wrapped in barkcloth and taken to the grave. Upon placement of the body into the grave, his eldest son was the first to throw down the soil, followed by the siblings in their order of birth.

All the hoes, spades, forks and other domestic appliances used in the digging of the grave and burial were not taken into the house until the end of the mourning period, which was two, four or six days. All those who participated in the actual burial would wash their hands on a broken piece of a pot, which was later crushed and thrown into the bush or on a heap of cow dung, as a symbol of throwing away death, so that it does not come back to disturb or haunt them. Throwing away death is common in many cultures but it is at times extreme and frightening as testified by Jerome et al., (2008). In this case, they explain what happens among the South Fore of Papua New Guinea where the relatives have to eat the flesh of the deceased and the widow has to consume the private parts of her husband as a ritual.

On the day of burial, the main bull in the kraal was slaughtered and eaten by mourners. All the perishable foods in the home like cow ghee, salt etc. were eaten during the days of mourning. It was believed that if they were carried over after the funeral rites, they could bring bad luck or misfortune. A day or two after the burial of the head of the family, all children and grandchildren had their heads shaved clean using a small knife-like razor blade called *orumweiso*. The widow changed the matrimonial bed to face in the opposite direction of where it was facing when the husband was still alive. The wife and children were then allowed to bathe. If the wife was breastfeeding a young child by the time the husband died, a ritual would be

performed that involved making the mother sleep alongside the dead body of her husband, get her breast, put it in the hand of the dead father and then put it in the mouth of the child so as to enable the woman to continue breastfeeding. In case the child was old enough to be weaned, it was done there and then. All jewellery of the woman was removed from her body and she would not put it on until she was either inherited by one of the in-laws, including the father-in law or she got married elsewhere.

The ending of the mourning period of the head of the family, as noted earlier, lasted for days that were even. For a family that had economic means, it stretched for ten days. On the eve of the final day of mourning, herbs were collected to be used in performing rituals. Herbs included *omwetango*, *enyaweera*, *omurembe*, *omugoshoora*, *omusinga* and *wankuura*, which, in other circumstances, are all medicinal herbs. These were put in a meat-cooking pot called *orwabya* that had no crack, mixed with water and red soil from a water well that was no longer in use, and kept overnight. Another shrub called *omuhoko* (*Phytolacca dodecandra*), was also gathered in the evening after sunset prior to ending the mourning period as well, and was placed in the front of the house at the end of the compound.

Very early in the morning before sunrise, when the sky is starting to get yellow, locally called *omushekye kujuguta*, one of the elders in the clan, especially the clan head would get one of the hoes that were used in the burial, and use it to cut the *omuhoko* shrub into two to signify the end of the period of mourning. The herbal concoction that was in the pot would be mixed with powdery ash from the cooking area (*eiju rya kashenda*) and was used later by pouring at least a drop on everyone in the home and their domestic animals as a sign of cleansing the family. These two rituals marked the end of the mourning period. Thereafter, the departed would not be referred to by his or her name but was called *Omugyenzi* in Runyankore/Rukiga and *Omubule* in Runyoro/Rutooro – the late. Among the Banyankore and Bakiga, pronouncing the name meant that they were inviting the wrath of the deceased and among the Banyoro and Batooro, the deceased's name would be preceded by *Omubule*. The term used is *okucuza*, used especially by relatives whether biological or through marriage (Mubangizi, 1963).

## 1.2 Death and Burial of a King (*Omugabe* or *Omukama*)

The death of *Omugabe* in Ankole and *Omukama* in Bunyoro and Tooro was not an ordinary death but a royal one.

### *Succession and other Rituals*

On the day of ending the mourning period, the eldest son was installed as the heir to the father. However, if it happened that the eldest son was not the desired heir by the father, the second male child would become the heir or any other person the deceased had mentioned. According to Kiiza (2005, pp 136-164) The ritual of installing the heir was done by the paternal uncle, who himself, would no longer be having his father. The heir was made to sit on the stool that was the principal seat of his father. In case there was none in the home, a special one was made out of the coral tree (*ekiko*). After sitting on the stool, the heir was given his deceased father's smoking pipe, and the spear which was a symbol of authority in the home. He smoked on his father's pipe as well. Some local banana brew called *tonto* was brought in a small pot, to which he drank and would give to all those present whose fathers were also deceased to drink. That beer was consumed without anything remaining. A millet meal was also prepared and served in a small basket that had no colours around it and was eaten with sauce which was prepared without salt and was served in a pot called *orwabya*. The reason for not putting salt in the sauce was to ward off death. The sauce was a mixture of different types of foods that could be got, including small pieces of meat that were cut from every part of the cow or goat that had been slaughtered on the day of burial. This food was also eaten by only those whose fathers were also deceased.

One other ritual that was performed on the day of succession was the demolition of the house or re-roofing it. The eldest married daughter picked some grass from the roof of the house where the father had died from and went with them to her husband. She moved without looking behind until she reached her husband's place. If she was not yet married, she took them to a house of one of the relatives who was of her clan. She stayed there and came back after they had demolished the house and built another one. The grass that made the mattress of the dead family head were removed from his bed by women who had reached menopause and taken to his grave by one of the girls. After that, the pillars supporting the house were pulled down and the house removed. It was the responsibility of the clan members to ensure that they build another house for the widow. If they foresaw that it might be hard to build another house, they repaired the existing one but the roofing was given a face-lift. The girl who had taken the grass from the house would then come back. She was given a sheep as a sign of respect and appreciation, and for mourning the death of her father. She then took it to her husband's place and had it slaughtered. Traditionally, this sheep was not expected to remain alive because it could give birth to young ones, which was considered as an abomination.

All the property of the deceased was also shared on that final day of mourning. It was distributed according to the will of the deceased father. However, in case he died intestate, the formula of sharing involved being given the property according to age but with almost equal share for each one. Only sons benefited as daughters were considered to have been married off to another clan. However, if the deceased was rich, he gave some of his property to his daughters but still much less than what the boys shared. In case the father left a daughter who had failed in her marriage, she stayed with the mother. If the mother was also dead, she stayed with her eldest brother or a brother that had handed her over to the husband (*okumugaba*) on the day of *okuhingira* (official day when the future bride is handed over by her father to her future father-in-law). Property for distribution was both movable and immovable.

The eldest son, who was the heir, took the spear, hand axe, stool, panga (machete), *eryato* (wooden boat-like container where banana wine/beer is brewed) and *emandwa* (family spirits). However, in the event that the spirits had chosen another son, that son had to inherit them. When it came to domestic animals, the sharing was equal. However, in case there were sons who were not yet married, the unmarried took more than those who were already married. This was to facilitate them during the marriage process especially paying the bridewealth.

Among the items that the deceased bequeathed included his daughters being bequeathed to his sons. The daughters were bequeathed according to how the sons benefited from the dowry and other gifts when one of their sisters was married off. For instance, the brother who received a goat when a sister was married, would assume responsibility for the sister. In case she made mistakes and was chased from her husband's place, that brother was the one to pay the fine, called *empongano*. In case the marriage failed completely, the brother had to refund the bridewealth in a ritual called *okuzimuura*.

The final ritual was called *okusinziira emitumba*. According to Mubangizi (1963) This involved preparing banana beer (*tonto*) from the plantation of the deceased. When the beer became ready, clan members, neighbours, relatives and friends who were close to the deceased, were invited home and drank that beer. This was after about two weeks. On this day, it marked the official ending of the mourning period. Clan members also descended on the banana plantation and cut down bended banana trees whose fruit had been cut during the period of mourning. In case the banana plantation had not been divided among the sons of the deceased, it was done on this day. This ritual is called *okusinziira emitumba*, and it still exists today.

### 1.3 Aspects of death customs among the Banyoro and the Batooro

Among the Banyoro and the Batooro death is *orufu* and to die is *okufa* except for kings as presented in previous studies, for whom death is *okutuuzza*. To bury is *okuziika* although for the king, it is *kutabaaza* (*Omukama*)- ‘to bury (the king)’. The grave is *ekituuro* or *ekimasa* (*egasani* for a king). *Ekimasa* is particularly used when referring to a grave of a close person, buried in one’s compound. Otherwise the common word is *ekituuro*. A dead body is *omurambo* or *omutumbi* though *omurambo* seems to be more common.

When a person died, burial took place without much delay, most often on the following day or exceptionally two days later. Bodies had to be buried quickly because body preservation was rare except for kings as discussed. Immediately after death, the dead person’s eyes were closed- and his arms and legs put in an appropriate position, i.e. stretched out, the arms along the trunk. This activity is called *kukuma omurambo* - ‘preparing the body for burial’. The body was then cleaned and shaved, dressed and wrapped in a mat and exceptionally in a bark cloth before burial. Burial usually took place in the afternoon as is still the case today. The body would be brought out of the main house through the front door head first and taken to the grave. Before covering the body with soil, mourners were allowed to bury first by throwing a few grains of soil in the grave, starting with the closest relatives. The laying of wreaths is a much more recent development brought about by westernization. After burial, and this still this happens today, people would wash their hands, most likely to wash away the death.

From the time of death, a fire would be lit in the evening in the front compound and relatives and friends would keep vigil the whole night- *kuraara ha rwoto*. If the person was not buried the following day, the vigil would continue. Even after burial the fire would still be lit and close relatives and friends would continue keeping vigil. This vigil would continue for three days if the deceased was a woman and four days if he was a man, i.e. up to the day of *okuturuka orufu*, literally meaning ‘to get out of death’ or to put an end to mourning.

On the day of *okuturuka orufu*, the whole compound would be cleaned, the fire in the front compound would be removed and friends, relatives and neighbours would make a feast as a final farewell by the family and community to the deceased. If the deceased was the male head of the household, then his designated heir would get up early in the morning. Someone would wash him and his head would be shaven. All

the close relatives and blood friends, *abanywi b'omukago*, would also shave their heads as a sign of marking the end of the mourning period. Later on in the day, the heir would be presented to the mourners. As pointed out by Kiiza (2005, pp 155-161) for the Banyankore, in the case of the Banyoro and the Batooro, the heir would also be seated on his dead father's official stool, and surrounded by his mother and his siblings, he would assume his dead father's role as *Nyineeka*, or head of the household, and one of the family elders would hand over to him the symbols of his father's authority, i.e. his father's spear and in this case, also the walking stick to protect the family. The other symbol of authority would be the father's official stool he would be sitting on.

Nothing would then happen until three months for a deceased female and four months for a deceased male when a final ritual, known as *kuhenda ekimasa*, would take place. It should be recalled that immediately after burial, the grave would be encircled by a small fence made of reeds. This was to protect the grave from being affected by soil erosion so that all the soil remains on the grave. People were particularly protecting the grave from chicken which could come and scatter the soil from the grave when the soil was still loose. These reeds remained on the grave till the day of *okuhenda ekimasa*, literally meaning 'breaking the grave' or removing the reed fence from the grave. This ritual could be equated to what some other communities call 'the last funeral rites'. The ceremony was attended by close relatives and friends. The reeds are removed from the grave and usually made to cover the grave till they rot. Thereafter the grave will continue undergoing regular weeding and maintenance. On that very day, a ceremonial meal is served which should include, among other dishes, a millet meal - *oburo*, eaten with a sauce made of *omukaro*-dry meat, *obutuzi bwera*-dry white mushroom and spiced with *amagita g'ente* - cow ghee. On this very day, the relatives and friends share the dead person's belongings among themselves or send them to whoever should receive them, and this marks the end of all the funeral rites for the deceased.

Even after the end of the funeral rites, death remained a subject of constant concern for the Banyakitara for after one family, death would strike in another family or even in that very family again. This is why many Banyoro and Batooro gave their children names trying to ward off death or begging death not to come. Such names include: *Byarufu* - 'All belongs to death', *Byakutaaga* - 'It's a matter of trying, - i.e will the child survive?', *Ndoleriire* - 'I am just watching him, i.e, Will he survive?', *Kaijabahoire* - 'He arrived when there was practically no one left', *Tigalyoma* - 'We will always be weeping', *Rukambonesa* - 'Death has really tortured me', *Byarugaba* -

I have put him in God's hands', *Kafuuzi*, - 'The orphan' and '*Kangamuteto*' - 'The one who has no one to pamper her', among others. Incidentally, all the above names are for men except *Tigalyoma* and *Kangamuteto*. Could it be that these people were more concerned about their male children? Many other Africans also name their children in the same way. Many other African people also have groups giving death names such as the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria with names like *Onwubiko*, literally translated as 'death please'. The Igbos<sup>4</sup> have many other names referring to death, such as: *Onwuwamaeze*, Death does not recognize a king or a great man, *Onwudiwe*, Death is painful, annoying, *Onwzuruike*, Death, rest, *Onwukwu*, Death is powerful. *Egwuonwu*, Fear death, *Onyekaonwu*, None greater than death, *Onwemala*, Death does not occur, *Onwukusi*, Death, stop, *Onwurah*, Death, spare this one, *Onwughalu*, Death, forgive, *Onwuchekwa*, Death, protect this one, *Onwucheta*, Death, remember, *Onuemeka*, Death has done a lot. ( 4 )

Back to the Banyoro and Batooro, the death of a twin (*omurongo*) or *omurongo kuguruka* as discussed earlier, had its own elaborate and complex rituals. For instance, the mother of the dead twin could not wash her body for a prolonged period time before some rituals were carried out, nor could she have sexual intercourse with her husband. Many of these rituals were roundly condemned by the missionaries and most of them have ceased to exist today.

#### 1.4 Death in the Modern times

In modern times, the body is dressed, put in a coffin and taken to the compound where eulogies are said. Prayers, depending on the religious denominations are said before the body is taken to the grave. Wreaths are laid on the deceased's coffin. It should be noted that Muslims do not use coffins but use a *tabut* or *bier* or *cot* depending on the circumstances. For the Muslims, the viewing of the body takes place all the time before burial, as it is placed in the sitting room immediately after being put in a *tabut*, *bier* or *cot*. At a certain moment, the body of the deceased Muslim has to be washed and, upon finishing washing it, viewing stops and the burial process begins. Muslims may bury the same day the person has died if there is still time. Bodies rarely stay overnight. In the case of Banyoro and Batooro, *okuturuka orufu*, getting out of death, is these days often done on the very day of the burial, although the close relatives and friends may still gather after three days for a woman and four days for a man to finalise all the rites.

Needless to say, the foreign religions and modern life have drastically changed the burial habits of the Banyakitara or even their attitude to death. Offering sacrifices to the *Emizimu* or ancestor spirits would be a serious sin for most Christians since these

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net>, retrieved on 1/11/2025

spirits are not recognised as intermediaries of the one true God. Not only are most of the Banyakitara no longer interested in the *Emizimu* but death itself has lost part of its mystery. In the case of Uganda as a whole<sup>5</sup>, people seem to be less frightened by death because of the many traumatic experiences they have gone through during their post-colonial history. One thinks of the butchering of people <sup>6</sup>during dictator Idi Amin's eight years of his reign of terror (1971-1979), President Museveni, the present (2022) ruler's bloody civil war from 1981 to 1986, Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army(LRA) uprising in Northern Uganda which lasted for more than 20 years from the coming to power of President Museveni and during which the Northern part of the country was devastated with many atrocities and mutilations committed against the population, the equally atrocious acts of the Allied Democratic Forces(ADF) mainly in Western Uganda. The activities of the latter, which started after Museveni's taking over power, have generally ceased in Uganda although, unfortunately, still rampant in the DRC. In the case of Southern Uganda, immediately after the Museveni war, when people thought peace had come at last, there was the onslaught of HIV and AIDS which has claimed thousands if not millions of victims not only in Southern Uganda but eventually in the whole country and beyond. And then as people were beginning to manage HIV and AIDS thanks to anti-retrovirals, Covid-19 arrived in full force and its real consequences are yet to be fully felt.

No wonder that today, when one goes for funerals in the countryside, people are seen sitting on graves, a thing unheard of in the past, except probably for wizards and night dancers (*abasezi* in Runyakitara). All this is compounded by the 'commoditisation' (5) of death for those who can afford. This includes the introduction of funeral homes, a recent phenomenon in Uganda and Funeral Service companies offering different products including glittering coffins, music, smartly dressed pall-bearers, among others. These phenomena are not only affecting the Banyakitara or Ugandans as a whole but a large number of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa as points Lee and Vaughan for Nigeria and the DRC, and Price for Kenya (6).

## 2. Conclusion

In any human society, death is always a great loss and inspires fear and sadness. It is a phenomenon which a human being has challenges to come to terms with and that is why, for an average human being, it is difficult to imagine oneself no longer there.

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<sup>5</sup> Commoditisation of Death. Term used by Lee & Vaughan, p. 357.

<sup>6</sup> See Lee & Vaughan (2008) on modern influences in Nigeria and the DRC.

It is always others who depart. As already noted among the Banyakitara and as in many other African societies, all is done to give the departed a good send off, so that, among other things, the departed has no cause to continue disturbing the living. There are also drastic changes in modern times brought about, among other things, by foreign religions, war and disruption, modern life and pandemics. It would be of interest to find out whether the modern attitude to death among the Banyakitara has made life easier or more complicated. That is a recommended subject of another study.

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