

**SYMBOLISM IN ESILEMBA ORAL POETRY: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS
SIGNIFICANCE IN RESPONSE TO DEATH AMONG ABANYOLE**

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DECLARATION AND APPROVAL

This is to certify that this is my original research project which has not been presented for award of a degree in any other university.

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DEDICATION

To the almighty God

Your Love for me is great

To my late Parents

Grace Wangare and Samuel Ahwale Zedekia. My success rests on your nurturing and the dreams you had for me. Your inspiration endures forever. May God rest your souls in Eternal peace.

To my children

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION AND APPROVAL	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	9
1.3 Objectives of the Study.....	11
1.4 Research Questions.....	11
1.5 Hypotheses.....	11
1.6 Justification of the Study	12
1.7 Scope and Limitations.....	12
1.8 Literature Review.....	14
1.8.1 Performance of Elegiac Oral Poetry	14
1.8.2 Symbolism in Oral Poetry.....	23
1.9 Theoretical Framework.....	25
1.9.2 The Semiotics Theory	28
1.9.3 Performance Theory	31
1.9.4 The Psychoanalytic Theory	33
1.10 Research Methodology	35
1.10.1 Sampling Methods.....	36
1.10.1.1 Purposive Sampling.....	37
1.10.1.2 Snowball Sampling.....	37
1.10.1.3 Data Collection.....	38
1.10.2 Data Validity Procedure	39
1.10.3 Data Analysis and Processing	39
1.11 Definition of Terms.....	40
1.12 Chapter Analysis.....	41

CHAPTER TWO : THE NATURE AND PERFORMANCE OF ESILEMBA ORAL

POETRY	43
2.1 Introduction.....	43
2.2 Symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry	45
2.3 Costume and Accompaniments.....	46
2.4 Esilemba Procession	47
2.5 The First-born son.....	47
2.6 The Bulls.....	48
2.7 Running amok, “okhuhuliana”	48
2.8 Cutting Down of Crops.....	49
2.9 Circular Formation Dance, “Likopo/Amakhuli”	49
2.10 The Chant, “Okhwekayakaya”.....	50
2.11 “Indi Nyama,” some creature.....	50
2.12 “Nise Olleti,” I am a Stake/Support.....	51
2.13 “Ngoyanile,” I am Confused.....	52
2.15 “Ingwe Elalila,” The Leopard is Crying	53
2.16 “Orabelelanga,” Do Not Be Sorrowful	53
2.17 How he Falls! “Aronyanga Te!”	53
2.18 “Omusala Kwakwa,” The Tree has Fallen.....	54
2.19 “Esikumba sie Inyama” Meat Bone	54
2.20 “Siamola” It is Crawling on me	55
2.21 Am I Tea? “Khali Echai?”	55
2.22 “Okhwekayaka,” The Chant or Release.....	55

CHAPTER THREE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SYMBOLISM IN ESILEMBA ORAL

POETRY	57
3.1 Introduction.....	57
3.2 Meaning and Impact of Death.....	60
3.2.1 “Indi Nyama,” A Creature	60
3.2.2 The Tree has Fallen “Omusala Kwakwa”.....	61
3.2.3 Do Not Be Sorrowful “Orabelelanga”	62

3.2.4 I am Confused “Ngoyanile”	62
3.3 Response to the Effects of Death	64
3.3.1 Costume and Accompaniments.....	64
3.3.2 The Bulls	64
3.3.3 Running amok “okhuhuliana”	65
3.3.4 Cutting Crops	66
3.3.5 Circular Formation Dance “Likopo/Amakhuli”	66
3.3.6 I am a Stake/Support “Nise Olleti”	66
3.3.7 I am the Leopard “Nise Ingwe”	67
3.3.8 The Leopard is Crying “Ingwe Elalila”	68
3.3.9 The Release “Okhwekayakaya”	69
3.4 Values of Abanyole Culture.....	69
3.4.1 Esilemba Procession	69
3.4.2 The First Son.....	70
3.4.3 The First wife.....	70
3.4.4 How he Falls! “Aronyanga Tel!”	71
3.4.5 Am I Tea? “Khali Echai?”	71
3.4.6 The Meat bone “Esikumba sie Inyama”	72
3.4.7 It is Crawling “Siamola”	73
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	74
4.1 Recommendation for Further Research	79
WORKS CITED.....	80
APPENDICES	88
Appendix 1: Esilemba Oral Poems	88
Appendix 2: Interview Schedule for Respondents.....	97
Appendix 3: Persons interviewed	98
Appendix 4: Focus Group Discussions: Esilemba Groups Visited.....	99

ABSTRACT

The study analyzed the meaning, role and significance of symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry in order to understand how the Abanyole people respond to death when it occurs among them. It was based on the premise that the main motivation behind the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry is to mitigate the overwhelming destructive social and emotional effects occasioned by loss through death. Esilemba oral poetry is performed during the burial of a respected man, the head of the family, among Abanyole. This is considered the most devastating death, especially given the patriarchal setup of the community. The study had two objectives: one, to describe the nature and performance of Esilemba burial oral poetry and two, to analyze the significance of the symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry. These objectives were accomplished by conducting a critical analysis of the enactment of symbolism in Esilemba's oral poems. The investigation was guided by two related but different hypotheses. One, that performance is the anchor upon which symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry thrives, and two, that symbolism plays a dominant role in conveying the meaning, role and significance of Esilemba oral poetry. The research was carried out as an oral literature field work that used a qualitative approach to describe the performance and analyze the significance of the symbolism. The method of data collection took an intra-cultural interaction and dialogue approach. It permitted the researcher to take an active part in live performances as one way of collecting data. Moreover, with the guidance of preset questions, the researcher conducted one on one oral interviews and focused group discussions with Esilemba oral poetry performers, the audience and informed members of the Abanyole community. These activities yielded a repertoire of thirteen poems accompanied by non-verbal data which were given free translation and analysis. The data was carefully collated with the information from interviews and discussions so as to come up with the research findings. The investigation embraced four theoretical approaches: the ethnopoetics theory assisted in the data collection from the fieldwork, with emphasis on interpretation of the performance best done within the cultural context; the semiotics theory helped comprehend the signs and their functions or significations, including verbal and non-verbal elements utilized in the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry; while the performance theory helped to bring out how Esilemba performers utilized linguistic features, paralinguistic aspects and performance techniques to enhance their communication; and finally, the psychoanalytic theory was used to understand the social and emotional impact of the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry on the mourners. From the findings of the investigation, it was confirmed that symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry is an effective and powerful tool that exposes the destructive social and emotional effects visited upon the people due to death and also, it mitigates against these destabilizing effects by performing a therapeutic role to restore the lost equilibrium to ensure that life continues smoothly.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Literature as literary work revolves around people in a community and that is the reason it has been alluded to as a "mirror" of society. Jane Nandwa and Austin Bukonya in *African Oral Literature for Schools* portray oral literature as creative works of art by man communicated in language that incorporates, "all utterances whether sung, recited or performed and which use to an appreciable degree the spoken." (1-2). This definition acknowledges African oral literature as a component of the mainstream literature. For sure, African oral literature, just like written literature is a result of man's creative mind. It is, similarly, a consequence of man's sharp perception of the environment. Through vivid imagination, Africans observed the environment and through utilization of language communicated in creative ways different values relating to their social order. It is valid, as seen by Nandwa and Bukonya that song and dance spread through the entire range of African traditional life. Each life changing experience inside African communities was celebrated through song and dance. (85) Thus, this is a fieldwork study of African oral literature based on the premise that oral performances provide a platform for understanding the cultural values, practices and aesthetic qualities of a community. This study aims at analyzing the use of symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry (song and dance) performed by the Abanyole people.

The analysis of the symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry highlights how the Abanyole people respond to (understand, deal or cope with) the phenomenon of death when it occurs in their midst. Esilemba burial oral poetry, on which this study is grounded, is a sub-genre of funeral oral poetry. It plays a significant role during the burial of a respected man among the Abanyole, relying predominantly on symbolism to convey its meaning. This means that symbolism, just like other cultural features, helps mediate thought and anchors the people's representation of reality. Therefore, to appreciate the significance of Esilemba burial oral poetry among the Abanyole, one needs to understand the nature and role of the symbolism utilized in it to convey meaning to the audience, particularly the mourners. This study delves into how literature serves the needs of the people at a crucial moment in their lives when they have to respond to the occurrence of death in their midst. The target community needs to be understood for this is an ethnographic study that

requires to be culturally contextualized. Therefore, the cultural background of the Abanyole needs to be understood as a basis of the study.

Abanyole are a sub-tribe of the Abaluhya who live in Emuhaya Sub-County of Vihiga County in Western Kenya. They are one of the seventeen sub-tribes of the Abaluhya tribe of Western Kenya. The other sub-tribes include: Abalogoli, Abanyole and Abadiligi of Vihiga County, Abashisa, Abawanga, Abamarama, Abatsotso, Abidakho, Abakabaras, Abisukha, Abanyala ba Ndombi, and Abatachoni of Kakamega County, Ababukusu of Bungoma County and Abakhayo, Abamarachi, Abanyala and Abasamia of Busia County.

Wilbur K. O. Ottichilo in *History of Abanyole of Emuhaya and Luanda Sub-counties in Vihiga County* posits that the Luhya as a Bantu tribe came from Congo, relocated through Uganda to settle in the Western region of Kenya. The Banyore initially settled around the shores of Lake Victoria which they called "Inyanza" which means a lake. Their predecessors later moved North ward to inhabit the fertile land in Lela "Esianganyinya" slopes. The clans of Abanyole include: Abamuli, Abasiratsi, Abamutete, Abasiekwe, Ababayi, Abakanga, Abatongoi, Abamang'ali, Abayangu, Abamusila, Aberanyi, Abasiralo, Abamulele, Abamukunzi, Abakuya, Abamutsa, Abamwatsi, Abasubi, Abasiloli, Abasikhale, Abakhaya and Abasakami. These clans have many cultural activities that bring them together during times of joy and sorrow. Further, Ottichilo explains that Abanyole have their way of life known as "Imbikho" which sets down practices and convictions they follow for peaceful co-existence. Each man is required to marry outside the clan and not a relative or any close neighbor. Any individual who conflicted with this was sent away from the tribe to guarantee their curse or evil would not recur. If one inadvertently killed a clansman, he was banished and his home burnt down because such a thing was an abomination. Sexual associations with family members were unthinkable on the grounds that they invited death or numerous different misfortunes. In the event that a man slept with a neighbor's wife, he was unable to visit him when sick for this would result in his death. In the olden days, breaking a girl's virginity before marriage was considered the worst misbehavior and a heavy fine was exacted while the guilty party was confined for a long time. After marriage, a wife was not permitted to leave her home and wander about. This could prompt separation. A promiscuous wife was chased away from the clan. A child born outside marriage was forbidden and there were rituals that brought about

the death of such a child. In the event that a woman or man engaged in extra-marital affairs while with a suckling child, the baby would decline in health and finally die.

Moreover, Ottichilo states that at the point when an individual died, they would be buried in accordance with the laid down traditional rites. The grave was dug in front of the house facing East, where the sun rises from. An elder was buried outside his house with the head facing East. Among the Abanyole, there were numerous taboos and abominations, called "Emisilo." A pregnant young woman was expected to make public the identity of the would-be father long before the birth of the baby, if not, the baby would die during birth or be killed after birth. This was to avoid "esiluchi" a curse for it was assumed that the father was a relative. The man would become an outcast with whom the locals could not eat with or include in social matters and functions. A rapist and a killer were beaten to death or banished from the community and their homes burned to the ground. "Tsisila" was the result of curses against secret acts committed against the society, for example, robbery, murder, incest, adultery, among others. Extraordinary harvests were expected of men who were upright, honest and blameless, in light of the fact that their seed thrived. When a woman conceived an offspring, the husband could not engage in sexual relations outside marriage within that time lest the baby died. It was unthinkable or forbidden to have sexual relations with close family members or wives to cousins. Such an individual would die if he participated in any function in the family, particularly in sharing meat.

In conclusion, Ottichilo asserts that a child was expected to adhere to instructions and whenever he was found to have defied the norms, age mates were authorized to cane him as discipline. Regarding music and art, songs went with all activities among Abanyole, for example, marriage, work, funeral, war, among others. Instruments included esilili, litungu, limuka, oluhika, amakhuli and later ekengele, echupa and efirmibi. Monkey skins and different hides were worn during the dance together with amalande. Traditional worship revolved around their God, Nyasaye, to make them peaceful and make their children safe. They worshipped by spitting saliva in the East and requesting God direct their day successfully. They also had raised areas before the house made of three stones for every household to worship. They erected three posts of "olusolia" (Markhamia Lutea) around the stones. An elder would pray for his household and present his case to God there. Sacrifices were additionally performed there with pieces of meat to appease the God. They

believed that the dead were still alive in the spirit world and could help them deal with their problems. Song and dance punctuated all their activities. Esilemba burial oral poetry which played a key role during such celebrations as the people expressed themselves through song and dance, was found to portray an overreliance on symbolism.

Abanyole funeral oral poetry falls under African oral literature. Ruth Finnegan in *Oral Literature in Africa* explains that the first and most basic characteristic of African oral literature, which is sometimes overlooked in collections and analyses, is the significance of the actual performance. (4) She states that oral literature is dependent on a performer who formulates it into words on a specific occasion, without which it cannot be realized as a literary product (4). This study describes the performance of Esilemba burial oral poetry in detail so as to communicate the message conveyed through the symbolism utilized. Indeed, among the Abanyole it is impossible to separate song from dance. This study focused on the song and dance enactment christened Esilemba performed during the burial of a respected man among the Abanyole. Moreover, Finnegan states that although elegiac poetry is an exceedingly common form of expression in Africa, it has attracted less scholarly interest (145). Whereas this is true, her reasons are not necessarily valid as she claims it is less specialized and elaborate than panegyric poetry, and that it is performed by non-professionals (often women). Contrary to her assertion, Esilemba burial oral poetry among the Abanyole, is not only an elaborate performance but calls for a lot of expertise on the part of the performers, who are predominantly men. This study looked at the verbal and nonverbal symbolic elements of Esilemba burial oral poetry supported by Finnegan's acknowledgement that in funeral dirges the musical and balletic elements are as important as the words. Similarly, this study takes a keen interest in what Finnegan describes as the "...overtones and symbolic associations of words and phrases". (145) and the "...expressiveness of tone, gesture, facial expression, dramatic use of pause and rhythm, the interplay of passion, dignity or humour, receptivity to the reactions of the audience." (145) All these aspects combine with symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry to make it powerful and effective in its communication of meaning. The analysis of symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry contributes towards the interpretation and understanding of burial oral poetry among the Abanyole. The significance of the symbolism's verbal and nonverbal elements accrues from this study. This is supported by Olatunde Olatunji in, "Features of Yoruba Oral Literature," who states that oral literature performs more than an

aesthetic function. He reckons that apart from entertaining his audience, topical issues in the society are very important to the Yoruba oral poet. (13) This means that poetry focuses on pertinent issues in society. Symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry focuses on the most important topical and mysterious issue of death among the Abanyole. In essence, poetry records not only the events that take place in the community but also often attempts a philosophical analysis of these events. All these features, functions and relevancies of oral poetry are evident in the symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry. I chose to focus the study on a detailed analysis of the semiotic mechanisms of the presentation of the symbolism based on the thinking that, as Olatunji puts it, there are signs and significations that suggest more than their surface meaning in poetry. This is because poetry extensively makes use of word economy, a lot of meanings are usually embedded in one another. This makes a poetic expression more encoded than other literary work.

Akivaga Kichamu and Asenath Odaga in *Oral Literature: A School Certificate Course* reckon that songs and dances are very common in African societies: there is practically no social event that is not accompanied by song and dance. They state that, “Through the songs people learn, mourn, console each other, inspire each other and at times pass secret messages. Most of the songs are sung with a great deal of expression and feeling.” The songs embody the people’s history, philosophy, beliefs and wisdom. “Real singing” takes place during get-togethers like as funerals, weddings, communal work and ceremonies such as initiation. Therefore, songs and dances are basically communal affairs. Songs and dance provide entertainment but they are not for pleasure only. They often convey significant information to the audience. To get the songs, you need to develop sharp observation; observe the song in its social setting and watch out for the temperament of the entertainers and listen to the words keenly.

At a ceremony one needs to: portray the event; note the venue of the enactment (indoor or outside); who joins in; depict in detail the real execution (the gestures of the singer, the movements of the dancers); survey the different phases of the performance and what occurs at each stage; instruments utilized and evaluate what the occasion means to the people. Elegiac poetry refers to funeral songs sung when someone dies. The songs and dances differ from community to community and also depending on the age and status of the deceased. A keen assessment of elegiac poetry will show the significance a specific society attaches to death. In certain societies, death does not simply

happen; it is brought about by some wicked individual or spirit. In others, death is not viewed as a final thing. Life is a continuous process and when individuals die, they are essentially transformed into the world of spirits. Nonetheless, in spite of the fact that individuals may consider death to be inescapable, they express their fear when it happens. Death is an event for grieving and distress since it takes away friends and family from the midst of the living.

Jane Nandwa and Austin Bukenya in *African Oral Literature for Schools* posit that, “Song and dance pervade the whole spectrum of African traditional life. In most societies, there are songs for every stage and occasion of a person's life from cradle to the grave”. (85) What Nandwa and Bukenya are saying implies that to understand a people's philosophy of life in many cultural spheres, one needs to interrogate their songs and dances. Symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry is one of the strategies of constructing this subgenre of oral poetry. Therefore, to understand the oral poetry one needs to analyze the poetics employed and this is where the study comes in to interpret those song and dance enactments that are of significance to the community during the burial of a respected man among the Abanyole.

Ezekiel Alembe in, “Singing and dancing the rhythm of life: Oral poetry in the Abanyole community of Kenya,” posits that the Abanyole have a wide variety of poems with various functions, that include instructing, socializing, reinforcing mental fortitude and providing entertainment. He recognizes that individuals are informally educated to be dependable individuals in the society using numerous poems. This socializing aspect is quite evident in the symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry. Alembe, moreover, clarifies that among the Abanyole, music and dance are as indivisible from one another as they are inseparable from the life of the society. They are indispensable to life and go with practically all socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of the society, fluctuating in structure and substance, contingent upon the overarching conditions. Alembe contends that life would in reality be fragmented and void without music to speak with the soul as it calms, reassures, teaches, exhorts, empowers, convinces, rouses, entertains and relieves, among other qualities. This means that the Abanyole philosophy can be accessed through their song and dance.

Ezekiel Alembi in, “The Construction of the Abanyole Perceptions on Death Through Oral Funeral Poetry,” highlights the role of the features of context, sound, accompaniments, costume and make up towards a comprehension of Abanyole perceptions of death. His study was focused on the oral funeral poetry enacted by the Abanyole from the time of death up to the day of burial; a period of about three days (123). My study analyzed a sub-genre of the oral funeral poetry which is burial oral poetry performed on the morning of the final day of mourning when the dead man is buried. It particularly discusses the symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry, a dance drama performed during the burial of a respected man among the Abanyole. The study concurs with Alembi when he contends that funerals are replete with profound emotions that are communicated through poetry because this is evident in Esilemba burial oral poetry since the symbolism utilized depicts the profound sentiments of the mourners confronted with death. Similarly, symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry is congruent with Alembi’s assertion that, “poetry performances become useful avenues to let out pent up emotions that could easily be harmful to the bereaved” (139). In addition, Alembi notes that everyone in Bunyore participates in oral funeral performances, either as the audience or performers.

This study focused on analyzing the symbolism employed particularly in the burial oral poetry of the dance drama christened Shilembe by John Mbiti in *African Religions and Philosophy*, Esilemba by Anthony Otwel in *A Short History of the Abanyole* and Esilemba by Jane Nandwa in *Oral Literature Among Abaluhya*. Ezekiel Alembi in, “The Construction of the Abanyole Perceptions on Death Through Oral Funeral Poetry,” prefers to call it okhukoma, argues that it is a more organized and specialized part of the larger body of oral funeral performances. Actually, this study focused on the symbolism used in Esilemba because it is the climax of the burial ceremony for a respected man among Abanyole. According to Alembi it is, “a dance drama that is staged for men with at least one son” (123). He depicts okhukoma as an expressive type of oral poetry performance that is the most elaborate of all genres of oral elegiac poetry on the grounds that the entertainers are profoundly specialized and skilful. Alembi then portrays the four scenes of okhukoma performance as okhuchesia, Esilemba, okhuhuliana and likopo. The symbolism used in this dance drama is the focus of my study. Though, I refer to it as Esilemba because this is the name commonly used for all the activities performed in what Alembi calls okhukoma. Okhukoma, for me, generally means to mourn the dead and is used to describe the performers of Esilemba oral

poetry as “abakomi.” Further, Alembi discusses the poetic devices that make oral funeral poetry appropriate at funerals. For example, he says “people express deep feelings about their loss, hence the use of imagery and symbolism.” (139) However, in his discussion on the poetics of oral funeral poetry he concentrates on devices such as euphemism, hyperbole, repetition and poetic register (139), giving little attention to the burial oral poetry itself and the symbolism dominant in it. In this study we focus on this dominant poetic device, symbolism, which is employed in Esilemba burial oral poetry to effectively play the many roles consisting of: consoling, encouraging, teaching, celebrating and reinforcing values. Thus, symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry just requires to be enacted and comprehended for its importance to become clear. This study focused on analyzing the symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry with a view to understanding how it contributes towards the interpretation and understanding of burial oral poetry among the Abanyole. This was motivated by the knowledge that symbolism in oral poetry, which revolves around significant issues among Abanyole, has had little systematic research conducted on it. Alembi calls for the need to study it at “a micro level as well as on specific categories of poems” (17) Therefore, the significance of the verbal and non-verbal elements of symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry accrued from this analysis adds to literature in this area.

Symbolism is the predominant stylistic feature employed in Esilemba burial oral poetry to convey meaning. In *A Handbook to Literature*, Harmon William asserts that literary symbols serve to illustrate the meaning of a text beyond what is explicitly and extrinsically stated, to suggest another meaning rooted in the knowledge shared by a particular culture. He further observes that symbols may contribute to an intrinsic system of meaning by allowing a performer to represent abstract ideas in personal terms consistent with the world they live. Therefore, in literature, the essence of symbolism is that the object or action evokes an image to suggest a different higher level of meaning. A poetic symbol has connections to the whole poem when well applied. Symbolism enriches poetry by adding different dimensions to be appreciated at distinctive levels. This is true of Esilemba oral burial poems that often sound easy and simple to understand until one comprehends the metaphorical language of the symbolism used to realize the richness of meaning therein. Symbolism is the most dominant, effective and powerful tool utilized by Esilemba burial oral poetry performers to convey their message. It enables the communication of the message clearly while letting the audience know more about their culture, philosophy of life, physical

environment and the atmosphere they live in. Therefore, to analyze symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry, the study considered verbal and nonverbal representations, and their meanings; both the superficial meaning and the figurative meaning because symbolism requires interpretation for the meaning to become clear. J-A Cuddon in his *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory* expounds on our comprehension of the importance of symbolism:

This word, symbol, derives from the Greek verb *syballein*, ‘to throw together’ and its noun *symbolon*, ‘mark’, ‘emblem’ ‘token’ or ‘sign’. It is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or ‘stands for’ something else. (884-5)

This study, thus, focused on analyzing the nature and role of symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry. The discussion centered on the performance of thirteen Esilemba oral burial poems to appreciate the effectiveness of symbolism in communicating the performers concerns. In the study, it was apparent that each Esilemba oral burial poem revolves around one central symbol, evident in the title of the poem, to convey its meaning concisely and effectively. In understanding the symbolism, one learns a lot about the Abanyole culture, philosophy of life, norms, environment, traditions and customs. Therefore, the symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry facilitates the understanding of the cultural poetry of Abanyole, particularly the burial poetry. Among other things, the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry plays a major role in addressing the emotions that accompany death while providing some form of collective therapy for the community as a whole thereby facilitating it to regain the wholeness destabilized by loss through death.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Abanyole have an elaborate oral poetry (singing and dancing) culture that helps them navigate the various experiences in life. This study was formulated to gain a deeper understanding of the response of Abanyole towards death, when it occurs in the society, through the use symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry, as perceived by Abanyole. The symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry plays the important role of exposing the adverse effects of death and how the Abanyole respond to it. Death arouses many deep negative emotions that would otherwise harm the people if symbolism were not employed to mitigate their impact and ensure life can continue smoothly. This concurs with Finnegan who recommends more research in African oral poetry especially at a micro

level and on specific sub genres of oral poetry because of the useful information to be gained. Symbolism plays such a role to assist the bereaved navigate through the depressive effects of death which confirms that some of the most striking oral poetry is showcased when death occurs. Thus, there has been some good measure of interest by researchers, led by Ezekiel Alembi, in the funeral oral poetry of Abanyole. Esilemba burial oral poetry is a subgenre of oral funeral poetry that predominantly employs symbolism as a medium of communication, therefore, it requires thorough analysis to interpret its meaning. Previous studies have not focused specifically, from a literary perspective, on symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry and so it has not been subjected to literary analysis from scholars. Yet it is a popular and significant social activity characterized by singing, dancing and other performances.

Alembi, the most prolific and distinguished scholar in Abanyole oral literature research, covers a lot of ground on the importance of oral poetry, children's oral poetry and funeral oral poetry. However, in his research on funeral oral poetry, our study's focus area, he has covered funeral oral poetry performed from the time death occurs to burial and beyond. Though, he acknowledges Esilemba oral poetry, which he refers to as *okhukoma* and even describes some elements of its performance, he does not engage in a detailed study on the very informative use of symbolism in the Esilemba burial oral poetry to get insights into how the Abanyole mitigate the deep sorrow resulting from death. Therefore, there is little systematic and detailed research on Esilemba oral poetry, specifically the symbolism that dominates it. Symbolism as a stylistic device has an incredible dominance and relevance in Esilemba oral poetry; yet, the push to investigate its nature and role has received little attention. This study set out to fill this gap.

Joseph Muleka in, "Images of Women in Abakhayo Bweya Oral Poetry and Their Social Significance for Girl Children," reckons that a literary artist is interested in, not only what life is but also what it ought to be. Indeed, the symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry communicates deeply felt emotions about death shared by the Abanyole, highlighting how they react to the circumstances of death, commenting on the problems encountered and possible solutions. This information could contribute towards solving some of the problems presently encountered among the Abanyole such as immorality and increased cases of suicide among young men. The message in Esilemba burial oral poetry is conveyed through verbal and non-verbal symbolic elements.

Nevertheless, critics have not focused on the elaborate and skillful performance of Esilemba burial oral poetry which predominantly employs symbolism to convey its meaning.

Consequently, the fundamental problem that the study addresses is the lack of a systematic critical analysis of the symbolism employed in Esilemba burial oral poetry and its significance to the Abanyole people's collective consciousness, socially and culturally. Precisely, this study addresses the existing lacuna by seeking answers to the following questions: what is the nature and performance of Esilemba burial oral poetry? And what is the significance of the symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry in communicating meaning to the audience? An in-depth analysis of the symbolism was crucial in providing answers to these questions. This study was to identify and interpret the symbols utilized in Esilemba burial oral poetry performance. We sought to highlight how the performance contributes to the understanding and interpretation of the symbolism. It intended to show how symbolism contributes to the society's ability to cope, deal, manage, overcome or navigate through the phenomenon of death when it occurs. Therefore, symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry needed to be studied exhaustively given the vital role it plays among the Abanyole.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study was based on the following objectives:

1. To describe the nature and performance of Esilemba burial oral poetry.
2. To analyze the meaning, role and significance of symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry.

1.4 Research Questions

The research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature and performance of Esilemba burial oral poetry?
2. What is the meaning, role and significance of the symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry?

1.5 Hypotheses

- i.) Performance is the anchor upon which symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry thrives.
- ii.) Symbolism plays a dominant role in conveying the meaning, role and significance of Esilemba burial oral poetry.

1.6 Justification of the Study

The Abanyole people rely heavily on the use of symbolism when dealing with issues that are highly emotive and spiritual to minimize direct confrontation that may result in anxiety or conflict. Death is a traumatizing ordeal that calls for use of symbolism to navigate its destructive social and emotional effects. Despite the dominant use of symbolism as a poetic device by Esilemba burial oral poetry performance to communicate its concerns, there has been little effort to conduct an in-depth literary analysis of the symbolism. Several scholars have carried out research on Abanyole oral poetry but none specifically on the symbolism predominantly used in Esilemba burial oral poetry. This makes the study necessary and significant.

The documentation of the study contributes to the preservation, in a scholarly manner, of Esilemba burial oral poetry and its dominant use of symbolism based on empirical data. Esilemba oral poetry has been passed on from one generation to the other by word of mouth but due to other social changes such as education, religion, urbanization and other developments, it is likely to vanish into oblivion. Hence, the need for a detailed qualitative analysis of the symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry among the Abanyole. This is due to the poetry being transmitted orally and the danger of distorting the traditional structures in the process. The study provides a platform to enhance our understanding and interpretation of Abanyole's Esilemba burial oral poetry which has not received systematic critical comment. It accords the people an opportunity to recognize and identify with the symbols, take pride in them, apply them to different situations and pass them onto the next generation. Thus, it adds to the already existing knowledge and helps the people preserve their culture.

The place of Esilemba oral poetry for the community and posterity becomes clear from the study as it creates a reference source for literary scholars in understanding culture as a dynamic phenomenon. The findings may be used by stakeholders to come up with strategies to preserve and disseminate the rich cultural heritage of the Abanyole.

1.7 Scope and Limitations

The study was conducted in Bunyore, the home of Abanyole people, which is in Emuhaya Sub-County, Vihiga County in Western Kenya. It was limited to the study of funeral poetry, specifically the subgenre of burial oral poetry performed during the burial of a respected man among the

Abanyole. The study focuses only on symbolism in burial oral poetry and not all burial oral poetry but that employed during the performance of Esilemba oral poetry. Previous research undertaken by Alembi focused on funeral oral poetry in general, dealing with lamentation and mourning, from the time a person died to their burial and beyond. This study focused on the activities, both verbal and non-verbal, that are engaged in during the enactment of Esilemba burial oral poetry. Furthermore, it focused only on one aspect of the burial oral poetry namely the symbolism employed in the performance. I utilized the semiotics theory as the guiding framework to analyze the meaning of the symbolism, from the community's perspective, used in Esilemba burial oral poetry; a poetic performance during the burial of a revered elder among the Abanyole. Although Esilemba burial oral poetry is predominantly performed by men, it is a whole village affair because women and children are also actively involved.

In consideration of the limited time, data was collected from some selected members of the community focusing mainly on performers and elders who, though retired from performing due to their advanced age, are a reservoir of information on Esilemba burial oral poetry. The circumstances are contextually peculiar to the specified area, the performers and elders under study. The findings may not be construed as replicable for experiences and perceptions in other villages or other clans. Nevertheless, the context is representative in some ways and there may be found possibilities of the rite's performance resonating with other clans' experiences during the burial of an elder. Or it may resonate with other clans with similar characteristics within their contexts.

I assumed that I would find performers and elders who are sufficiently informed about the Esilemba burial oral poetry's performance and the significance of the symbolism utilized therein, among the Abanyole people. I also assumed that the performers and elders encounter opportunities and challenges in the performance of the Esilemba burial oral poetry in the prevailing circumstances. Further, the study assumed that the participants shared perspectives and experiences that are genuine so as to provide a realistic representation of what actually happens.

1.8 Literature Review

This literature review revolves around the performance of elegiac oral poetry as a sub-genre of oral literature. I review literature relating to the performance of funeral oral poetry, the use of symbolism in oral poetry and the theoretical frameworks employed in the analysis of symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry, namely: the ethnopoetics theory, semiotics theory, the performance theory, and the psychoanalytic theory.

1.8.1 Performance of Elegiac Oral Poetry

Ruth Finnegan in, "*Oral Literature of Africa*," states that the meaning of oral literature has been a subject for a lot of discussion. However, most analysts have agreed on the creativity in the oral genres. As Finnegan notes, there is no conspicuous border between written literature and oral literature. She contends that literature cannot just refer to the written works. As Finnegan notes, there is no obvious boundary in distinguishing between written literature and oral literature. Literature cannot only mean the written works. The view that literature alludes just to the written material was accentuated by Western scholars who saw their literature as better than that of others. (17)

Finnegan, on Elegiac Poetry, states that it is a very common type of expression in Africa consisting of those poems or songs enacted at funerals or commemoration ceremonies from all territories and in a wide range of structures. For elegiac poems, funeral ceremonies are their essential and specific occasions and death is one of the numerous subjects of these oral poems. Finnegan argues that elegiac poetry performances are generally less specialized and elaborate than panegyric poetry and maybe that is why they have elicited less interest from researchers. (156) She says that they are, in general, performed by non-experts who are regularly women with musical and balletic components being as significant as the words. These elegiac poems are sung by women among the Yoruba, the Akan and also include the Zitengulo songs of Zambia with men every so often included. Moreover, Finnegan posits that among the Yoruba and the Zintengulo of Zambia funeral songs sung by women mourners, adding that, "these songs often involve wailing, sobbing and weeping, makes them particularly suited for women." Women are seen as the weaker sex who can freely express themselves emotionally in public while men in Africa must not express their weakness (like crying) in public as any man doing this will be termed effeminate.

Among the Limba, the initial mourning is invariably by women, in either chorus or antiphonal form but in the case of an adult male, the burial itself is by the men's secret society and the accompanying songs are by men. The majority of the dirges are relevant and short term, utilized at the funeral of one individual and relating only to him, although they utilize the acknowledged sayings and structures. Praise is one of the most widely recognized themes in them despite the fact that one finds resignation and acceptance of the inevitable while some other poems focus on individual sentiments and experiences of the mourners. Akan dirges revolve around the deceased, portraying his characteristics utilizing various names (proper names, "by names" and praise appellations) that respect the dead. Benevolence, compassion and generosity, trustworthiness and productivity in a woman are characteristics that are praised. The characteristics both elevate the deceased's good points while conveying to the community the misfortune it has suffered.

Joseph Kwabena Nketia in *The Funeral Dirges of the Akan People* notes that, the "traditional forms of expression (are) still pregnant with emotion to the Akan, expressions which are not considered outworn in spite of frequent use" He states that the choice of words is marked by the extraordinary recurrence of keywords all through the poems, words firmly connected with the main subject matter. Apart from syntactical forms and obscure names and metaphorical expressions, the language of dirges is generally straight forward. In spite of the ordinary language and short span of the poem, a whole range of highly charged impressions can be conveyed because funerals are important and memorable events among the Akan.

Adegbite Tobalase in *The Dirge as a Literary and Cultural Expression* discusses the artistic characteristics and social effect of funeral oral poetry in a chosen gathering of the Yoruba people - the Awori's and furthermore, concludes that funeral dirges still exist despite everything. (2) He noted the various death and burial service rituals and customs in Yoruba land, with some viewed as conventional while others are "special" as a result of the status, age and cause of death of the individual in question. (3) Emphasis is on the accomplishment of a decent death to create a conducive environment to celebrate the life of the deceased because their god wishes people promote goodness by keeping up moral uprightness and personhood (goodness to self, individuals around you and ancestors). (6) The reciting of elegiac poetry in Africa and Yorubaland as a means of communicating ones' sentiments at the death of a loved one or family member has been in

existence since time immemorial. The songs additionally have stylish highlights which are a blend of emotions and thoughts stimulated by the entertainers. The deceased's accomplishments are brought to the front proposing the beliefs, desires, concerns and values of the community including trustworthiness, sincerity, equity, order, regard for appropriately constituted authority, among other issues. (9) The funeral dirges have predominance of the feeling of melancholy since they are delivered to communicate the sentimental disorder the beloved face at the death of their kinsman. (13) Most funeral dirges, apart from mourning the dead, also take part in moral training, social criticism and philosophical reflection on life. (14)

Babila Mutia in, "Stylistic Patterns in Oral Literature: The Song and Structure of Bakweri Dirges," affirms that the musical backup, the rhythm of the dance and the vitality, feelings and enthusiasm with which the performers vent off their emotions, all contribute to give deep insights about Bakweri funeral poetry. Most funeral poems are short, making them simple to remember and master. They consist of melodious repetitions such as, /o/and/e/sounds that convey the feeling of the misfortune and sorrow of the mourner. Bakweri funeral dirges, just like most African songs have a free rhythm. When enacted together with a chorus, the dirges have a beat that is expressed by dance, the backup of drumming, ringing of bells and the playing of a large group of assorted instruments that determine the tempo of the rhythm. The language utilized is moderately ordinary and straight forward yet with complex references, hidden implications and connotations disguised inside the subtext of the songs, which may not be clear to the casual onlooker in these funeral occasions. A decent number of these elegiac poems draw their symbolism from nature, essentially from creatures and plants. They use appropriate allegories and striking comparisons that mirror the social and religious encounters of the Bakweri people. The artistic importance of the dirges is made clear in the aesthetic choice of the words utilized by the performers, their suitability and their perceptiveness inside the setting of sorrow and mourning.

Symbolism is a regular stylistic device in Bakweri funeral songs. This is the capacity to utilize words whose implications cannot be seen from their face value, ordinarily connected with death that the mourners use during their performances. In one of the poems a trip represents a permanent separation. Death itself is alluded to in wording that mean it is "everlasting" "omnipresent" or "ubiquitous." In other words, it is extremely unlikely that anyone can keep away from death. The

possibility that we are born just to die is a reasonable quality of the Bakweri world view in which death is viewed as an inescapable reality. Home is utilized to symbolize the grave which represents the world beyond the physical, mortal domain in which the dead man's home exists. Personification, in which human qualities are attributed to abstract or non-human elements, is by all accounts a standard component in the dirges with the lead vocalist blaming death for snatching her whole family away. Death is represented as a human beast that can snatch individuals away. This demonstration of snatching away individuals depicts the unpredictability of death. Alliteration, assonance and ideophones abound in these dirges.

Okot p'Bitek, in his "Horn of my Love" a study of the Acoli People of Northern Uganda declares that presents poetry of the Acoli community comprising of their lullabies and love poems, their mocking poems, their religious poems and recitations, their war poems and elegiac poems. He reckons that experiencing them one might get a brief look at what these individuals think and believe, what life means, their virtues, their sense of humour, their apprehensions and delights are introduced in those poems. (vii) P'Bitek highlights the characteristics of oral poetry that resonate with what the symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry portrays, especially in capturing the people's thoughts, emotions and perceptions of life.

Joseph Muleka in, "Images of Women in Abakhayo Bweya Oral Poetry and Their Social Significance for Girl Children" reckons that performance is a crucial component without which even the very existence of an oral work may be doubtful. He concurs with Finnegan who points out that this is a component that many scholars have overlooked in collections and analyses. Finnegan further observes that "oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it into words on a specific occasion – there is no other way in which it can be realized as a literary product" (2) This observation underscores the significance of performance in realizing an oral work. Oral poetry can only be realized and appreciated during the live execution or actualization of the work. This study focuses on analyzing the performance of Esilemba oral poetry specifically its use of symbolism to convey meaning. In emphasizing the intersection of art and culture, Muleka reckons that works of art are not created in a vacuum and that they go hand in hand with particular contexts (3). In addition, he emphasizes the significance of the audience when he posits that, "the existence of performer and performance may not be complete without an

audience.” He states that performance is only relevant because of the audience who partake of and participate in it.

Similarly, the audience is an integral part of Esilemba burial oral poetry performance comprising of the whole community including children, women and men. Burial is a communal undertaking because all people are involved in mourning the loss of a village elder through singing, dancing, wailing, screaming and generally expressing their sorrow. Moreover, Muleka identifies two types of audiences; the real audience (live composition of people witnessing the performance) and an imagined audience (not present during the performance). During Esilemba oral poetry enactment the performers may also address an audience not present during the performance such as “Abaluhya banje” (My Luhya people) and “olufu ibe” (You, death). Also, in a typical African setting, the rendition of oral performances often involves composition in the process of selecting, organizing and developing, which the oral artist carries out during the realization of the performance.

Ezekiel Alembi in, “Singing and Dancing the Rhythm of Life: Oral Poetry in the Abanyole community in Kenya,” states that Africans are deeply musical and poetical. For support, he quotes Nandwa and Bukenya who posit that, “song and dance pervade the whole spectrum of African traditional life. In most societies there are songs for every stage and occasion of a person’s life from cradle to the grave.” (85) Moreover, Alembi asserts that singing and dancing goes with many events among the Abanyole, playing different roles such as instructing, socializing, reinforcing bravery and giving pleasure. Alembi reckons that through oral poetry, people learn to be reliable members of the community, “socialization among Abanyole is a lifelong process as members from infancy towards onwards graduate at different cycles of the wheel of life”. They develop a strong sense of pride in belonging to the Abanyole sub-tribe. Although oral poetry plays a significant function in the lives of Abanyole, a scrutiny of existing studies reveals that little systematic research has been conducted. The few studies conducted attempted to cover many issues and categories of poetry at the same time. Alembi’s basic objective was to comprehend Abanyole’s concept of death through the oral poetry by interpreting the expressions and proclamations of funeral poetry to gain an insight into the community’s attitude towards death. Alembi says, “There is, therefore, the need to study this poetry at a micro level as well as on

specific categories of poems” It is within this context that I have formulated my study to gain a deeper understanding of symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry.

Further, Alembi talks about the role of song and dance in a funeral service setting among the Abanyole concentrating on traditional Abanyole songs. In particular, he talks about enactments by individual mourners and night renditions at funerals. Alembi's examination was guided by the questions that follow: Who conducts the performance? When do the enactments occur? What is the structure of the presentation? What is the importance of the presentation inside the funeral setting? He underlines the translation of words and activities inside the particular social settings. This basically implies that the significance of the words and activities must be situated inside the view of the studied community. He agrees with the view of ethnopoetics that analysts should participate in the life of the societies as a sound foundation for learning, encountering and recording the beliefs, desires, fears and concepts of the community studied. Specifically, Alembi investigates how the presentation of oral funeral poetry facilitates the activity of bidding farewell to the deceased among the Abanyole by examining components of setting, sound, gear, costume and décor. Alembi posits that among the Abanyole funerals are replete with profound emotions that are somewhat communicated through oral poetry. In this way, oral poetry enactments become helpful ways of releasing hidden feelings that could otherwise be destructive to wellbeing of the bereaved. In addition, funerals are accompanied by emotions of pleasure communicated through the oral poetry. As opposed to what Ruth Finnegan in *Oral Literature in Africa* records in an overview of elegiac poetry in Africa, asserting that wailing and singing is exclusively an attribute of women mourning, all individuals from Abanyole community mourn and sing at funerals. In fact, since childhood, the Abanyole youth watch and take part in oral funeral poetry performances. Thus, they normally become skilled and expert mourners. One classification of the performance Alembi calls “okhukoma” calls for high individuality and is driven by specialists in the art of performance. Hence, it is a more organized and specialized section of the bigger body of all funeral poetry performance.

Further, Alembi argues that the wailing, singing, reciting and dancing play significant mental and social roles. Mentally, they offer emotional help to the bereaved family, who are made to realize that they are not alone in their sorrow, while socially mourners' express solidarity with the

bereaved family. At the individual level, singing, crying, reciting and dancing help in releasing stress and venting out feelings which, when stifled, could be more destructive to the mourners. Therefore, the Abanyole do not perform these enactments for fun, but to serve serious needs of the community. Alembi depicts *okhukoma* (for my study *Esilemba*) as a category of the expressive genre of funeral poetry enactment performed only for the ethically upright male individuals from the community who have at least begotten a son, on the morning of the day when the deceased is buried. He contends that of all genres of funeral oral poetry performances this is maybe the most elaborate. In this viewpoint, I agree with Alembi when he contradicts Finnegan, who states that funeral performances in Africa are not especially intricate (147). In opposition to what Finnegan notes about performers being unprofessional, lead artists in *Esilemba* oral poetry are exceptionally specialized and skillful. Alembi portrays *okhukoma* dance as a one act play separated into four scenes: *okhuchesia*, *esilemba*, *okhuhuliana* and *likopo*. The dance begins early in the morning with performers dancing as they walk around the village, visiting places frequented by the deceased as a way of escorting the spirit of the dead to say goodbye to his preferred spots. Then, the performers begin walking fast, then jogging and finally running at full speed as in a battle charge towards the home of the deceased. When they enter the homestead, the widow of the deceased welcomes them if she had been faithful to her husband. In the event that she had ever been unfaithful and was accused of, “*okhulia tsibeba*” (committing adultery), it is believed she would die on the spot in the event that she attempted to welcome the performers. Then, in “*okhuhuliana*” (moving blindly), after getting into the homestead, all singing stops. Horn blowers move to the centre of the compound and totally assume control over instrumentation while the artists go wild as they go around the compound spearing the air and "defending" themselves.

On this aspect Nandwa notes that the performers at that point entered the home with extraordinary force and trampled on anything in front of them. All the children had to be taken away, for they could be crushed underneath. In the event that there were any crops growing in the farm, they chopped them down and crushed them totally. (222)

Also, on the same, Alembi in, “Aspects of Theatre in Pre-Colonial Kenya,” states that the mourners visit the deceased’s farm and grazing grounds, after which they head to his homestead carrying spears, clubs and twigs. In his compound they go crazy, running to all corners and chopping down

crops. Totally tired, they gather at the centre of the compound for the last part of the performance. (17) The "war" in okhuhuliana is a battle with malevolent spirits that are believed to be the cause of death of the deceased. The spirits should in this way be destroyed and ousted from the compound for the bereaved family to have a sense of security and safety. The cutting of the plants is symbolic for it implies life has briefly reached an end, however, it will continue as the plants recover. This portrays the Abanyole's belief that death is not the last stage of life for human beings. They live again in amakombe, the world of spirits or ancestors (Alembi, 2002). From another angle, it implies that the community cannot end with the passing on of an individual. Society through procreation of its individuals will keep on flourishing. The last scene, likopo, is an entertainment performance as they are tired after the vigorous last scene. Customarily, the performers used to walk along the main routes and paths close to the deceased's home singing and dancing offering their final appreciation before the burial. Nowadays, the dancing is mostly performed in the deceased's homestead.

One of the main instruments in an okhukoma enactment is a horn. There are two main kinds that are utilized. The short horn, *essilipa*, is used to spice the presentation while the long one, *olwika*, is utilized for various roles, for example, to control the performers and to manage the movements of the performers. Other instruments used comprise of *omutindi* (little drum), big drums, jingles, sticks and fiddle. The amount of the instruments and the quantity of performers relies upon the status of the dead. Okhukoma is a detailed presentation with the correct attire, makeup and accompaniments utilized for colour or display and to mark the significance of the rite. The important members in this enactment, the performers and the soloist, dress uniquely in contrast to the other dancers. They wear shorts underneath the sisal skirts for ease of dancing. They additionally wear light tops, a band embellished with plumes around the heads and makeup of coloured clay soil. Some wear masks of leopard faces, which means the dead man was a warrior. They wear jingles around their lower legs. The bulls, other than being decorated with twigs and creeping plants, have bells around their necks, which jingle as they run. The performers carry spears and shields and wield them as though in genuine battle. The costume, makeup and accompaniments are profoundly symbolic in this rendition. In the event that the dead individual was a warrior, prosperous farmer, landowner or trader, the performance is more detailed with

brilliant colours, more performers, more bulls and more makeup. In general, a presentation for a prosperous individual would be more elaborate, as though the society was aspiring to wealth.

Ezekiel Alembi in “Aspects of Theatre in Pre-Colonial Kenya,” says that in the event that the dead man was a warrior, the vast majority of the performers will wear war dress, including a leopard skin to signify that the dead man was a brave warrior who could even dare to face a leopard, perhaps the deadliest creature of the forest. Some may wear leopard face masks and be armed with suitable weapons like spears and shields (18). The manner of dress of the performers therefore isolates the abakomi, the dancers, from any other villagers. Song and dance are important in the funeral context in Bunyore as through them the community not only bids farewell and escorts the spirits of the departed members but also communicates important messages about death and life. Also, through song and dance the life that one has lived is revealed. These performances are therefore not just about death but also about life.

Ezekiel Alembi in “Aspects of Theatre in Pre-Colonial Kenya,” posits that in the Abanyole society, music and dance are as indivisible from each other as they are indistinguishable from occasions of the community. They are irreplaceable to life and go along with all the social, economic and political occasions of the community, contrasting in structure and substance, dependent upon the general conditions. Life would actually be incomplete and empty, without music to talk to the spirit, as it mitigates, upholds, educates, admonishes, stimulates, persuades, rouses, assuages, gives pleasure, among several other functions. Thus, oral poetry just needs to be enacted and comprehended for its value to become apparent.

Alembi, additionally, says that accompaniments are important elements of oral poetry in Africa. In African enactments, accompaniments may include sticks, jingles, harp, drums and flutes. Alembi explains that the mix of singing, dancing and playing the instruments produces music that enormously influences both the performer and the audience, a view that is supported by Finnegan (481-499). Regarding stylistic tools, African poetry uses elements that make it easy and engaging sing. These features incorporate repetition, rhyme, similar sounding word usage and careful choice of words. Alembi (48) noted that basically all analysts who have studied African oral poetry come to a common end result that this imaginative work plays a critical role in the lives of the people.

African creative artists do not sing just for the sake of singing. Thus, poetry for the sake of poetry is not a feature of African oral poetry.

1.8.2 Symbolism in Oral Poetry

In, "Literary Devices: Definition and Examples of Literary Terms," symbolism is characterized as the utilization of symbols to connote thoughts and characteristics, by giving them representative implications that are unique in relation to their surface meaning. For the most part, it is an object standing for another, to give a completely different significance that is a lot more profound and important. At times, nonetheless, an activity, an occasion or a word verbally expressed by somebody may have a symbolic value. For example, "smile" is a symbol of friendship. Also, the activity of somebody smiling at you may represent a symbol of the sentiment of warmth which that individual has for you.

Symbols vary their meanings depending upon the setting in which they are utilized. "A chain" for instance, may mean "union" as well as "imprisonment." Thus, the symbolic importance of an item or an activity is comprehended through setting; the when, where and how it is utilized. Normal instances of symbolism in regular day to day life comprise of the dove as a symbol of peace, a red rose represents love or romance while a broken mirror may represent separation. Regarding its role, symbolism gives an artist an opportunity to add two levels of meaning to their work: a denotational one that is apparent and a symbolic one whose significance is unquestionably more significant than the surface meaning. Symbolism in literature elicits the audience's interest as they discover a chance to get to know more about artist's psyche on how he sees the world and how he considers common objects and activities, having more extensive implications.

Gbormittah Francis Cantor in, "Performance, Oral literature and Ideo-Aesthetic Heritages in the search for the soul of a poet," states that it is striking among the Eve people that the presentation of funeral songs is not exclusive to only men and women as both genders participate actively in enacting the dirges. It is additionally shown that, apart from grieving the dead, funeral poems provide the people with a chance to analyze their own life. The presentation of funeral songs, in addition, inculcate African communal values and linguistic heritages in the people. He similarly clarifies that the oral poems performed are strikingly clear with stylistic features. Some of elaborate

stylistic components distinguished comprise of figurative language, repetition, piling and affiliation, digression, symbolism, ideophones and imagery. Figurative references are commonly used in many occasions relating to death and are introduced in a language that utilizes plenty of mental symbolism. Many of the dirges are enhanced using repetition of words, sounds, thoughts, phrases and many more.

The repetition provides an opportunity for the audience to participate especially the sections that are repeated and helps the performers to easily memorize the songs. Due to the effect of repetition the performers can inject, in their hosts and audience, compassion and the emotion of the weakness of a man in the "dark world of life". Agyekum in, "Introduction to Literature," observes that repetition can be utilized to accomplish the fullness of an impact to support audience consideration and enthusiasm, to separate sections in the oral performance and as a formulaic tool. (45) Another stylistic feature in these songs is voice pitch that Finnegan, in, "Oral Literature in Africa" and Okpewho in, "African Oral Literature," agree is obvious in most African funeral poems on the grounds that most Africa languages have strong tonal qualities. Ideophones are likewise utilized in these songs as sounds and words to enhance their effect. In the expressions of Okpewho, ideophones, "are not like normal words to which meanings are readily assigned. They are simply sounds used in conveying a vivid impression. In short, an ideophone is an idea-in-sound" (92).

All through the enactment the woman occasionally made the sound "nhummm nhumm" which demonstrated the, "heaviness" of the heart of the people upon the loss of their elder.

Lucy Loice Nabukonde in, "Symbolism in Ugandan Poetry," contends that symbolism relates two things with signification that is both literal and metaphorical. She states that symbols depend on commonly known and generally acknowledged qualities. Symbolism in poetry is for the most part impacted by the way of life, traditions and background of the community. (6) Types of symbolism in poetry are literal in themselves as well as figurative depending upon their environment. Symbolism as a stylistic device, with all these qualities, has an incredible dominance in Esilemba oral burial poetry; yet, the push to investigate its nature and role has received little attention. Since symbols are based on widespread and commonly accepted values in a community, the symbolism in Esilemba oral burial poetry is mainly influenced by the culture, environment, norms and traditions of the Abanyole. Esilemba oral burial poetry performance has great presence and plays

a significant role in the lives of the Abanyole, yet the effort to critique its nature, effectiveness and the changing trends have been relatively low.

I have attempted, in this study, to examine Abanyole funeral oral poetry from the perspective of the symbolism employed in Esilemba burial oral poetry, one of the dying traditions of Abanyole. I have confirmed that cultural values and the aesthetic heritage of Abanyole have much to benefit from oral traditions.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

The study embraced four theoretical approaches namely; the ethnopoetics theory, the semiotics theory, the performance theory and the psychoanalytic theory. One, the ethnopoetics theory was applied to the oral literature fieldwork research, particularly in the collection, transcription and translation of information. It assisted in the data collection from the field, with emphasis on interpretation best done within the cultural context, concentrating on the performance. I thought I could merge the next two theories; semiotics theory and the performance theory so that I utilize one instead of both, but the nature of the work required that I mention the two theories working as complementary and reinforcing each other. This is because despite the focus being on the interpretation of the meaning of the symbolism used, Esilemba oral poetry is basically a performance. So, two, the semiotics theory facilitated the analysis of the symbolism used in Esilemba oral poetry as a sign and its capacity for meaning. It helped comprehend the signs, their signification and functions, including the sounds, words, body language, patterns, actions and objects utilized symbolically in Esilemba oral poetry. Three, the performance theory was used to understand how Esilemba oral poetry performers employ linguistic elements, paralinguistic features and performance techniques, including facial expressions, outward appearances, gestures, accompaniments, movements, intonation, instrumentation, costume and decor to improve their performance and to help the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry to communicate meaning powerfully and effectively. Finally, four, the psychoanalytic theory was used to understand the social and emotional impact of the Esilemba oral poetry with its cathartic effects on the bereaved family and the community at large.

1.9.1 Ethnopoetics Theory

The ethnopoetics theory was applied to this oral literature fieldwork research, particularly in the collection, interpretation and translation of information. Pertti Anttonen in *Ethnopoetic Analysis and Finnish Oral Verse* reckons that ethnopoetics centres around the aesthetic and poetic organizing of oral art. (113). This is supported by Jan Blommaert in “Ethnopoetics as Functional Reconstruction” who argues that, ethnopoetics is a type of narrative investigation designed, at first, for the examination of folk stories and dependent on an ethnographic performance-based comprehension of narratives underscoring the fact that meaning is an impact of performance. It offers chances for analyzing "voice." (235) Thus, it is possibly a helpful device for tracing "local" examples of creating meaning in narratives. The theory has two strands generated by Dennis Tedlock and Dell Hymes that complement each other.

The tenets of Hymes' ethnopoetics were based on the idea of narratives as fundamentally organized in formal and aesthetic - "poetic" - designs, not on substance or thematic structures. Dell Hymes in, *Ethnopoetics, Oral-Formulaic Theory, and Editing Texts*, states that a narrative is, thus, to be viewed as a type of activity, of performance, and the implications it produces are results of performance. Thus, narratives are sorted out in lines and in gatherings of lines (refrains, stanzas) and the arrangement of lines in narratives is a sort of clear structure that makes the story effective. He indicates that, “the relation between lines and groups of lines are based on the general principle of poetic organization called ‘equivalence’ which may involve any feature of language” including prosodic features like stress, pauses, pitch and intonation; syntactic elements, such as, similar verb tense or aspect; phonetic features, for example, alliteration and rhyme; and lexico-syntactic features, like the utilization of specific particles or discourse. (330) Dell Hymes in, “In Vain I Tried to Tell You,” further states that, “these oral poetry and expressions are founded upon a socially constituted poetic structure that is presented both in the organization of experience as well as in the organization of reports on that experience.” (113) According to Hymes, the lines and verses are, “organized in ways that are not only poetic but also a kind rhetoric of action in that they embody an implicit cultural schema for the organization of experience.” (113) The ethnopoetics theory helps to make the writing and interpretation clearer as it defines the characteristics of the verses in terms of how long a line should be through the stops, repeats, pauses among others, that

separate lines. This implies that an analysis of verbal art cannot be interpreted outside of the context in which it is performed.

It depends on the sober minded investigation of language, wherein signs and texts are investigated as far as their utilization in communication is concerned. Anttonen posits that semiotically, meaning is investigated in terms of the connection between a sign and its user. (116) Texts analyzed are available only as composed documents. This implies Dell Hymes and his adherents do not insist on observation and recording of live performances, like Tedlock and his supporters. Tedlock, as quoted in Anttonen stressed the oral nature of texts and the reliance of the arrangement of the texts on lines. He argued that transcription of texts depends on two factors: the content is organized into lines as indicated by the pauses in the oral performance. Every subsequent pause demonstrates the finish of one line and the start of another. The transcription captures the difference in intonation, volume, vowel length and presents the content as it was heard in performance (114). The focus is on fieldwork, in other words, all the material considered must have been gathered and transcribed by the researcher analyzing it. Moreover, Tedlock attempted to deliver a performable content by utilizing a framework much similar to musical scoring. Gestures, facial expressions and important audience reactions were depicted in parenthesis and commentaries. Silence, nevertheless, is the most significant depiction of the poetic measure in oral poetry and stops should somehow be set apart in any printed portrayal of such poetry. (113) Anttonen affirms that the methodology emphasizes that aural characteristics in performance are fundamental to the arrangement of discourse as they pass on to the audience a feeling of the overall significance of aspects of meaning. (114) Obviously, the focal idea of ethnopoetics investigation is that each culture has its own poetics and that it can be portrayed. One culture's poetry has different structural and aesthetic standards in comparison to another. Ethnopoetics enhances acknowledgment and appreciation of such contrasts.

Shirley Lim in *Reconstructing Asian-American Poetry* postulates that there have been criticisms of ethnopoetics in practice and concerns on the degree of its applicability. (55) Lim refers to the cumbersome nature of an ethnopoetics examination since it requires comprehensive knowledge of the first language and a deep, close comprehension of the way of life of a society. Furthermore, one can read ethnopoetics texts in translation, however one cannot perform an ethnopoetics

examination of translated texts. This makes the field of ethnopoetics to some degree constraining. More worrying is the likelihood that a given ethnopoetics examination could accidentally affirm stereotyped, even supremacist, suppositions about the way of life it studies because researchers, regardless of their best objectives, go into cultural settings with formed opinions. (64) If they are not careful to distance themselves from these assumptions, the ethnopoetics analysis faces the risk of distorting and in any event, belittling the "primitive" culture, and as a result it may elevate bogus suppositions to the whole academic world. This shows why it is totally important that the translator be personally familiar with the language and culture under examination.

In this study, the ethnopoetics theory assisted in the literary interpretation of the performance and the methodology of transcription and analysis of the collected data especially on the literary strategies deployed by the artists, and the mediated social concerns and their impacts on the bereaved in the society.

1.9.2 The Semiotics Theory

The study utilizes the semiotics theory to analyze symbolism as a sign utilized in Esilemba burial oral poetry and its capacity for meaning. This study centres around semiotics interest in scholarly traditions, rules, stylistic devices and structural components. Bronwen Martin and Felizitas Ringham in *Dictionary of Semiotics* characterize semiotics as a theory of connotation that aims at the creation of meaning. (128) To Paul Cobley in *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics and Linguistics*, "Semiotics" originates from the Greek root "Seme", as in "Semeiotikos" which implies an interpreter of signs. (5) Along these lines, therefore, semiotics as a subject area, is just the understanding of signs. Literature is one of the significant features of life in which signs are encoded to convey messages to either impart knowledge or entertain the audience.

Ferdinand de Saussure in his book *Course in General Linguistics* provides the original idea that concentrates on the nature of the linguistic sign. He explains that each word has a place within a sign system which is comprised of two sections: the signifier, which is spoken imprint (sound or picture) and the signified which is an idea. (65) In this way, the signifier combines with the signified to create a sign. There must be common coherence between the signifier and the implied, if not, codification may not be conceivable. The communication procedure between the signifier

and the signified is called signification. Saussure reckons that the connection between the signifier and the signified in language is arbitrary (67). As indicated by de Saussure, all signs are social constructs with their importance comprehended through rehashed, scholarly and aggregate use. He argues that correspondence is a ceaseless chain of sign creation. Saussure concocted three degrees of importance: denotational or syntactic level, connotational or authentic and the representative or social significance. The sign alludes to words as well as to everything that can have significance, for example, pictures, images, symbols, sounds, motions – at both denotational and connotational implications. The particular sign incorporates, not only the characteristics, feelings and mental pictures but also, the social, cultural and ideological meanings connected to it. In this way, semiotics intends to interpret the signs around us so as to understand human experiences. It delves into the hidden implications of the words that are used on a day to day basis. This study depended on these tenets in understanding the signification of the symbolism used in Esilemba oral poetry at both the denotational and connotational levels. The examination of symbolism as a sign enhanced the interpretation of the significance of the poetry as a reflection of Abanyole's life experiences.

Charles Sanders Peirce developed his theory of meaning called “Semiotics” in which he expounded on the triadic theory of sign referring to: Representamen, Object and Interpretant. Paul Copley and Litza Jansz in *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics and Linguistics* characterize Representamen as something that represents a person or thing in some regard or role. (22) The object in the field of semiotics is characterized by Eco as a sign that represents something with the concept which the thing brings out or transforms. (69) Understanding an object is dictated by a few factors, these could be social, ideological, linguistic, religious, traditional, logical, among others. To Copley and Jansz, an interpretant is approximately what we generally understand as a sign's meaning. (22) Peirce also suggested a model for a language system comprising of three sections: index, icon and symbol. An index is a sign wherein the signifier has a solid relationship to the signified, for instance; smoke connotes fire. An icon is a sign in where the signifier looks like the signified, for instance; a painting is an icon to the subject it speaks of. According to Lois Tyson in *Critical Theory Today* a symbol is a sign wherein the connection between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. (218) Saussure and Peirce concur that linguistic signs are the best possible instances of symbolic meanings. Further Tyson explains that semiotics as a theory does

not just focus on itself as a sign system, but in addition manages the emotions. Also, it incorporates objects, signals, actions, events, sounds, pictures, in brief, whatever is observed by the senses (216). In this study we dealt with how verbal and nonverbal components of Esilemba oral poetry performance play their role and how a single word could be symbolic. Therefore, we uncovered profound layers of signification in Esilemba oral poetry. Signs in semiotics do not just incorporate visual signs like drawings, artworks and pictures but in addition, include the sounds, words and non-verbal communication used to pass on meaning. Thus, semiotics is the investigation of the role of sign systems in imparting meaning in communication.

Roland Barthes in *Elements of Semiology* states that semiology therefore targets to understand any arrangement of signs, whatever their substances and limits; pictures, signals, melodic sounds, objects and the complicated relationship of them all, that make the setting of the rite, custom or communal entertainment: these comprise of, if not language, at least any frameworks of meaning. (9) Barthes uses the denotative and connotative “levels of meanings” to analyze the signs in visual objects. He distinguished the analyzing of the signs into two, the verbal and non-verbal signs. (89) The verbal sign is like the oral texts of the performance, such as the words, musical sounds, chant and many more. The non-verbal signs are the actions, gestures, costumes, objects and others. (90) Feyrouz Bouzida in “The Semiology Analysis in Media Studies” argues that denotation is what all people see without relating it to their society, culture or ideology (1). In agreement, John Fiske in *Introduction to Communication Studies* reckons that figurative language depicts the association that happens when the signs meet the sentiments or feelings of the members and the values of their culture (85).

In summary, semiotics is the investigation of signs. The purpose of words is to convey messages using the exchange of data. At the point we begin to peruse a text, the word conjures an image in our brain that assists us relate to the text, so we can say that the literary text addressed us and communicated the author's attitudes. Therefore, semiotics is a tool that utilizes symbols, pictures, objects and language which suggests the logical investigation of a text.

1.9.3 Performance Theory

Ruth Finnegan in *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* posits that performance is the means towards understanding any type of oral literature. She asserts that the best way to confirm the coherence of an oral poem is through performance in which significant perspectives like, “the skill and personality of the performer, the nature and reaction of the audience, the context, the purpose” give an understanding into an oral work of art. (28) This examination depended on Finnegan's concept that the text alone cannot suffice in the analysis of oral poetry without thinking about the component of performance. I utilized the performance theory to understand how Esilemba oral poetry performers and audience use paralinguistic features and performance techniques, including facial expressions, outward appearances, gestures, accompaniments, movements, intonation, instrumentation, costume and decor to improve performance and to help in the understanding of the oral poetry.

This investigation drew from the works of Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process* (96 – 130), Richard Schechner in *Performance Theory* (170 – 210) and Richard Bauman in *Verbal Art as Performance* in their interpretations of the performance theory as an approach to the study of literary works of arts. Schechner first instituted the expression "Performance Studies" when he hypothesized that performance is any conduct that is, "twice-behaved" or "restored." These are activities that people engage in on occasions that have been established through a process that has several stages: they have been practiced and arranged and are "framed, presented, highlighted or displayed" in an elevated style. Esilemba oral poetry performance fits this depiction impeccably as it has been passed on from generation to generation over the years. Richard Schechner quoted in “Performance studies Floating Free of Theatre” (2013) states that a “performance” might be characterized as all the actions of a particular person on a specific event that serves to have an impact in any manner on any of the other members. Taking a specific member and his performance as a fundamental perspective, we may refer to the people who participate in the different performances such as the audience, eyewitnesses, or co-performers. (18)

Moreover, Schechner reckons that rituals are part of performance. (178) His idea of, “as if” refers to where rituals provide moments of relating the imaginary to reality. The events in Esilemba performance provide an avenue with which to study the community on the role of their oral poetry

in mourning the dead as the event essentially involves the mourners bidding farewell to a respected man in the community through song and dance. Schechner posits that performances are there as activities, interactions and connections or the basic constructs that structure our existence. Consequently, performance studies researchers work to comprehend and remark upon how performances work – to clarify what any given performance does and how it does it. They ask: What conditions made this performance necessary? How is it organized? What connections does it empower? What impact does it have in the community and has that role changed with time? (18) It considers behaviors to be intelligible constructs that when examined can reveal insight into their makers. Therefore, performances are what is under the magnifying glass in any performance studies examination. They are the data, proof, records and texts of its investigation. These aspects made the performance theory highly applicable to our study in figuring out the why, how, what, where, when and who of the Esilemba oral poetry enactment. Schechner is supported by John Miles Foley in *The Singer of Tales in Performance* who reckons that the allocation of meaning to oral texts is performed by the way of life and conventions of the performer and the audience. He notes that analyzing performance in context minimizes the denotative power of customary units of articulation and highlights the extraordinary metonymic, performance-based significance chosen by the selected word. (9) He emphasizes the importance of context to meaning, when he says that: “Outside this forum for exchange, the signals will lack their implied content and will necessarily ‘read’ according to a code other than that employed by the performer in generating them” (49). This facilitated the interpretation of the connotational meaning of the symbolism employed in Esilemba oral poetry in its context.

Victor Turner states that ritual serves to express beliefs about society, not only for the functionalist purpose of keeping human beings in their social place but also for the existential purpose of giving them a social place. (1) This explains why rituals, like the performance of Esilemba oral poetry, are considered cleansing or therapeutic in nature.

Bauman asserts that a rendition of oral poetry can be considered as a performance. (292) A performance calls for the text, the performer and the audience as when he posits that performance stands for a change of the fundamental referential functions of language. This means that, in creative enactment of this sort, there is something happening in the exchange which suggests to

the reviewer that they should decipher what is stated in some exceptional sense; that they should not interpret it as meaning what the words alone, understood at face value, would mean. This may imply that performance introduces or proposes, an interpretive system inside which the messages being conveyed are to be perceived and this system of meaning appears different from the literal one." (292) Bauman argues that the term performance conveys a dual sense of artistic action – doing of folk and artistic event and the performance situation involving performer, art form, audience and setting. (223) To Bauman, “the touchstone of verbal art lies in a maximized use of the devices of language in such a way that this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon.” (227) Bauman, in addition, states that performance is seen in acting as a mode of speaking. Therefore, it is seen as a central aspect of human communicative capacity that cannot be completely comprehended without a complete appreciation of the roles of language and other semiotic conduct in human life. My focus is on the comprehensive analysis of the symbolism used in Esilemba oral poetry as communication of issues and emotions relating to death among the Abanyole.

1.9.4 The Psychoanalytic Theory

Ruth Finnegan in *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts* while addressing the issues of theory in the study of oral literature states that, “psychological significance of fantasy and of symbolic representations call for application of psychoanalysis to the inflicted persons.” (93) The theory seeks to explain the complex relationship between the body and the mind and so bring out the understanding of one’s emotions. Esilemba oral poetry is replete with various profound emotions that need to be understood during the performance for meaning of the symbolism to be comprehensive.

The psychoanalytic theory was developed by Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist, as a theoretical approach and therapeutic strategy dealing with the unconscious mind. Freud believed that human behaviour and understanding can be determined by irrational drives that are rooted in the unconscious. In *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* Freud defines psychoanalysis as, “a method of medical treatment for those suffering from nervous disorders.” (342) While in *Creative Writer’s and Day Dreaming* Freud describes poetry as, “an expression of displaced neurotic conflict: a consoling illusion, symptom, socially acceptable phantasy or substitute gratification

which compensates us for the inevitable renunciation of desire involved in the necessary accession to the reality principle.” (419) He believed that artists use their creative work as therapy to release their neurotic tension. Thus, psychoanalysis as a literary theory gives us a profound understanding of the “unconscious” mind of the author. Freud observed that physical symptoms tended to disappear after, “forgotten material was made conscious.” He considered the unconscious an area of great “psychic activity” that influenced the personality and behaviour of an individual. Therefore, poetry is understood as an expression of symptoms of the poet’s personal and societal neurotic tendencies.

According to Freud, conflicts between conscious and unconscious material may result in mental disturbances, he called neurosis, neurotic traits, anxiety and depression. He reckoned that liberation from the effects of the unconscious is achieved by bringing this material into the conscious mind through therapeutic intervention. Some of the actions and behaviour of the performers and mourners of Esilemba oral poetry may appear irrational and indicative of neurosis until one understands the motivation behind them. In Esilemba’s well-coordinated music and dance, the mourners are able to release this tension by way of expressing the hidden emotions. Indeed, Esilemba provides men with an opportunity to express emotions hitherto considered effeminate thus realizing a means for gratification of wishes ordinarily denied to them as articulated by Erika Bourguignon in “Suffering and Healing, Subordination and Power.” (557)

James Strachey in “Introduction. The Ego and the Id.,” reveals that psychoanalysis had its, “origin in connection with the study of hysteria.” Hence, it is referred to as, “a dialogic and symbolic method of interpretation which works with a manifest narrative (talk, dream, phantasy) in order to uncover its latent source through such terms as “talking cure,” a process through which, “repressed and painful memories and, “negative energies are unlocked or cathartically released.” (viii) This depicts the performance of Esilemba oral poetry, as a therapeutic work of art, that helps lessen the adverse emotions inflicted by death.

According to Carl Jung in *On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry* the poet’s persona is the same person as the poet. He explains that the reason the poet does this is to purge himself of his accumulated pains and to get himself focused so as to be able to face another round of problems that may soon come up after the previous has been fully dealt with. (80) My study found the

psychoanalytic theory essential in analyzing Esilemba oral poetry performers' and audience's emotions during the performance.

1.10 Research Methodology

The study was carried out as an oral literature field work that used a qualitative approach to collect the poems to be analyzed and to describe the dance performed. Analytic and descriptive methods ensured the comprehension of the symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry among the Abanyole. The study analyzed symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry on the supposition that it has numerous profound implications passed on to the mourners. Jenny Donovan in "Medical Proofs, Social Experiments" clarifies that qualitative research centres around breaking down circumstances and the interpretation of literary text through words, expressions and sentences. (3) The method concentrated on symbolism utilized in Esilemba burial oral poetry and its different connotations. The investigation describes the symbolism and analyzes their literal and metaphorical meanings as indicated by semiotics. The study was based on two objectives that were, in line with Stephen Isaac and William Michael in *Handbook in Research and Evaluation*, clear and in specific terms. These were to describe the nature and performance of Esilemba oral poetry, and to identify and interpret the symbolism used in Esilemba oral poetry. The field study concentrated on using the semiotics theory to analyze the poetry, performance and accompaniments to help the objectives of the analysis, while ethnopoetics performed its function in facilitating the recording of data in the field while the performance theory improved the comprehension of symbolism in enactment of Esilemba burial oral poetry. Further, the psychoanalytic theory assisted get insights into the psyche of the mourners during the performance of Esilemba oral poetry.

The data looked at concentrated on insider point of view as articulated in ethnopoetics. The model stresses the interpretation of words and activities inside particular social settings. This basically implies that the meanings of the words and activities must be situated inside the perceptions of the studied society. Basic to this model is a key concern that researchers ought to take an interest in the life of the societies, being a sound ground for comprehending, experiencing and recording the beliefs, desires, fears and perspectives of the societies investigated. Comprehensive details

collected as data present a genuine picture of the symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry's verbal and non-verbal components for meaning to be realized.

The investigation was an objective literary examination of the symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry. The study looked into the textual, performance and contextual aspects highlighted through the use of symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry. The strategy for language utilization was considered so as to inspect how the symbolism conveyed the messages in the poetry. The investigation considered all elements engaged in the creation of meanings in Esilemba burial oral poetry using the semiotics theory. While trying to complete the examination, I distinguished the verbal and non-verbal symbols in the poems and characterized them. I examined their meanings by critically analyzing their substance and settings. I utilized the semiotics theory as the theoretical analytical framework to interpret and understand the symbolism utilized in Esilemba burial oral poetry. Comprehensive details of the symbolism utilized in Esilemba burial oral poetry brought out a clear picture of the oral poetry performance in its unique setting.

1.10.1 Sampling Methods

Allan Merriam in *The Anthology of Music* explains the complexity of deciding the quantity of informants or songs that establish a reasonable representation of songs in a given culture, clan or gathering of individuals. (54) Moreover, he insists that innovativeness is a continuous process creating more songs at an unpredictable rate. Hence, the collection of songs keeps on increasing with time making it hard to choose a definite number as a dependable sample. The investigation, thus, depended on two sampling techniques involving purposive and snow-ball sampling. Fred Kerlinger in *Foundations of Behavioral Research* (1973:129) notes that non-probability samples are always necessary and unavoidable. (129) Their shortcomings can somewhat be moderated by utilizing knowledge expertise and care in choosing samples and by replicating studies with different samples. This investigation coordinated purposive and snow-ball sampling that prompted complimentary and harmonious connections.

During the fieldwork study we collected twelve poems that can be found in appendix 1 complete with their English translations. I attended four live performances of Esilemba oral poetry between August and December, 2019. I also carried out face to face interviews with fourteen (14)

respondents whose details are in appendix 3. I met three Esilemba performance groups, see appendix 4, which sometimes provided induced performances on request. I carried out the collection of poems by attending burial ceremonies for men and interviewing individuals and groups. Then, I gave the poems a free translation into English. After identifying the symbolism used in Esilemba oral poetry, interpretation was accomplished through interviews with the performers and the audience and my own deductions. I critically analyzed the symbolism by collating it with the information from my interviewees.

1.10.1.1 Purposive Sampling

Olive Mugenda and Abel Mugenda in their book *Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* note that purposive sampling is a testing procedure that permits an analyst to utilize cases that have the necessary data concerning the objectives of their investigation. (50) Along these lines, subjects are handpicked in light of the fact that they are useful or they have the necessary qualities. In this study, the sample size comprised of current Esilemba performers and elders (previous performers) as cultural informants who were identified purposively through snow ball sampling. These, together with different members, made up a sum of fourteen individuals and three groups that were interviewed by the end of the study.

1.10.1.2 Snowball Sampling

As indicated by Mugenda and Mugenda, in this method, subjects with the ideal qualities are distinguished utilizing purposive sampling methods. (51) The few recognized subjects name other people who have the necessary qualities until the researcher has the quantity of cases required. In the study, I utilized snowball sampling by recognizing some current Esilemba oral poetry performers and groups, and elders who used to perform before. These informed me about others with information on the expected investigation and its objectives. I, similarly, required them to identify key informants, who for the most part included elders from various regions who were knowledgeable on Esilemba burial oral poetry. Since there were very few active performing groups, I did not have much choice but to interview the three active ones. Burials are rare occasions, especially those of men where Esilemba oral poetry is performed, so I attended those that took place within the study period. The choice of location was also done on purpose because

Abanyole community has a rich music culture. Moreover, my own prior knowledge of the Abanyole community contributed a great deal to my decision on where to carry out the study.

1.10.1.3 Data Collection

I concentrated for the most part on Esilemba burial oral poetry performers and informed elders in Emuhaya Sub-County to get a reasonable representation of the data. I utilized numerous techniques to accumulate data which included: primary data through participant and non-participant observation during performance, oral one on one interviews and focused group discussions. Secondary data included published and unpublished documents comprising dissertations, manuscripts, books, journal articles and internet sources. Linda Darling-Hammond in “Constructing 21st Century Teacher Education,” states that the utilization of numerous information sources aids in triangulation to get validity and reliability. (308)

During my participation, observation, discussions and interviews, I used several tools and instruments. I used a video recorder to capture the performances, a camera to take pictures and a field note book to take notes. The video recorder came in handy as I could replay the recordings several times when writing out the poems in the most reasonable transcription. The note book enabled me to note down what I observed during the live performances while I used the camera to take still pictures. In this manner I was able to capture both the audio and visual aspects of Esilemba oral poetry performances.

The collection of primary data was guided by the knowledge that oral poetry is realized through live performance to capture its full essence and impact. Being an ethnopoetics study, I engaged in close interaction and dialogue with the community under study. Therefore, I had to actively participate in the live performances and interviews to get deep insights into the meanings of the symbolism utilized in Esilemba oral poetry. I attended four burial ceremonies to record the performances using video recorders, photographing and taking notes while observing the live performances. In addition, I carried out interviews and discussions with selected respondents guided by the schedule in appendix 2 to gather information on the symbolism used in Esilemba oral poetry. I also engaged in discussions with performing groups that I found among the Abanyole community. I found out that several groups exist in some locations who are invited to lead the

performance during the various burial ceremonies as well as during Abanyole cultural day. These groups constituted a valuable source of information for me. Further, I requested my interviewee groups and individuals to perform for me Esilemba songs so as to supplement those collected at live burial ceremonies. Anytime I wanted a symbol or some feature of the performance explained I would ask the interviewee to do that.

1.10.2 Data Validity Procedure

Robin Whitemore, Susan Chase and Carol Lynn Mandle in, “Validity in Qualitative Research,” state that it is conceivable to guarantee validity of qualitative information if the analyst follows systems that limit biases. (102) in the study, some techniques were utilized to guarantee the exactness of the findings. Information gathered through various strategies like observation, interview and focused group discussions was triangulated to create a coherent justification for the understanding of meaning. The researcher compared useful information at the end of every data collection meeting to guarantee that what was gathered was not dependent upon individual bias. Additionally, taped information was utilized to analyze the respondent's actual words.

The collected Esilemba oral poems were transcribed and translated. This framework has weaknesses since it ignores various innate features of the songs. For example, it does not capture ululations, shouts, yelling and other vocal embellishments. Consequently, recorded video tapes and still photographs were utilized to highlight more comprehensive features of Esilemba burial oral poetry. The sound recordings of Esilemba burial oral poetry captured the songs, dance, movement, speech and other para-linguistic features.

1.10.3 Data Analysis and Processing

After the field work, the poems and performance information gathered from several sources and the field was written down descriptively and critically analyzed. The songs gathered from the field were given an English translation and they were read several times, in both the original language, Kinyore, and in English, so as to identify the various symbols and other topical concerns. Being a qualitative research, the outcomes are discussed in a narrative manner. For ease of reference, the songs are numbered sequentially as they appear in appendix 1. I constantly referred to my field notes to identify the major areas of interest such as issues, symbols, context, role and performance

techniques. In my analysis of the oral poetry, I focused on the symbols, their meaning and the emotions they conveyed. The data on sound tapes and video tapes was collated with information from interviews, documents and observation in order to make interpretations and draw conclusions. The video recordings assisted in analyzing the paralinguistic and suprasegmental features of the Esilemba oral poetry performance. This enabled me to come up with clear justifiable articulations and conclusions that highlight how literature represents the Abanyole society through Esilemba and its use of symbolism.

The research methodology used in the investigation has been talked about with emphasis put on the research design, descriptive methodologies, the qualitative components of the case study research and research strategy. The viability of the two sampling techniques, to be specific, snow balling and purposive sampling have been talked about together with data validity, processing and the analysis method. In addition, data collection techniques, for example, interviews, focus group discussions, observations and content analysis are assessed as far as how they were effectively utilized. This section recognizes the importance of Esilemba oral poetry to the Abanyole who employ it to cope or deal with the inevitable yet devastating phenomenon of death. It highlights the need to identify the symbolism used in Esilemba burial poetry and to find out its role in socializing the Abanyole towards death in the society, especially the bereaved.

1.11 Definition of Terms

Esilemba oral poetry refers to the oral poetry performed on the morning of the day of burial of an elder among the Abanyole. It is known in the language of Abanyole, Olunyole, to refer to a special warriors' dance that is performed, since time immemorial, during the burial of a revered elder in the community. The elder has to have begotten sons to qualify for this great honour. The performance of Esilemba oral poetry is led by the eldest son and subsequent sons, if any, into the homestead where the burial is to take place. The study of the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry entails collecting the poems, describing the performance with its accompaniments and analyzing their meanings to understand the effects on the performers, the bereaved and the community mourning the loss of their beloved community member. I explored the meanings and feelings communicated and aroused by symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry performance.

A symbol conveys meaning through something, for example, an article, picture, word, a sound, specific object or individual that stands for something different by association, similarity or trend. It is an item or activity that implies more than its surface meaning. A symbol has dual meaning: the literal meaning of it and the deeper meaning which is something more profound. Many symbols have widespread, ordinarily known interpretations that the audience ought to perceive. However, not all the interpretations are outrightly clear but are truly dictated by specific cultures and time. Symbols do not have absolute implications and by their nature, cannot be understood literally. Each society utilizes symbols in its day to day existence as well. A symbol sometimes provides a sort of short alternate way to communicate a thought. Therefore, in this study a symbol is anything, verbal or nonverbal, that conveys meaning beyond what is presented.

Symbolism has been thought to be one of the most impressive and compelling devices that artists employ widely to connect with and to impart their messages clearly and with brevity. Clearly, symbolism is by all accounts one of the most dominant poetic devices in the enactment of Esilemba oral poetry. Symbolism empowers the poems to convey the themes more plainly and concisely, however it similarly gives the audience an opportunity to understand much more about the environment where they live. Symbolism refers to the assigning of meaning to symbols by the users. These associations are peculiar to the particular context and community. Thus, symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry refers to both the verbal and non-verbal features that provide a meaning beyond their literal meaning. The symbols reflect the living environment of the Abanyole and can only be accurately interpreted by them. Therefore, when we focus on symbolism in poetry, we are thinking about linguistic units, iconic representations and their significations that propose a literal meaning as well as a significance much deeper.

1.12 Chapter Analysis

The study is arranged in four chapters. Chapter one gives the background that informs the study including the statement of the problem, the objectives, hypotheses, justification, scope and limitation, literature reviewed in relation to the research, as well as the theoretical framework and the research methodology. Chapter two presents and discusses the nature and performance of Esilemba burial oral poetry with emphasis on what constitutes symbolism in the enactment. Chapter three discusses, interprets and analyses the meaning, role and significance of the

symbolism employed by Esilemba oral poetry in response to death when it occurs among Abanyole. Chapter four, then, provides a summary of the findings coupled with the conclusions and recommendations, and finally proposes suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURE AND PERFORMANCE OF ESILEMBA ORAL POETRY

2.1 Introduction

Finnegan foregrounds performance in the comprehension of oral poetry since it is through the expertise and character of the artist, the nature and response of the audience, the setting and the reason for enactment that a work of art can be understood. Therefore, the text alone is not enough without the component of performance. (28) Schechner confirms this when he refers to performance as activities, interactions and connections or the basic constructs that structure our existence. He says that performance studies endeavour to understand what a performance does and how it does it. (18) Indeed, it is the performance of symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry that was under the magnifying glass in this investigation. The performers of symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry must effectively communicate with the audience for meaning to be relayed. To interpret the symbolism used, it is significant to understand the various linguistic elements, paralinguistic aspects and performance techniques employed by Esilemba oral poetry performers to capture and retain the attention of the audience, and convey meaning effectively. Among the Abanyole, it is almost impossible to separate the performance from the poetry as they always accompany each other. In this chapter I present the data collected from the field guided by the ethnopoetics theory, the semiotics theory and the performance theory.

This chapter focuses on how the performance of Esilemba oral poetry contributes to understanding the symbolism used as a response by Abanyole towards death when it occurs in the society. I focused on symbolism because it is the predominant stylistic feature employed in Esilemba burial oral poetry to convey meaning. Symbolism is the essence of the Esilemba burial oral poetry as every aspect of its enactment is replete with dominant symbols that convey the effects of death and how the people respond to them. I discuss the performance of Esilemba oral poetry highlighting what the Abanyole consider symbolic. Baumann reckons that in an artistic rendition one has to interpret what is said beyond itself, figuratively, not literally. (292) Similarly, for the Abanyole, anything can be used as a symbol so long as it conveys meaning at two levels; the literal and metaphorical. Therefore, the symbols comprise of several different verbal and non-verbal features employed in the Esilemba oral poetry such as imaginary creatures, animals, plants,

patterns, people, actions, movements, sounds, words, objects, costume, musical instruments, concepts, food, feelings, gestures, among others. For instance, every poem or aspect of Esilemba oral poetry revolves around a central symbol that conveys the main message of the poem at a deeper level.

The study utilized the semiotics theory to analyze symbolism as a sign utilized in Esilemba burial oral poetry and its capacity for meaning. This study centres around semiotics interest in scholarly traditions, rules, stylistic devices and structural components. The sign alludes to words just like everything that can have significance, for example, pictures, images, symbols, sounds, motions – at both denotational and connotational implications. The particular sign incorporates, not only the characteristics, feelings and mental pictures but also, the social, cultural and ideological meanings connected to it. In this way, semiotics intends to interpret the signs around us so as to understand human experiences. It delves into the hidden implications of the words that are used on a day to day basis. This study depended on these tenets in understanding the signification of the symbolism used in Esilemba oral poetry at both the denotational and connotational levels. The examination of symbolism as a sign enhanced the interpretation of the significance of the poetry as a reflection of Abanyole's life experiences.

Barthes distinguished the analyzing of the signs into two, the verbal and non-verbal signs. (89) The verbal sign is like the oral texts of the performance, such as the words, musical sounds, chant and many more. The non-verbal signs are the actions, gestures, costumes objects and others. Symbolism in the Esilemba poetry performance revolves around a variety of things that the Abanyole relate to in their everyday existence. Each poem is constructed around a main symbol(s) that effectively convey the intended feelings and meanings. The symbolism used varies from imaginary creatures to familiar objects, human attributes or state of mind, to food stuff, actions or events, plants and even spiritual beings. One cannot easily predict what type of symbol a poem would employ. The titles of the poems portray the symbolism that is employed to convey the message in the poems. Therefore, the analysis of the poems' symbolism focused mainly on the titles of the songs, actions within the performance and other symbols so as guide the identification, interpretation and understanding of the symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry.

The Esilemba burial oral poetry is functional in serving the community to respond to the occurrence of death, especially the most devastating one; that of the head of the family. This is in accordance with Victor Turner who states that ritual serves to express beliefs about society, not only for the functionalist purpose of keeping human beings in their social place but also for the existential purpose of giving them a social place. (1) This explains why rituals, like the performance of symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry, are considered cleansing or therapeutic in nature. According to the Abanyole, the whole of the Esilemba oral poetry performance is symbolic, in the sense that the main aspects of the enactment mean more than their face value. This means that all the paralinguistic features and performance techniques are embedded with meaning at two levels that can only be understood by the discerning adults. Thus, in this chapter I look at the whole performance from the perspective of identifying the symbols and understanding the literal meaning so that the figurative meaning could be critically analyzed in chapter three.

I utilized the performance theory to understand how Esilemba oral poetry performers and audience use linguistic elements, paralinguistic features and performance techniques, including words, sounds, facial expressions, outward appearances, gestures, accompaniments, movements, intonation, instrumentation, costume and decor to improve performance and to help in the understanding of the oral poetry. The semiotics theory facilitated the identification of the symbols as signs with both literal and metaphorical associations.

2.2 Symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry

The symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry is enacted as a dance drama when a respected man dies among the Abanyole as a way of dealing with the pain, melancholy and desperation felt in the face of death. It is a dance of protest by the warriors of the community against death for taking away one of their own. It presents as a procession of men, usually in a two-line formation from a well-known arena to the home of the deceased. The main action of the performance happens in the homestead of the deceased with the whole village as the audience, who are free, and in most cases actively take part in the action. The mourner-performers, “abakomi” are dressed in war regalia. The general mood during Esilemba oral poetry takes on a somber mournful tone throughout the performance except for the last part of “Likopo” or “amakhuli” which is for entertainment. Several aspects of Esilemba oral poetry stand out as significant and vital to the enactment because they

convey more than their face value. According to Abanyole, the following are symbolic elements of Esilemba oral poetry because they communicate meaning at the literal level as well as at a metaphorical level with the sign used representing a concept to provide more profound meaning. These comprise of: the costume and accompaniment of Esilemba oral poetry; the marching procession; the use of bulls; first-born son leading Esilemba into the homestead; the first wife welcoming Esilemba into the compound; running berserk; cutting the crops; “likopo,” circular dance; “okhwekayakaya” chant; and the many symbols predominant in the songs sung as part of the Esilemba oral poetry performance.

2.3 Costume and Accompaniments

The attire and accompaniments of Esilemba oral poetry are special and suited to the occasion and function. They put on hides and skins of different animals including cattle, leopards, cheetahs, antelopes, monkeys and baboons. The mourner-performers, “abakomi” tie jingles (both small and big) around their legs (ankles and near the knee). The warrior mourners wear magnificent head gears or hats made with beautiful tall multicolored feathers from various birds that shake and quaver as they move or run during the performance. The mourner-performers, “abakomi,” are decorated with (amalande) creeping plants and are painted different patterns on their faces and legs. The painted patterns, “epala,” are made using soot and clay of different colours. They paint their legs, faces and heads elaborately. Many of the men are camouflaged by their attire so much so that one would not easily recognize them as they perform the dance drama.

They are armed to the teeth, carrying their weapons including bows and arrows, shields, swords, sickles, spears and clubs. Hippo skin is a common hide used in the making of the shields, whips and other defense items. They carry and blow horns of various animals (some small and others quite big) such as cattle, buffaloes and antelopes. The “Esikuti” and other drums are an integral accompaniment in Esilemba oral poetry performance as they, together with jingles, set the rhythm and tempo of the performance. “Likhanga,” a special instrument made from a long hollow piece of wood at the end of which a loose circular animal skin is tied, is employed to produce a deep sonorous sound. Its deep vibrating sound is used in the “likopo” circular formation dance.

2.4 Esilemba Procession

As a warm up to the Esilemba oral poetry, some male mourners go around the village, especially places the deceased frequented as they mourn his departure. An elaborate procession of Esilemba oral poetry starts out there from a common recognized venue in the open, “ebulafu.” The size of the procession depends on the stature of the deceased in the society. A man’s Esilemba oral poetry is directed to his homestead by his age mates who control the performance throughout. A lap of honour is conducted from an arena at a distance to the home of the deceased. On the eve and the morning of the burial day, a small horn, “esilipa” with a sharp shrill sound that carries quite far, is blown to remind the performers, “abakomi” of their duty the following day. The horn heralds the beginning of Esilemba oral poetry as preparations are initiated the day before. At dawn, on the burial day, the “abakomi” wake up to the sounds of assorted horns from different directions. They all dress up in their war regalia before converging to assemble at a common arena in the open “ebulafu” from where Esilemba oral poetry performers move, as one body, to the deceased’s homestead that is the burial site. The horns are signals for all men to come out and go abroad before proceeding to the home. Depending on the location and status of the deceased, different places are available for this assembly. Commonly used places in Bunyore include Luanda, Kima, Emusutsui, Emakakha, Esibuye, Mwichio among others. Luanda is reserved for the most prominent personalities among the Abanyole people. This is because their Esilemba oral poetry performance would involve or require, “abakomi” from all over Bunyore. The procession moves, as one body including all clans, singing and dancing up to the home of the deceased.

2.5 The First-born son

The first-born son leads the Esilemba oral poetry procession into the homestead son attired in his father’s war regalia, carrying the deceased’s spear and shield. Beside him would be the deceased’s first wife to welcome the Esilemba oral poetry. At the homestead, the Esilemba oral poetry is performed in waves led by the different clans in attendance, starting with the immediate clansmen. Though performed communally, each clan leads an Esilemba oral poetry troupe into the homestead followed by the next until all have had a chance. The soloists leading the first procession to the homestead must be from the local clan and be of unblemished morals and integrity. Since mourning is communal, subsequent processions from the other clans are led by their own soloists. A clan that has committed an abomination against Abanyole is not allowed to participate in the process

until an exacting cleansing ritual is carried out. One instance of this is the Abamutete clan, which was for a long time barred from participating in Esilemba oral poetry because one of them committed an abomination when he killed a fellow Munyore; a kinsman.

2.6 The Bulls

In many instances, bulls lead the Esilemba oral poetry entourage into the homestead. Renown among the Abanyole in the 1970s, were two bulls that belonged to Ochango Eyauma, a prominent Senior Chief at that time. The two bulls named Handa and Atoko, led many Esilemba oral poetry processions including that of their owner and master's burial. They were two menacing bulls that knew the process of the performance and appeared to follow orders given to them during the performance. They were, just like the other "abakomi," decorated with (amalande) creeping plants and painted different patterns on their faces and legs. As the first wave of performers approach the home, they increase the intensity of the performance. Then they enter the compound led by the mature ferocious gigantic bulls decorated with creeping plants (amalande). The bulls enter the compound and in a beeline head for the mound of soil at the grave side. They proceed to gore the mound of soil, throwing it this way and that way, with their hooves and horns, as they are cheered and praised by the audience. All the "abakomi" and the animals look menacing with all manner of paintings all over their bodies. The painted patterns, "epala," are made using soot and clay of different colours. They paint their legs, faces and heads elaborately. They are so camouflaged with the paintings, creeping plants and other garments that one cannot easily recognize a familiar person. Some even wear masks of animals on their faces.

2.7 Running amok, "okhuhuliana"

Suddenly, at a cue from their leader, all the men stop singing and dancing to point their weapons East. Looking extremely dreadful; faces contorted with rage, they engage in what is locally known as "okhuhuliana" or running amok. They go wild amid a cacophony of noise from all the instruments. Strong men among the performers engage in a mock fight in the open space of the homestead of the deceased, running from one side of the compound to the other, clashing their shields and menacingly brandishing their weapons, as they crisscross from one end of the compound to the other, seemingly trying to knock one another down. If one is overwhelmed and falls down, he would be assisted up while being covered by shields. They run amok urged on by

different sounds from horns, screams and war cries. Then, they charge dangerously at anybody and anything. The performers run to one side of the homestead as if attacking an enemy, then to the other side. They occasionally charge at the audience, comprising mainly of women and children, who, in fear, scamper for safety. The “abakomi” search everywhere for the enemy lurking in the shadows. They scatter all over, running amok, charging at one another while brandishing their weapons (spears, swords and clubs), clashing their shields, pushing and shoving one another as they run from one side of the compound to the other. This happens accompanied by a cacophony of sounds from all the instruments, particularly the various horns sounding; “tii tii,” “poo poo,” “twalalala twalalala,” which make the mourner-performers go completely wild as their blood boils, “amatsai kasalama”.

2.8 Cutting Down of Crops

The “abakomi” then cut down and trample on all the crops growing in the compound. In this volatile environment, the widow stands firm at the front of the corpse’s shed facing the main gate. The “abakomi” then cut down all the crops growing in the compound in their fury. They cut down bananas, finger millet, sorghum, maize and trample on them to destroy them completely. After the cutting of the crops, the performance of Esilemba continues with song and dance until the final episode of “likopo,” the entertaining circular motion dance. The cutting of the crops is an expression of anger at the loss of a loved one but also has a deeper symbolic meaning.

2.9 Circular Formation Dance, “Likopo/Amakhuli”

“Likopo/amakhuli” or dancing in a circular motion, is the last stage of Esilemba oral poetry. “Amakhuli” is the Kinyore word for jingles, the dominant instrument in this section of Esilemba oral poetry. This is a slow warriors’ dance that focuses on shoulder shaking that contrasts greatly with the violence and fury of the earlier stage. It is a more leisurely dance. “Likopo,” is a circular motion dance, in a line, consisting of loud clapping, instrumentation and the shaking of shoulders. During this dance, every one puts their best foot forward since skilled dancers are applauded and encouraged while poor dancers are mocked and jeered by the audience. It is a dancing competition of sorts, to entertain and identify the best dancers among the warrior mourners. The dancers move in a circular motion, occasionally collapsing so as to be rewarded, before rising up again to continue. Several poems are performed during this section.

2.10 The Chant, “Okhwekayakaya”

To conclude the Esilemba oral poetry, the “abakomi,” mourner-performers go to the shed where the deceased lies in state and their leader utters some words on behalf of the agemates in what is referred to as, “okhwekayakaya.” He urges the deceased to remember how they have lived together in harmony and solidarity all the years. That he should go in peace and not return to disturb the people remaining behind, since there is no grudge. Then, they pierce their spears into the ground next to the shed and take off without looking back.

Songs During Esilemba Oral Poetry

Several songs are sung during the Esilemba oral poetry enactment. I have divided the songs into two categories. The first set are the songs sung during the main Esilemba oral poetry that includes the movement to the homestead and upon arrival inside the compound. The second set of songs are those sung during the second stage referred to as, “amakhuli,” or “likopo,” when a circular motion dance is enacted. The songs sung in the first stage include: “Indi Nyama;” “Nise Olleti;” “Ngoyanile;” “Nise Ingwe;” “Ingwe Elalila;” “Orabelelanga;” “Aronyanga Te;” and “Omusala Kwakwa.” The songs are listed as appendix 1 and are briefly discussed below.

2.11 “Indi Nyama,” some creature

This is the main song of the Esilemba burial oral poetry enactment, titled, “Indi Nyama,” translated to mean, “some creature,” in English. It captures the meaning of death and its effects on the Abanyole. Some creature gives an impression of a being not well understood by the people.

The main line is:

“Indi nyama yarula indangu, echendanga neyaba amako,” which is translated as, “a creature from behind, goes about digging holes.”

In this song, the creature is described as the enemy within that must be fought and vanquished. The poem, “Indi nyama,” talks about a strange and mysterious creature or animal that comes from the rear to attack the people and goes about digging holes. The words, “indi nyama,” literally mean a creature that is unknown and mysterious. The poem describes how the creature, “Echendanga neyaba amako,” meaning it moves about digging holes. Moreover, the creature, “echendanga nekasiamana,” meaning it moves zigzag through the community in a manner incomprehensible to

the people. The irregular and unpredictable movement, coupled with its invisibility, makes it horrifying. In addition, “echendanga nekhumbalikha,” means it moves about pompously. It is an arrogant creature. The repetition Yet, the “abakomi” or mourner warriors, of Esilemba oral poetry, are tasked to defend the community by chasing away or killing this creature.

2.12 “Nise Olleti,” I am a Stake/Support

This song “Nise olleti,” declares that Esilemba oral poetry is the, “Olleti,” which means a stake or support among the Abanyole used to prevent a plant from falling, either due to its weakness or the effect of wind, for instance, a banana tree with a big bunch of bananas needs an, “olleti.” Without the “olleti” the plant is susceptible to being blown down by the wind. To ensure the plant bears fruit, it needs to be protected by being supported.

The song declares:

“Nise olleti oluballetanga abandu habukwe!” meaning, “I am people’s support from the East!” which captures the Abanyole belief in fortune coming from the East where their spiritual power emanates; they pray facing the East.

Further the song states:

“Nise olleti oluballetanga abandu munda!” Meaning, “I am the support to your stomach!” which explains that misfortune leaves one broken or bent in the midriff but the support will straighten them so that they recover their posture. The Abanyole believe that great disaster is felt in the stomach, leaving one feeling hollow and empty. “Olleti,” promises to eliminate this feeling completely.

It concludes that:

“Nise olleti olubaletanga hamuoyo!” meaning, “I am the support for your heart!” addressing the heartache caused by death. Esilemba oral poetry promises relief from this pain.

The song captures the feelings of pain, emptiness and despair caused by death with Esilemba oral poetry declaring it is the support necessary at this critical moment.

2.13 “Ngoyanile,” I am Confused

The song, “Ngoyanile,” in English means I am confused or disorderly. It refers to the confusion and disorder that results from death. Death leaves the family and community confused and disorganized. The song refers to “Ebukwe” the East, where the Abanyole believe their supernatural power that determines one’s life lives. They believe all life emanates from the East because the sun, believed to be the giver of life, rises from the East. The song says:

“Nirula habukwe ngoyanile! Meaning coming from the East I am confused! The mourners lament that they have woken up confused due to the creature’s visit. They sing, “...sabanga obwakalani,” which translates to, “I am asking for the truth.” “Kalani” refers to something obvious, something known to be true by all, something in the open, the truth that must be known or exposed. This is a demand for the true cause of the death since the abanyole believed that death did not just happen but was caused by evil people or spirits.

Further the song laments: “Nirula habuko, Ngoyanile! Meaning that coming from the grave, I am confused! This explains the confusion of seeing the hole in which the deceased will be buried, never to be seen again. The bereaved cannot think straight due to the pain and loss caused by the death of the beloved member of their family and community. Yet, the true cause of the death has not been explained, perpetuating confusion.

2.14 “Nise Ingwe,” I am the Leopard

The poem describes a leopard which is a revered animal among all the Abaluhya people. Actually, it is the Luhya totem; considered sacred and a role model. The leopard’s traits are admired and emulated. It is peaceful, calm, organized, meticulous yet fierce and ruthless when provoked. It is a deadly adversary to have, especially when enraged.

The poem declares: “Nise ingwe!” meaning, “I am the leopard!” to say the mourner is a leopard which is not easy to defeat. This is, highlighted in the line: “Yabakhayanga mumakhayo,” meaning, the one they always try to vanquish without success. It shows how the leopard is invincible such that despite prolonged attempts or struggles to destroy it, the end result is failure.

2.15 “Ingwe Elalila,” The Leopard is Crying

This song is similar to the previous one focusing on the symbol of the leopard, a revered animal among all the Abaluhya. The song describes a very disheartening scenario. The song reckons that:

“Ingwe Elalila!” meaning that the leopard is crying! This is something rarely seen or heard of. The imagination is stretched to envisage a scenario in which the leopard is crying. It gets worse when we are told:

“Elalila, nomusika nomumila,” meaning that it is crying bitterly, shedding tears and mucus. In addition, we are told:

“Ingwe elaana,” meaning the leopard is roaring in pain, followed by:

“Ingwe elaoola,” suggesting it is growling in pain even with a piece of meat in its mouth. This gives the impression of unceasing feeling and expression of pain.

An injured or angry leopard on rampage is vicious and deadly. It fiercely attacks anybody and anything it encounters; it becomes a creature that cannot be easily tamed. It is a rare and dreadful occurrence for a leopard to cry and growl in pain. The leopard is known to have a ferocious anger that does not dissipate quickly. It has a terrible temper, “lileko” that is envisaged through the pain in the shedding of tears. It growls “ekhasanga” malevolently when hurt.

This song captures the depth and severity of pain resulting from death.

2.16 “Orabelelanga,” Do Not Be Sorrowful

The song requests the bereaved: “Kaita, wefwe orabelelanga,” meaning Kaita, do not be sorrowful. This is an appeal to the bereaved not to feel sorrowful. The song goes ahead to explain that: “Amaingo kosi karobolanga abakosi,” meaning all misfortunes expose the righteous, so there is no reason to be sorrowful.

2.17 How he Falls! “Aronyanga Te!”

The poem vividly captures how a man dies. It refers to men with different epithets such as, “omwami wefwe,” meaning our leader; “etalanyi yefwe,” meaning our lion; “manyika wefwe,” meaning our strong one and finally, “imboko yefwe,” meaning our hippo. Despite all the praise names, the process is the same for them all. It explains that first: “Aronya isisi” meaning that a man first falls in the bedroom. Then next: “Aronya mubwelu,” meaning that he falls in the sitting

room. And finally: “Eronya mulwanyi,” meaning that at last he falls outside the house. The song clarifies the process men go through when death comes to the homestead.

2.18 “Omusala Kwakwa,” The Tree has Fallen

The song states that: “Oliekomba omwami,” meaning that you will long for the man after his death. The man is referred to as: “Omusala kwe mwitala,” meaning the tree of the homestead. It also says: “Baremele omusala kwa omumonyo yekamanga mwo, sling’ane!” meaning, they have cut down the tree that many ants shelter in, be silent. The poem declares that the tree has been cut. The tree under which, “amamonyo,” ants (benign ants similar to safari ants) shelter in, has been cut down. The song urges everyone, for that matter, to be quiet, “siling’ane!” The song captures the fact that the cutting of the tree was unexpected and unplanned since no one considered the “amamonyo” that shelter under it. This action will cause untold misery to the ants.

Songs during Likopo

The next three are songs sung during the, “likopo” or “amakhuli,” circular motion dance at the tail end of the Esilemba oral poetry when the dancers are tired after the exhausting and vigorous first part. The poetry is recited during the “likopo” and “litungu” dance to herald the end of Esilemba. The dance concentrates on singing, clapping, instrumentation and dancing, especially of male dancers shaking their shoulders referred to as, “amarenga” or “amabeka.” The best dancers are cheered and praised. The accolades go beyond the individual to include his family and where he is uncled. The poor dancers are jeered and ridiculed. They include “Esikumba sie Inyama,” “Siamola” and “Khali Echai?” which are presented below:

2.19 “Esikumba sie Inyama” Meat Bone

This song talks about a meat bone or a bone of meat. It says that: “Ndauka, esikumba sie inyama, sialeka abakhasi babakhongo,” meaning that, I have always wondered how, the meat bone has conquered wives of prominent people. It continues that the meat bone: “Sialeka abakhasi bababukha,” meaning it has subdued wives of young men too. That is not all, as it states it: “Sialeka abakhasi babahinda,” meaning it has defeated wives of wealthy people as well. It concludes with: “Esikumba siomunyati, Sialeka abakhasi babandu,” meaning the meat bone of the butcher, has conquered people’s wives. This song discusses how meat is irresistible to women. People dance

and revel in the idea of the wife of the rich, “abakhasi babahinda,” being easily lured by a meat bone, “Esikumba sie inyama.” The song is full of humour for the mourners coupled with the competitive dancing of shaking shoulders.

2.20 “Siamola” It is Crawling on me

The song states that: “Siamola beyaye siamola,” meaning that it is crawling on me, I tell you, it is crawling on me. “Siamola,” explains that something is crawling on my shoulders. The shoulders then shake and quaver to get rid of the thing crawling on the shoulders. The dancers then call on their female relatives to confirm that it is crawling on his shoulders. They call upon: “Mulamwa,” the sister-in-law, “senje,” the aunt, “kukhu,” the grandmother and “mufiala” the cousin to all confirm that indeed there is something crawling on his shoulders. The speed and vigour with which one’s shoulders vibrate determines the expertise of the dancers who are cheered or jeered by the audience accordingly.

2.21 Am I Tea? “Khali Echai?”

This poem asks: “Khali echai, yabahongelanga okhulunga,” meaning, Am I tea? That they keep sweetening. Tea with sugar was an unprecedented beverage that everybody loved. The song then states: “Khali esiungu,” meaning, am I porridge in a pot, that you keep enjoying. A similar delicacy mentioned that is compared to tea is porridge in a pot, “esiungu,” that is very much loved by the Abanyole. A man who provides tea for his family, particularly his wife, is much appreciated.

2.22 “Okhwekayaka,” The Chant or Release

This is a chant engaged in at the end of the Esilemba oral poetry performance. It presents the words of fellow warriors and comrades at the termination of the Esilemba oral poetry. The spokesman addresses the deceased as he lies in state. He chants: “Siwalola! Eee Etalanyi,” meaning, you saw what happened, yes, you are a lion. It continues to focus on their time together by stating: “Khwali nnawe bulahi,” meaning that, we were strong together. The song urges the deceased: “Ochende bulahi, Orakalukha kho hano tawe,” meaning, go in peace and do not return to this compound. It concludes that the bereaved should: “Olume liloba kupu,” meaning he should merge with the earth completely and not return to haunt people. This is “okhumwesua” or “okhwekayakaya,” a form of chant or spoken word at the very end of the whole of Esilemba oral poetry that summarises the

whole enactment. The deceased's age-mates assemble at the shed for the leader (usually the soloist) to talk to the departed man. The abakomi urge the deceased to go in peace and not to come back to disturb anybody in the community. They request that he guides his children to be of good conduct so as to take good care of the homestead. The deceased is asked not to appear to people in their sleep. He is advised to take off with honey and land with milk. The "abakomi," led by his age mates, declare that he is no longer one of them. The age mates then all pierce their spears next to the dead man's shed and walk away without looking back.

This chapter presented the elements of the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry, both verbal and non-verbal, that convey meaning, with special emphasis on highlighting those that are symbolic, meaning they convey significance at two levels; literal and metaphoric. It dwells on their denotational meaning while the next chapter interprets and analyses these symbolic features used in Esilemba oral poetry so as to unravel the profound meanings at the deep level.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SYMBOLISM IN ESILEMBA ORAL POETRY

3.1 Introduction

In *A Handbook to Literature*, Harmon William asserts that literary symbols serve to illustrate the meaning of a text beyond what is explicitly and extrinsically stated, to suggest another meaning rooted in the knowledge shared by a particular culture. He further observes that symbols may contribute to an intrinsic system of meaning by allowing a performer to represent abstract ideas in personal terms consistent with the world they live. Therefore, in literature, the essence of symbolism is that the object or action evokes an image to suggest a different higher level of meaning. A poetic symbol has connections to the whole poem when well applied. Symbolism enriches poetry by adding different dimensions to be appreciated at distinctive levels. This is true of Esilemba oral burial poems that often sound easy and simple to understand until one comprehends the metaphorical language of the symbolism used to realize the richness of meaning therein.

Ruth Finnegan in *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts* while addressing the issues of theory in the study of oral literature states that, “psychological significance of fantasy and of symbolic representations call for application of psychoanalysis to the inflicted persons.” (93) The theory seeks to explain the complex relationship between the body and the mind and so bring out the understanding of one’s emotions. Esilemba oral poetry is replete with various emotions that need to be understood during the performance for the effects of death to become clear as well as the mechanism the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry employs to overcome these emotions for stability to be restored.

The psychoanalytic theory was developed by Sigmund Freud as a therapeutic strategy dealing with the unconscious mind. Freud defines psychoanalysis as, “a method of medical treatment for those suffering from nervous disorders.” (342) He believed that artists use their creative work as therapy to release their neurotic tension. Thus, psychoanalysis as a literary theory gives us a profound understanding of the “unconscious” mind of the author. Freud observed that physical symptoms tended to disappear after, “forgotten material was made conscious.” He considered the

unconscious an area of great “psychic activity” that influenced the personality and behaviour of an individual. Therefore, poetry is understood as an expression of symptoms of the poet’s personal and societal neurotic tendencies. In the same vein, James Strachey reveals that psychoanalysis was initially helpful in dealing with hysteria. Hence, it is referred to as, “a dialogic and symbolic method of interpretation which works with a manifest narrative (talk, dream, phantasy) in order to uncover its latent source through such terms as “talking cure,” a process through which, “repressed and painful memories and, “negative energies are unlocked or cathartically released.” (viii) This aptly captures the role of symbolism in Esilemba burial oral poetry, as a therapeutic work of art, that helps lessen the adverse emotional effects inflicted by death. This concurs with Carl Jung who explains that the reason the poet creates the work of art is to purge himself of his accumulated pains and to get himself focused so as to be able to face another round of problems that may soon come up after the previous has fully been dealt with. (80) This is the important role the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry plays for the bereaved and mourners.

According to Freud, conflicts between conscious and unconscious material may result in mental disturbances, he called neurosis, neurotic traits, anxiety and depression. He reckoned that liberation from the effects of the unconscious is achieved by bringing this material into the conscious mind through therapeutic intervention. Some of the actions and behaviour of the performers and mourners of Esilemba oral poetry may appear irrational and indicative of neurosis until one understands the motivation behind them. In Esilemba’s well-coordinated music and dance, the mourners are able to release this tension by way of expressing the hidden emotion. Indeed, Esilemba provides men with an opportunity to express emotions hitherto considered effeminate thus realizing a means for gratification of wishes ordinarily denied to them as articulated by Erika Bourguignon in “Suffering and Healing, Subordination and Power.” (557) My study found the psychoanalytic theory essential in interpreting and analyzing the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry performers’ and audience’s emotions during the performance.

Thus, this study focused on analyzing the nature and role of symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry. The discussion centered on the symbolism in the performance of thirteen Esilemba oral burial poems to appreciate its effectiveness in communicating the performers response to death when it happens in their society. In the study, it was apparent that each Esilemba oral burial

poem revolves around one central symbol, evident in the title of the poem, to convey its meaning concisely and effectively. In understanding the symbolism, one learns a lot about how the Abanyole respond to death when it occurs, apart from conveying other important issues on their culture, philosophy of life, norms, environment, traditions and customs. Therefore, the symbolism used in Esilemba burial oral poetry facilitates the understanding of the cultural poetry of Abanyole, particularly their burial oral poetry. Among other things, the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry plays a major role in addressing how the people deal with the emotions that accompany the occurrence death while providing some form of collective therapy for the community as a whole thereby facilitating it to regain the wholeness destabilized through death. Symbolism is the most dominant, effective and powerful tool utilized by Esilemba burial oral poetry performers to perform this significant role of purging the individual and society of the depressive emotions aroused by death.

In this chapter I focused on the interpretation and analysis of the data presented in chapter two to understand the connotations of the symbolism identified and the role it plays in mitigating the adverse effects of death on the bereaved and the society at large. I looked at the nature and role of symbolism as used in Esilemba oral poetry among the Abanyole to get insights into the people's response towards death. For ease of interpretation and analysis, I divided the data into three categories: one, the symbolism that highlights what death means and the emotions it evokes when it occurs; two, the symbolism that portrays the response of the mourners towards the negative feelings evoked by death; and three, symbolism that reflects issues that are important to the Abanyole culture, philosophy, norms, environment, traditions and customs.

Several aspects of Esilemba oral poetry are worth focusing on to understand their significance during the performance so as to make meaning of the whole enactment or to unravel the deep meaning conveyed through the symbolism. Alembe argues that the wailing, singing, reciting and dancing play significant mental and social roles. Mentally, they offer emotional help to the bereaved family, who are made to realize that they are not alone in their sorrow, while socially mourners' express solidarity with the bereaved family. At the individual level, singing, crying, reciting and dancing help in releasing stress and venting out feelings which, when stifled, could be more destructive to the mourners. This is the role of the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry among the people. Therefore, the Abanyole do not perform these enactments for fun, but to serve serious

needs of the community. The symbolism brings out the meaning and impact of death, and the response of the people to the effects of death. The symbolism is conveyed through: the costume and accompaniment; the marching procession; the bulls; first-born son; the first wife; running berserk and cutting the crops; “likopo,” okhwekayakaya and the songs sung as part of the performance.

3.2 Meaning and Impact of Death

Generally, the whole of the Esilemba dance drama is symbolic in nature as the dance communicates a petition against death for the loss of a valued member of the society. It is an enactment of a protest by the warriors of the clan against death for taking one of them. In fact, it is a declaration of war against the spirit of death. It is enacted to highlight the people’s anger, protest and defiance towards death. The main intention highlighted in the whole performance is a desire to banish or exterminate death from the community for good. The general mood during the enactment of Esilemba oral poetry takes on a somber mournful tone throughout except for the entertaining last part of “Likopo” or “amakhuli” which lightens the melancholy. The following features dwell on explaining the phenomenon of death and its effects according to the symbolism utilized in Esilemba oral poetry.

3.2.1 “Indi Nyama,” A Creature

The creature referred to in the poem as, “Indi Nyama,” symbolizes death, “olufu,” a mysterious and invisible creature which stealthily creeps on people, killing them. It is depicted as inevitable since it cannot be predicted. The “abakomi” or mourner warriors come out armed to the teeth to chase it away, if not kill death. It is perceived as spreading and becoming rampant in the community. Death is portrayed as a creature that is well known yet invisible and therefore, mysterious. The poem describes how death knocks down men who end up buried in holes or graves, “amako.” Thus, death condemns them to the “hole” or grave. Death moves digging holes that people fall into without any chance of escape. Worse still, is the fact that, death is insatiable as it does not dig only one hole, but continues to dig more and more holes; mercilessly, unceasingly and unpredictably. This scenario leaves the people desperate and hopeless.

Death is seen as a creature that continues to torment the people as it zigzags through the community in a manner incomprehensible to the people. The irregular and unpredictable movement, coupled with its invisibility, ensures that death captures all and is, thus, inescapable. This symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry highlights the desperation, dread and melancholy that death portends among Abanyole. Death is seen as destroying the community by taking away men, the most valuable members of this patriarchal society, for good. The poem laments that death continues unabated despite the people's protest. It roves pompously, "nekhumbala," with impunity, leaving the people desolate.

The oral poetry highlights a myriad of emotions evoked by death such as: sorrow, dread, horror, rage, loss, despair, pain, among many others. These latent feelings get an opportunity to be ventilated through the symbolism used in Esilemba oral poetry. The overt expression of these traumatizing emotions through symbolism has a therapeutic impact on the bereaved and the mourners. Thus, the symbolism aims at consoling the bereaved to realize that they are not the only ones suffering at the hands of death. It communicates the people's solidarity and that the bereaved are not forsaken as the whole community is mourning with them. The song captures the communal pain, protest and anger against death which are mitigated through the symbolic enactment of Esilemba oral poetry. The performance of the symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry demystifies death making it appear less formidable and invincible since the warriors, with courage and in solidarity, come out to confront it.

3.2.2 The Tree has Fallen "Omusala Kwakwa"

The poem declares that the tree has fallen. The tree under which many shelter has fallen. The tree in the homestead represents the man as the head of the family. He provides "shelter" for the many family members who are like, "amamonyo," some benign insects that resemble safari ants. The terrible suffering the insects undergo in search of shelter implies the devastating results of the death of a man. The cutting of the tree, likened to the death of a man, results in widespread intense sorrow since many people depend on the man for many of their needs.

The poem is recited amid dancing to entice the people to forget about death since, like a tree that has fallen, it cannot be reversed. Though the people are in the cold the poem advises them to be calm and peaceful in the word, “siling’ane!” The silence also portends to the grave situation at that time. The poetry urges them to face the loss so as to overcome it and move on with life as usual.

3.2.3 Do Not Be Sorrowful “Orabelelanga”

This is an appeal to the bereaved not to be overwhelmed by the deep sorrow from death because all misfortune, “amaingo kosi,” including death, “lifwa,” reveal the righteous in society. There is some positive or fortune that comes out of the worst that happens in a person’s life. Once a man lives right, his death just highlights his virtuous nature which is exhibited openly through the performance of Esilemba. Similarly, death symbolizes passage to the next stage of human existence, as a spirit. The Abanyole believe that when a man dies, he joins the revered ancestral spirits. Thus, one should not give in to the pain and melancholy accompanying death, for life continues in the immortal world of spirits. This heralds success over death which should be celebrated. Thus, symbolism helps purge the feelings of sorrow with a focus on the positive promotion to next stage of existence.

3.2.4 I am Confused “Ngoyanile”

“Ngoyanile” means I am confused. It refers to the disorder that results due to death. Death leaves the family and community confused and disorganized. The song portrays the homestead as being in utter confusion without the man; the most important member of the family, clan and tribe as a whole. The confusion is reinforced by the ferocious fight witnessed between fellow clansmen who attack one another with all manner of weaponry during the performance. They strike one another with shields, brandishing spears threateningly and swords on the ready to stab their opponents. This symbolizes the division and antagonism resulting from the death of the man who is the head of the family. This kind of fighting should be reserved for enemies and not kinsmen. This shows that death has disrupted the normal order of things resulting in utter disorder in the deceased’s homestead as well as the society as a whole. This exposition makes the people aware of the impending danger of divisions thereby preparing them to deal with it well.

The confusion alluded to highlights the mystery of death to the Abanyole who almost always suspect foul play in the death of an individual. The threat of discovery for one with the evil eye would scare away anybody who may have participated in a plot to kill the deceased. Everybody is watched carefully to eliminate any suspicion of duplicity. The whole clan must participate in the mourning process lest they become suspect of rejoicing in the death of a kinsman.

The song declares, "...sabanga obwakalani" which translates to "I am asking for the truth." "Kalani" This may refer to the cause of death of their beloved one for among the Abanyole someone did not just die. Death was always believed to be caused by someone wicked or some evil spirit. The mourners would demand to know the truth in terms of who caused the death. This may also refer to the true character of the deceased which must be upright as expressed through Esilemba oral poetry in broad day light. Everything should be exposed. This is the day of reckoning when a person's hidden dark secrets are exposed or their true character brought to light. Esilemba is seen as an exposor of the truth or many secrets especially those relating to immorality and what happens behind the scenes. It exposes the immoral people who must seek forgiveness (like the adulteress) while extolling the virtuous in the community.

At the deep level, "...sabanga obwakalani" also alludes to the demand for conjugal rights that a man is entitled to, especially after death to quickly endeavour to fill the gap left by naming the deceased as soon as possible. The "confusion" would continue and only be alleviated by the birth through naming, in several homes, of the departed man. Then, the clansmen would be sufficiently consoled and assuaged against death. In this sense, "...sabanga obwakalani," is a demand by men for conjugal rights aimed at facilitating the quick replacement of their lost member.

The statement, "...sabanga obwakalani," similarly encourages men to always do the right thing whatever their circumstances. Just like in their performance of Esilemba oral poetry, there should be no ulterior motives such as using the mock fight in the performance as an excuse to revenge on an enemy.

Moreover, "sabanga Obwakalani" signifies seeking forgiveness from the deceased, ancestral spirits and God. The deceased is asked for forgiveness since he died without anybody to defend him or fight for him, ancestors for any wrong doing that could have annoyed them and God, since death was believed to be a punishment for committing abominations.

At the same time, “Sabanga obwakalani,” is seen as a request for help because deep sorrow engulfs the whole homestead and the community as a whole. The people desire intervention from their ancestors and God to overcome their predicament. Through this symbolism, which is accompanied by singing and dancing the soul is sufficiently consoled and the people feel relieved after expressing themselves openly.

3.3 Response to the Effects of Death

3.3.1 Costume and Accompaniments

The attire and accompaniments of Esilemba oral poetry are special and suited to the occasion and function. The performers of Esilemba oral poetry are adorned in their war regalia to signify that they are warriors going to war against death. They move towards the deceased’s homestead in military formation of two lines of soldiers marching towards the enemy. The main action of the performance happens in the homestead of the deceased, the battleground so to speak. The, “abakomi,” warrior-mourners put on hides and skins of different animals including cattle, leopards, cheetahs, antelopes, monkeys and baboons. These are protection from several weapons used against them in the mock fight. They are armed to the teeth, carrying their weapons including bows and arrows, shields, swords, sickles, spears and clubs. Many of the men are camouflaged by their attire so much so that one would not easily recognize them as they perform. The attire is a response to death’s attack on the people, calling upon the warriors of the community to rise in defense of the community. They look angry and solemn as they sing and dance going into war. Their costume emboldens them to face the enemy courageously.

3.3.2 The Bulls

In many instances, bulls lead the Esilemba entourage into the homestead. Usually, they use mature ferocious bulls that reinforce their fury and anger against death. The bulls enter the compound and in a beeline head for the mound of soil at the grave side. They proceed to gore the mound of soil, throwing it this way and that way, with their hooves and horns, as they are cheered and praised by the audience.

The bulls symbolize the man's virility, bravery, wealth and pride in the society. Their presence also reinforced the wealth of the man as well as the fact that even animals felt the loss of the head of the family. These bulls' actions are part of the message of anger, bitterness and pain directed at death. Similarly, the bulls symbolize the bravery, fierceness and virility of the dead warrior as well as his prosperity in owning many herds of cattle.

The bulls reflect manliness or manhood that is indefatigable, that cannot be subdued even by death. They violent goring of the soil at the grave side by the bulls signifies the warriors attacking death the same way.

3.3.3 Running amok "okhuhuliana"

The mourner-warriors go wild amid a cacophony of noise from all the instruments, running this way and that way in the compound as if possessed. Strong men among the performers engage in a mock fight in the homestead of the deceased, running from one side of the compound to the other, clashing their shields and menacingly brandishing their weapons, as they crisscross from one end of the compound to the other, seemingly trying to knock one another down. Then, they charge dangerously at anybody and anything. The performers run in war formation to one side of the homestead as if attacking an enemy, then to the other side. They occasionally charge at the audience, comprising mainly of women and children, who, in fear, scamper for safety. The "abakomi" search everywhere for the enemy lurking in the shadows. They scatter all over, running amok, charging at one another while brandishing their weapons (spears, machetes and clubs), clashing their shields, pushing and shoving one another as they run from one side of the compound to the other.

This mock fight signifies the warrior-mourners effort to kill or chase away death. At the end of the fight the Abanyole believe death has been eliminated by either being killed or leaving the compound lest it is killed.

3.3.4 Cutting Crops

Then they cut down and trample on all the crops growing in the compound. The “abakomi” then cut down all the crops growing in the compound in their fury. They cut down bananas, finger millet, sorghum, maize and trample on them to destroy them completely.

The cutting of crops in the homestead is a hunt for the enemy, “death,” lurking somewhere in the compound after killing one of their clansmen. The performers ensure that death, the unwelcome visitor, is either obliterated or scared away from the homestead so that it does not claim another person. The Abanyole believe in life after death which is symbolized by the cutting of crops and trampling upon them with the knowledge that they will sprout even more vigorously than before to give a bumper harvest. The deceased, because of his virtue, should be reborn or named by many after his death. The finger millet, sorghum and bananas cut down rejuvenated with more verve than ever before. This clearly mocks death as it signifies death’s failure to exterminate the Abanyole people despite all its effort to that end. Instead, it encourages the Abanyole to be more resilient, tenacious and determined to continue thriving, if not to redouble their number, despite death’s endeavours to annihilate them.

3.3.5 Circular Formation Dance “Likopo/Amakhuli”

“Likopo/amakhuli” or dancing in a circular formation, is a more leisurely dance. During this dance, every one puts their best foot forward since skilled dancers are applauded and encouraged while poor dancers are mocked and jeered by the audience. It is a dancing competition of sorts, to entertain and identify the best dancers among the warrior mourners.

“Likopo” is a very popular dance among the mourners for its explicit entertainment value as it contrasts with the gloom of the first part of Esilemba oral poetry performance. It provides an interlude of relief from the sorrow and tension of confronting death to ensure that the people are not overwhelmed by the melancholy of death.

3.3.6 I am a Stake/Support “Nise Olleti”

“Olleti” refers to a stake or support. It is a symbol is used to decry the loss of a man on whom the homestead is reliant. A man is considered the community’s link to the ancestors which is

highlighted in his being referred to as the support to the East, “habukwe.” The East “Ebukwe,” where the sun rises from, is considered spiritually significant to the Abanyole as the source of life and fortune. The man is the spiritual leader of his family, praying for benefits from God. The death of a man temporarily severs this vital link with the spirit world. When an elder dies, it is believed he joins the spirit world of the ancestors. Thus, “olleti,” represents a comforter, or security because the presence of a man is of great assistance and comfort to the people in the family as well as the community.

“Olleti,” as a symbol in Esilemba oral poetry mourns the loss of the most dependable member of the homestead; the man, who is considered the mainstay or king post of the homestead and community. Death uproots the main support of the family, leaving the family vulnerable to attacks from enemies. The family is like a very productive banana that has put on a very big bunch and has to be supported with a stake, “esiilo.” A man in every family should act as its support. He should be dependable in many ways. He is the “olleti olulletanga hango,” the support that stabilizes the home. This means the man is the mainstay of the home without whom the family will disintegrate. The scenario is similar to a productive banana that succumbs to wind without its “esiilo” or stake to strengthen it.

Esilemba is considered “Olleti olletanga abakosi” which means it provides support accorded only to the virtuous men in society. Those considered good men of the community receive this special treatment reserved only for them.

“Olleti,” signifies the remedy, cure or stabilizer for the pain, emptiness and despair caused by death. Death leaves the people broken or defeated while “olleti,” erases these effects to restore the people to their old selves. The hidden feelings of depression and frustration are exposed to purge them so that order can be restored.

3.3.7 I am the Leopard “Nise Ingwe”

The leopard is a revered animal among all the Abaluhya. Actually, it is the Luhya totem; considered sacred and a role model. The leopard’s traits are admired and emulated. It is peaceful, calm, organized, meticulous yet fierce and ruthless when provoked. It is a deadly adversary to

have, especially when enraged. Leaders, good leaders and men in general, are likened to the leopard. They protect their homestead like the leopard. Thus, when they die the home is vulnerable and gullible to attacks.

The symbol of the leopard can be viewed from two perspectives, as an aggressor and as a victim. As an aggressor, it is compared to the effective and efficient hunting instincts of death. That, it is not easy for one to escape from the attack of a leopard, just like when death comes for someone, success in its hunt is almost assured. In contrast, as a victim, the fierceness and invincibility of the leopard in protecting its own, is compared to a man protecting his family. This reinforces the extent and depth of loss through death when the family, clan and community lose a man.

The poem captures the loss of the owner of the home (man) with the devastation and pain that accompanies it. The man, feared and respected, is no more. It highlights the prolonged attempts or struggles to destroy the leopard, “yabakhayanga mumakhayo,” that end in failure. It implies that the leopard is not easily vanquished and one has to try many times, employing diverse methods in an effort to subdue it. The message is that death can only fight the people but it cannot defeat them. It can only win battles but not the war. All its efforts are in vain as it employs many methods to destroy the community without success. The message is that the people are tenacious and life continues despite death’s attempts to make them lose hope.

The people relate the leopard’s attributes to themselves which instils in them the courage to deal with death and emerge victorious. The reflection of the leopard’s attributes helps banish fear giving the people hope and strength to handle what follows in future.

3.3.8 The Leopard is Crying “Ingwe Elalila”

This is a war song that employs the symbol of the leopard to convey its meaning effectively. The leopard is revered as well as dreaded. An injured leopard on rampage is vicious and deadly. It fiercely attacks anybody and anything it encounters; it becomes a creature that cannot be tamed easily. This captures the depth of pain and sorrow the people experience under death’s cruel hand. It is a rare and dreadful occurrence for a leopard to cry and growl in pain. When it happens, measures must be put in place to mitigate against the resultant adverse effects. The leopard is known to have a ferocious anger that does not dissipate quickly. It has a terrible temper, “lileko,”

that is envisaged through the pain in the shedding of tears. It growls, “ekhasanga,” malevolently when hurt, whether physically or emotionally. This is considered the crying of a leopard which should be appeased quickly otherwise the repercussions can be dire.

The leopard crying symbolizes the severity and depth of pain the people undergo in the face of death, capturing the damage to their psyche. The effect of death is described as comparable to what can bring down a tenacious, fierce and fearless animal like the leopard. The people are likened to a leopard growling in pain. We learn and understand the emotional devastation and rage resulting from the death of a man among the Abanyole through the use of the symbolism of the leopard. If only the people can get hold of death, then death will cease to haunt them.

The symbol of a leopard portend victory in a fight alluding to the people overcoming death.

3.3.9 The Release “Okhwekayakaya”

To conclude the Esilemba oral poetry performance, the “abakomi” mourner warriors chant some words in what is referred to as, “okhwekayakaya.” This symbolizes the warrior mourners’ farewell to the deceased releasing him to join the spirit world. It paves the way for the man to go in peace to join the spirit world as he has cleansed and released from his homestead. This implies a peaceful crossover to live happily in the other world. This means that he is no longer a member of the age-group and has been expunged from their midst, thus releasing him to the spirit world. The bereaved and the mourners are relieved to know that their beloved has overcome death to join their ancestors.

3.4 Values of Abanyole Culture

3.4.1 Esilemba Procession

There are two procession on the day of burial of a man among the Abanyole. One is performed very early in the morning on that day when some warriors in the village go round the village visiting the deceased’s favourite places. This stands for a mourning and cleansing process that clears the deceased’s influence from all areas of community to fully dispatch him to the next world. It also signifies the solidarity he enjoyed with his age mates as per the expectations of society.

The second and main procession is an elaborate procession of Esilemba oral poetry which starts out there from a common recognized venue in the open, “ebulafu.” The death of a respected man is interpreted as the death of “Inzika” (a brave warrior) of the Abanyole people, therefore, a lap of honour is conducted in respect of the departed hero. This signifies that the deceased had no dark secrets and that he did keep his record in the community clean, without blemish. The soloists leading the first procession to the homestead must be from the local clan and be of unblemished morals and integrity. Since mourning is communal, subsequent processions from the other clans are led by their own soloists.

3.4.2 The First Son

The entry of Esilemba oral poetry performance is led or welcomed into the homestead by the first-born son attired in his father’s war regalia, carrying the deceased’s spear and shield. Beside him would be the deceased’s first wife. The first wife holds sway among the other wives in the homestead if the man was polygamous. The first-born son leads Esilemba into the father’s compound to clearly manifests the transfer of power and authority from the father to the first-born son in line with the patriarchal nature of the society. Beside him, is the first wife, if she is virtuous, dressed in the deceased’s attire to display her faithfulness and respect. The first wife welcomes Esilemba oral poetry performance into the homestead only if she has been faithful.

3.4.3 The First wife

The first wife welcomes Esilemba into the homestead only if she has been a faithful wife. In the volatile environment of the warriors running amok, the widow stands firm at the front of the corpse’s shed facing the main gate. Only a faithful wife welcomes or meets Esilemba and survives. If a wife has engaged in any immorality “omukhasi owalia tsibeba,” “a woman who has eaten moles,” takes off to the back of the house, covering her ears, chased away by other women who throw stones and clods at her, abusing her, calling her stupid “akhahingwa.” If she receives the performers “abakomi” death will surely claim her. Previously, part of the thatch was removed from the front of the house and the suspect was asked to skip over it. It was believed death would surely follow if she were guilty. The first wife welcoming the Esilemba oral poetry performers into the homestead symbolizes her fidelity to her husband which is highly treasured among the Abanyole.

3.4.4 How he Falls! “Aronyanga Te!”

The poem vividly captures how a man dies or should die, by using falling to signify dying. The process of nursing a sick man is described to show that he died properly according to tradition. Customarily, first, a man gets sick in his bedroom where he is nursed, then, when he appears too weak to survive the illness, he is moved to die in the sitting room from where, upon death, he is carried to lie in a shed outside on the left side of his house.

The process prepares both the patient and the people for death. Necessary preparations are performed in anticipation, such as, the passing on of family possessions to the sons. The poem communicates the message that everyone will die and should be prepared for the day. People are prepared to know what to do in the impending death of the man of the homestead.

The poem emphasizes cultural norms in the process of nursing a sick man to death, in the village, among Abanyole. It also communicates the reality of death as inevitable and acceptable when it comes.

3.4.5 Am I Tea? “Khali Echai?”

This poetry originated among the Abamutete clan of Bunyore which enjoyed the “privilege” of encountering the Europeans before the other clans. The British settled among the Abamutete introducing new foods like “echai” or tea. The Abamutete enjoyed this beverage and used it as “control” or a weapon to dominate the other clans. Tea with sugar was an unprecedented beverage that everybody loved.

The symbolism signifies the pride and pedigree of the Abamutete which is said to be akin to the status of tea. Anywhere tea is served copiously, multitudes are attracted to attend. The poetry is used to show that many people have attended the burial to attest to the integrity of the deceased. Integrity elevated to the status of tea which is highly regarded. A man of impeccable character attracted many people to pay tribute to him during his burial. A similar delicacy mentioned that is compared to tea is porridge in a pot “esiungu” that is very much loved by the Abanyole.

The song sings that, “I am not tea you keep sweetening,” suggesting the popularity of the Abamutete clan among the other clans enhanced by having enjoyed tea before the others. It brags of its elevated position as a pioneer clan among the Abanyole. The other clans sing the song as a

way of asserting themselves as recognized and respected clans among Abanyole. Tea symbolizes the high esteem of the deceased hence the attraction of many mourners to show their respect.

A man who provides tea for his family, particularly his wife, is respected since it is believed, the wife cannot stray. Women are seen as people who love “ebindu ebielungu” sweet things or “ebindu ebinolu” delicacies. A man, among Abanyole, is expected to cater for the wife’s material comfort.

3.4.6 The Meat bone “Esikumba sie Inyama”

This is considered a political poem as it focuses on gender relations. People dance and revel in the idea of the wife of the rich (Abakhasi babahinda) being lured by a “bone” of meat (Esikumba sie inyama). The butcher has monopoly of meat supply thus he is a threat to many husbands as he can avail meat to women on a daily basis. The bone of meat has many suggested hidden meanings.

The bone of meat is used to symbolize how the desire for “sweet things” or delicacies leads women into immorality (fornication and adultery). The song states that if you show a woman a chunk of meat, she will follow you. It suggests that women who are greedy, are easily lured, convinced or swayed to commit immoral acts since they are led by their focus on the good life or pleasure. It also contains a veiled threat to men to provide for their women or risk losing them to someone else.

Sexual connotations can easily be interpreted in the use of the symbolism of, “esikumba sie inyama,” the meat bone making women forget themselves, even wives of wealthy men. The meat bone also alludes to the stiffness of the manhood which is implied as the main attraction for women. The man must work hard to satisfy his wife. According to Abanyole, failure to cater for the woman’s needs results in problems in the family.

The symbolism aims at dissuading women from focusing too much on the pleasures of the moment for that can lead them astray thereby destroying the family, the clan and finally the community at large. Therefore, the symbolism stresses the importance of the woman remaining morally upright for the stability of the family unit and the community as a whole.

3.4,7 It is Crawling “Siamola”

“Siamola” signifies the music crawling through someone’s shoulders as a measure of how well someone becomes possessed by the spirit of music. The shoulders seem to have a life of their own as they obey the music. The best dancers are cheered and praised. The accolades go beyond the individual to include his family and where he is uncled. The poor dancers are jeered and ridiculed. The mourners temporarily forget their sorrow and partake of the humour and entertainment of the oral poetry.

This dance attempts to lift the people from the melancholy of death. It symbolizes the coming to life of a person’s body previously numbed by sorrow and pain due to death. It portrays the continuity of life and pleasure for the living as they have overcome death. Despite everything that happens people must rise above it to continue enjoying the pleasures of being alive. Women are voluble as spectators as they cheer their brothers-in-law who must, not only demonstrate good dancing skills, but also be men of integrity. This dance completely transports the people away from the overwhelming grief of a short while before. It is a dance of pleasure and enjoyment. It mocks death that may have thought the people will be overwhelmed by their sorrow to a state of despair.

This chapter highlights and confirms the attribute of song and dance as having therapeutic power, through communication with the spirit or the psyche, purging it of any depressive emotions.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry plays a significant role in facilitating the response and management of the effects of death when it occurs among the Abanyole. When a person passes on, the first sounds that alert the villagers of the death are the wailing of women. The wails and screams of women communicate their pain and shock while announcing that death has reared its ugly head again. Men, in this patriarchal society, rarely display emotions of weakness openly even in the face of death, except for their solemn faces and gnashing of teeth. Therefore, Esilemba oral poetry accords men a special opportunity to mourn the dead and vent their pent-up emotions. This has a cathartic effect on them thereby purging their otherwise depressive emotions. Therefore, symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry has a therapeutic effect, both on the individual and the community at large.

It is imperative for Abanyole to mourn their own dead regardless of where one dies, whether within or outside the community. The burial day is customarily after three days with Esilemba oral poetry performance being carried out on the morning of the fourth day. An immoral man is buried in shame and Esilemba oral poetry cannot be performed in his compound. The few mourners, especially close relatives who attend his burial, enter the compound through the fence and not the main entrance as a mark of the shame brought to the community. Those who commit suicide are not recognized at all. Nobody in the village can participate in their burial. In fact, they are buried at night by their maternal uncles without any wailing, lamentation or mourning of any kind since they are a disgrace to Abanyole community. The last respects to the bereaved are highly valued by all the Abanyole who endeavour to maintain their integrity and high regard while alive to earn a respectable send off.

For a man to receive the honour of Esilemba oral poetry, he has to be a man without blemish according to Abanyole culture. It is reserved only for virtuous men who have not soiled their names, particularly with immorality. A lot of emphasis is placed on sexual immorality where one would engage in forbidden sexual liaison with those considered sisters, aunts, mothers or brothers' wives. A man of integrity avoids such acts to qualify to receive the honour of Esilemba oral poetry

on his burial day. This is important in the socialization of the youth who are dissuaded from engaging in such immoralities that would comprise their reputation in the society.

Esilemba oral poetry performance paves the way for the deceased to progress to the next world of existence without complications. Failure to perform Esilemba oral poetry dance for a deserving person (almost unheard of) results in trouble or problems, as the deceased does not know or give the bereaved peace. His spirit visits the living in dreams, demanding fair treatment until his Esilemba oral poetry performance is conducted in his homestead. He may ask in the dream, “Where did my Esilemba enter my homestead?” It has to be performed for peace to reign. Yet, Esilemba oral poetry performance cannot be performed after the time has expired. Thus, the “abakomi” or mourner performers have to wait until another elder dies so that they can combine the two Esilemba oral poetry performances by passing through the previous homestead after the performance of the day. Thus, Esilemba oral poetry performance symbolizes a safe and peaceful passage from the world of the living to the spirit world, something that every man among the Abanyole, earnestly desires.

Esilemba oral poetry performance is a protest against death. It portrays death as a most unwelcome visitor among the Abanyole people which should be shunned at all times. It is something to be banished forever, if it were possible. Death is seen as some creature that sneaks on the living, catching them unawares. Thus, Abanyole recognized decent death where the victim was caught off guard as opposed to abominable death where the person committed suicide. This may explain why it was unheard of for an adult male among the Abanyole to commit suicide. Ignoring culture may be a contributory factor to the current increased incidences of suicidal deaths by men, especially young men, among the Abanyole.

Similarly, it was found that society esteems and profoundly respects the leader of the family (the man) for their role while alive. The death of a male member of the Abanyole community seems, by all accounts, to be viewed as a worse blow than that of a female member, both to the family, the clan and the community at large.

Esilemba plays an important role in providing an avenue for the expression of sorrow, for mourning and for lamentation. It consoles the bereaved from being overwhelmed by sorrow and desolation. One physically mourns the dead to overcome their grief especially for men in this patriarchal society that frowns upon a man who cries, laments or sobs publicly. Men are expected to contain their emotions of weakness and remain strong as an anchor for the other members of the family and community. They are considered the “olleti,” the support, that their family members lean on in times of crises. The only emotions men are free to display overtly are those of strength as shown in the performance of Esilemba oral poetry. These include feelings of anger, power, bravery, strength, fearlessness among others.

Esilemba oral poetry performance portrays great honour accorded to virtuous individuals among the Abanyole. Every person in the community loves to be recognized as being of high integrity especially given that it heralds the potential to be named by many after one’s death. Among the Abanyole, children were named only after virtuous men and women who had already passed on. Culturally, the Abanyole do not name the living. However, immoral people are not named after their death because it is feared that they will pass their negative traits to the children. This is significant because Abanyole do not name people of questionable morality. Consequently, Esilemba oral poetry performance is a reinforcement for the virtuous or men of integrity in the society. Thus, the ultimate goal of the society is to socialize all boys into virtuous men. Virtuous men are shown to be moral and responsible, a valuable asset to the society.

Esilemba oral poetry performance is deeply entrenched in the spirituality of Abanyole because it functions to cleanse one for their role in the spirit world. It is an important ritual for the warriors as it ushers one of their own to the next world; the world of spirits. It is a hero’s farewell that is a prerequisite for the deceased to join the ancestors. It displays the great esteem the deceased is held in and bids him a deserving farewell.

Esilemba oral performance provides an occasion to remember the deeds of the deceased. His life is eulogized especially through the spoken word that accompanies the Esilemba oral poetry performance. The age mates recall his deeds and the experiences they shared with the deceased and where he proved himself worth of respect. It is a reminder to the remaining men that their

conduct is always being monitored and noted so as to dissuade them from activities that may blemish their reputation.

The Esilemba oral poetry performance is quite didactic for it encourages virtues while discouraging vices in the community particularly targeting the youth who may wonder about a particular adult male being buried without an Esilemba oral poetry performance. Young men, who have undergone circumcision, are allowed to participate in Esilemba oral poetry performance so that they can learn and take over from the elders.

Esilemba oral poetry performance provides a sense of safety and comfort for those remaining in the homestead. They believe that the evil spirit that causes death, “indi nyama,” has been ostracized, chastised, chased away or killed by the Esilemba oral poetry performers during, “okhuhuliana.” They believe that if it survived the onslaught, then, death has been scared away not to come back again. They do not expect death to be near or to return to the homestead. Subsequently, Esilemba oral poetry performance is a comforter of many people including those previously bereaved, who have another opportunity to relieve their sorrow through the current enactment.

Esilemba oral poetry performance is therapeutic as it purges the sorrow that would otherwise overwhelm the individual or the community at large. It consoles the bereaved while highlighting the solidarity and benefits of communal living. The bereaved realize that they are not on their own as they have the whole community behind them. They relish the social security provided by the community. This results in feelings of consolation, solace and calm among the bereaved. Indeed, it exhorts the spirit of the communal togetherness prevalent among the Abanyole.

Pride, “esunga,” or “enyatsi,” or heroism is a vital ingredient of the Esilemba oral poetry performance. Esilemba oral poetry performance enhances the status, of not only the deceased, but also his family, the clan and the community at large. It makes them regain their punctured pride, image and respect, giving them a feeling of being exalted. Their confidence is re-established to soldier on with the challenges of life.

The significance of women in the building, maintenance and perpetuation of a stable family, clan and community is constantly emphasized throughout the Esilemba oral poetry performance. Their faithfulness and loyalty to their husbands is continually mentioned and stressed. The unfaithful woman is abused, shamed and punished, making her life miserable and intolerable in the society, particularly after the death of her husband. This was a great deterrence for women who were tempted to be promiscuous while socializing girls to protect their integrity. Similarly, immoral liaisons between men and women considered taboo or forbidden were severely punished. The sexual integrity of men was carefully monitored to check for any unbecoming behaviour that would deny them the honour of an Esilemba performance on the day of burial.

Esilemba has encountered many challenges over time because of changing trends influenced by religion, education, urbanization among others. Initial converts to Christianity wanted nothing to do with Esilemba oral poetry performance. Christians and the educated Abanyole saw Esilemba as a barbaric rite which they did not want to be associated with. They objected and refuted its performance vehemently. There was a bitter rivalry between the two groups; the Christian educated and the traditionalists. The quarrel only ended when an elder undressed in public (an abomination) in protest so as to pacify the two sides. Currently, many people insist on both the traditional rite of Esilemba oral poetry performance and the Christian church service. Therefore, the community allocates each ceremony sufficient time to perform, one before the other; with Esilemba oral poetry performance starting in the morning till eleven o'clock and the Christian church service following thereafter. Esilemba oral poetry performers are also free to continue their mourning in the afternoon after the burial.

Currently, Esilemba oral poetry performance is liberally enacted for any elder with children regardless of the gender of the children. One only needs to have a wife and children to have Esilemba oral poetry performance conducted during their burial. Although this happens, different songs are sung to signify the person has given birth to sons or to girls. Thus, the performers reach the main entrance and inquire if the first born is a boy or a girl so as to determine the entry song into the homestead. If a son, they enter the compound with "Ingwe elalila," while if it is a girl they use, "Ngoyanile." If the first born is a girl, Esilemba oral poetry performance revolves from the left side to right side while in the case of a boy it rotates from the right side to the left side. For a

polygamous man, the wives occupy their designated specific positions, with the first wife being at the head side of the deceased and second wife at the foot side, while the others stand by the sides.

Currently, a semblance of the Esilemba oral poetry formation and movement is envisaged in the use of motorcycle riders during a burial procession. They imitate it when one or two riders split from the main group, ride very fast while turning this way and that way, then, quickly returning to the main procession. Similarly, current trends in the Esilemba oral poetry performance show its dynamism with new songs and instruments being incorporated.

4.1 Recommendation for Further Research

The use of symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry is powerful and effective in the communication of the intended message. Therefore, one is left wondering if the same aspect might be replicated in other subgenres of Abanyole oral poetry, especially considering that song and dance are an integral part of the community's life. I recommend that further research be undertaken in the use of symbolism in the other subgenres of Abanyole oral poetry such as: work songs, wedding songs, initiation songs, funeral songs, war songs, hunting songs, among many others.

Another possible area for study would be a comparative investigation of performances similar to the Esilemba oral poetry of the Abanyole with that of any other Luhya sub tribes, or other tribes for that matter, if such performances exist among them.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Esilemba Oral Poems

1.) INDI NYAMA

Solo: Indi nyama yarula indangu

Echendanga neyaba amako

All: Indi nyama yarula indangu

Echendanga neyaba amako x2

Solo: Echendanga neyaba amako!

All: Oooooo! Oho!

Indi nyama yarula indangu

Echendanga neyaba amako

Solo: Echendanga nekasiamana!

All: Ooooooo! Oho!

Indi nyama yarula indangu

Echendanga neyaba amako

Solo: Echendanga nekhumbalikha!

All: Ooooooo! Oho!

Indi nyama yarula indangu

Echendanga neyaba amako

SOME CREATURE

Solo: Some creature from behind

Goes digging holes

All: Some creature from behind

Goes digging holes x2

Solo: It goes digging holes!

All: Oh! Oh!

Some creature from behind

Goes digging holes

Solo: It walks zigzag!

All: oh! Oh!

Some creature from behind

Goes digging hoes

Solo: It walks majestically

All: Oh! Oh!

Some creature from behind

Goes digging holes

NISE OLLETI

Solo: Nise olleti weee! Nise olleti weee! x2

All: Aaaaaa! Nise olleti x2

Solo: Yee yee yeee!

All: Nise olleti

Oluballetanga abandu habukwe!

Aaaaa nise olleti! x2

Solo: Nise olleti weee! Nise olleti weee! x2 I'm the support yes! I'm the support yes! x2

All: Aaaaaa! Nise olleti x2

Solo: Eee eee eeee!

All: Nise olleti oluballetanga abandu munda!

Aaaaa nise olleti! x2

Solo: Yo yo yoooo!

All: Nise olleti oluballetanga habukwe!

Aaaaa nise olleti! x2

Solo: Nise olleti weee! Nise olleti weee! x2 I'm the support yes! I'm the support yes!

All: Aaaaaa! Nise olleti x2

Solo: Eeee eeeee eeeee!

All: Nise olleti olubaletanga hamuoyo!

Aaaah nise olleti!

I AM THE STAKE/SUPPORT

I am the support yes! x2

Indeed, I am the support! x2

Yes, yes, yes!

I am the support!

I am people's support from the East!

Yes, I am the support! x2

Yes, I am the support x2

Oh yes! oh yes!

I am the support to your stomach!

Yes, I am the support! x2

Yeah yeah yeah!

I am the support from the East!

Yes, I am the support! x2

I'm the support yes! I'm the support yes!

Yes! I am the support! x2

Yes, yes, yes!

I am the support for your heart!

Yes, I am the support!

2.) NGOYANILE!

Solo: Aaaaaa! Ngoyanile!

All: Aaaaa Ngoyanile x2

Nirula habukwe

Sabanga obwakalani

Aaaaaa! Ngoyanile!

I AM CONFUSED!

Yes, I am confused!

I am confused! x2

Coming from the East!

I seek the truth!

Yes, I am confused!

Solo: Nirula habukwe ngoyanile!	From the East I am confused!
All: Aaaaaa ngoyanile x2	Yes, I am confused! x2
Nirula habukwe	Coming from the East!
Sabanga okhubakala koosi	I seek to expose everything!
Aaaaaa ngoyanile	Yes, I am confused!
Solo: Eeee! Eeee! Eeee! x2	Yes, Yes! Yes! x2
All: Ngoyanile x2	I am confused! x2
Nirula habukwe	Coming from the East!
Sabanga obwakalani	I seek the truth!
Aaaaaa! Ngoyanile!	Yes, I am confused!
Solo: Ooo! Ooo! Ooo!	Oh! Oh! Oh!
All: Ngoyanile x2	I am confused! x2
Nirula habuko!	Coming from the burial!
Sabanga obwakalani!	I seek the truth!
Aaaaaa ngoyanile	Yes, I am confused!

3.) NISE INGWE

Solo: Nise ingwe wee x2	I am the leopard! x2
All: Aaaaa nise ingwe x2	Yes, I am the leopard! x2
Solo: Yeee yee yee	Yes! Yes! Yes! x2
All: Nise ingwe x2	I am the leopard! x2
Yabakhayanga mumakhayo	They always try to vanquish!
Aaaaa nise ingwe	Yes! I am the leopard!

I AM THE LEOPARD

Solo: Nise ingwe wee x2

I am the leopard! x2

All: Aaaaaa nise ingwe x2

Yes! I am the leopard! x2

Yo yo yooo

Yes! Indeed!

Nise ingwe

I am the leopard!

Yabakhayanga mumakhayo

They always endeavour to destroy!

Aaaaa nise ingwe!

Yes! I am the leopard!

4.) INGWE ELALILA!

THE LEOPARD IS CRYING!

Solo: Aaaaaa ee ingwe elalila!

Yes! The leopard is crying!

All: Elalila x2

It is crying! x2

Nomusika nomumila

Shedding tears and mucus!

Aaaaa ingwe elalila

Indeed! The leopard is crying!

Solo: Aaaaaa ee ingwe elaana!

Yes! The leopard is roaring!

All: Elaana x2

It is roaring! x2

Nomusika nomumila

Shedding tears and mucus!

Aaaaaa ee ingwe elaana

Indeed! The leopard is roaring!

Solo: Aaaaaa ee ingwe elaoola!

Yes! The leopard is lamenting!

All: Elaoola x2

It is lamenting x2

Nesikumba khumunwa

A bone in its mouth!

Aaaaa ingwe elaoola

Indeed! The leopard is lamenting!

5.) ORABELELANGA

DO NOT BE SORROWFUL

Solo: Kaita wefwe orabelelanga

Kaita, do not be sorrowful

All: Aaaaa orabelelanga	Yes, do not be sorrowful
Solo: Andeka wefwe orabelelanga	Andeka, do not be sorrowful
All: Aaaaa orabelelanga	Yes, do not be sorrowful
Solo: Otweche Nambuto orabelelanga	Otweche Nambuto, do not be sorrowful
All: Aaaaa orabelelanga	Yes, do not be sorrowful
Solo: Amaingo kosi karobolanga abakosi	All misfortunes expose the righteous
All: Aaaaa orabelelanga	Yes, do not be sorrowful

6.) **ESIKUMBA SIE INYAMA**

THE BONE OF MEAT

Solo: Ndauka eeee! x2	I have always wondered how? x2
All: Esikumba sie inyama! x2	A bone of meat! x2
Sialeka abakhasi babakhongo! x2	Has conquered wives of prominent people!
Solo: Beyaye ndauka! x2	I tell you! I have always wondered how?
All: Esikumba sie inyama! x2	The bone of meat! x2
Sialeka abakhasi bababukha! x2	Has conquered wives of young men! x2
Solo: Anyole ndauka!	Anyole, I have always wondered how?
All: Esikumba sie inyama!	The bone of meat! x2
Sialeka abakhasi babakhongo!	Has conquered wives of wealthy people!
Solo: Asiratsi ndauka!	Asiratsi, I have always wondered how?
All: Esikumba siomunyati!	The bone of the butcher! x2
Sialeka abakhasi babandu!	Has conquered people's wives!

SIAMOLA

Solo: Siamola beyaye siamola x2

All: Tsie murebe mulamwa esindu

Siamola khumabeka ikulu

Solo: Siamola beyaye siamola x2

All: Tsie murebe senje esindu

Siamola khumarenga ikulu

Solo: Siamola beyaye siamola x2

All: Tsie murebe kukhu esindu

Siamola khumabeka ikulu

Solo: Siamola beyaye siamola x2

All: Tsie murebe mufiala esindu

Siamola khumarenga ikulu

CRAWLING ON ME

It is crawling, I tell you, it is crawling! x2

Ask my sister in law!

What crawls on my shoulders!

It is crawling, I tell you, it is crawling! x2

Ask my aunt!

What crawls on my shoulders

It is crawling, I tell you, it is crawling! x2

Ask my grandmother!

What crawls on my shoulders

It is crawling, I tell you, it is crawling!

Ask my cousin!

What crawls on my shaking ones!

7.) ARONYANGA TE!

Solo: Aronyanga mbwe! x2

All: Aronya isisi!

Solo: Omwami wefwe, aronyanga mbwe! Our leader, how does he fall?

All: Aronya mubwelu!

Solo: Etalanyi yefwe, eronyanga mbwe! Our lion, how does it fall?

All: Eronya mulwany!

Solo: Manyika wefwe aronyanga mbwe! Our strong one, how does he fall?

All: Aronya isisi!

HOW HE FALLS!

How does he fall? x2

He falls in the bedroom!

He falls in the sitting room!

It falls outside!

He falls in the bedroom!

Solo: Andeka wefwe, aronyanga mbwe! Our Andeka, how does he fall?

All: Aronya mubwelu! He falls in the sitting room!

Solo: Imboko yefwe, eronyanga mbwe! Our hippo, how does it fall?

All: Eronya mulwanyi! It falls outside!

8.) Omusala Kwakwa

The Tree has Fallen

Solo: Oliekomba omwami eeee!! You will long for the man!

All: Oliekomba omwami! You will long for the man!

 Omwami nafwiye wololo! When he dies oh!

 Oliekomba omwami! You will long for him!

Solo: Inzika yatsia bane! The hero has gone, oh!

All: Oliekomba omwami! You will long for the man!

 Omwami nafwiye wololo! When he dies oh!

 Oliekomba omwami! You will long for the man!

Solo: Likama liefwe bane! Our shelter, oh!

All: Oliekomba omwami! You will long for the man!

 Omwami nafwiye wololo! When the man dies, oh!

 Oliekomba omwami! You will long for the man

Solo: Omukhongo watsia bane Our prominent one has gone

All: Oliekomba omwami! You will long for the man!

 Omwami nafwiye wololo! When the man dies, oh!

 Oliekomba omwami! You will long for the man

Solo: Omusala kwe mwitala! The tree of the homestead!

All: Oliekomba omwami!

Omwami nafwiye wololo!

Oliekomba omwami!

Solo: Baremele omusala

All: Baremele omusala

kwa omumonyo yekamanga mwo!

Siling'ane!

You will long for the man!

When the man dies, oh!

You will long for the man

They have cut the tree!

They have cut the tree!

That harmless ants' shelter in!

Be silent!

9.) KHALI ECHAI?

Solo: Aaaaa! Khali echai?

All: Khali echai? x2

yabahongelanga okhulunga

Aaaaa! Khali echai?

Solo: Andeka bene khuli echai x2

All: Aaaaa! Khuli echai x2

Khuli echai

yabahongelanga okhulunga

Aaaaaa! Khuli echai

Solo: Kaita bene khuli echai x2

All: Aaaaa! Khuli echai x2

Khuli echai

yabahongelanga okhulunga

Aaaaaa! Khuli echai

AM I TEA?

Am I tea?

Am I tea? x2

They keep sweetening!

Am I tea?

Andeka, we are tea! x2

Yes, we are tea!

We are the tea

They keep sweetening!

Yes, we are tea!

Kaita, we are tea! x2

Yes, we are tea!

We are the tea

They keep sweetening!

Yes, we are tea!

CHANT/SPOKEN WORD

10.) OKHWEKAYAKAYA

FAREWELL/RELEASE

Solo: Siwalola! Eee Etalanyi!

You saw what happened! Yes, Lion!

All: Mmmmmm! Yeeee!

Yes! Yes!

Solo: Khwali nnawe bulahi!

We were strong together!

All: Habwene!! Toto!

Indeed, we were!

Solo: Walola bwa khwali!!

You witnessed yourself!

All: Yeee!

Indeed!

Solo: Ochende bulahi!

Go in peace!

Orakalukha kho hano tawe!

Do not return to this compound!

All: Toto!

True

Solo: Luma liloba!

Merge with the earth!

All: Bulahi!

Completely!

Solo: Otsie nende oluyali!

Go respectfully!

Otsie mmulembe!

Go in peace!

All: Yeee! Yeeee!

Yes! Yes!

Solo: Olume liloba kupu!!

Be one with the earth!

All; Toto!!!

All: Completely!

The age mates then all pierce their spears next to the dead man's shed and walk away without looking back!

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule for Respondents

The following questions were used as a guide in the analysis of Symbolism in Esilemba oral poetry performance.

Name:

Sex:

Age:

- 1) Have you taken an active role in an Esilemba oral poetry performance?
- 2) What role did you play?
- 3) What is an Esilemba oral poetry performance?
- 4) When and why is it performed?
- 5) Who participates in Esilemba oral poetry performance?
- 6) How would you describe the stages of an Esilemba oral poetry performance?
- 7) What songs are sung during Esilemba oral poetry performance?
- 8) What do the songs specifically say?
- 9) What symbols are used in the poems?
- 10) What is the purpose of these symbols?
- 11) What meaning does the symbolism convey?
- 12) Is Esilemba oral poetry performed today as it was in the past?
- 13) What are the differences?
- 14) What role does Esilemba oral poetry play in the lives of Abanyole?

Appendix 3: Persons interviewed

<u>NAME</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>CLAN/CONSTITUENCY</u>
1) William Machengo Nyapela	81 years	Abasiratsi - Emuhaya
2) Enock Ochango Mung'au	69 years	Abasiratsi – Emuhaya
3) Donald Angote Lukoye	62 years	Abasiratsi – Emuhaya
4) Festo Chuma Ombisi	75 years	Ab'bayi – Luanda
5) Anthony Susu Otana (Khabilutsi)	80 years	Ab'bayi – Luanda
6) Festo Juma Ombisi	73 years	Ab'bayi – Luanda
7) Joshua Opute Peku	75 years	Ab'bayi – Luanda
8) Okango Amayoti	48 years	Abatongoi – Emuhaya
9) Okila Tayi	51 years	Abalonga – Luanda
10) Agab Otieno Omenda	47 years	Amutete – Luanda
11) Omare Khatili	52 years	Abasakami - Luanda
12) Gilbert Musumba	42 years	Emmang'ali – Emuhaya
13) Charles Ate	14 years	Abatongoi – Emuhaya
14) Kenneth Buchichi	49 years	Ab'bayi – Luanda

Appendix 4: Focus Group Discussions: Esilemba Groups Visited

These groups of performers are registered as traditional dance groups who are well known around Bunyore and in Vihiga County for their performances during burials and major occasions like the recent Abanyole Culture Day where I also witnessed their performances.

- 1.) Abatongoi Esilemba Dancers
- 2.) Abamang'ali Esilemba Troupe
- 3.) Abasiekwe Dancers

NB The three groups performed during the Abanyole cultural Day to entertain the visitors and the Abanyole on their cultural day.

ANALYSIS SCHEDULE

Symbol (Kinyore)	Literal meaning	Metaphorical meaning	Characteristics	Feelings aroused	Social function	Philosophy and moral effects
Indi nyama	Some creature or mysterious animal	Death (Olufu)	Mysterious, invisible, insatiable	Fear, sorrow, horror, despair, grief	Express these hidden feelings	Continuity of life, inevitability of death
Omusala kwakwa	The tree has fallen	Death has struck	Despair, helplessness	Loss, desperation, anger, grief	Express feelings of destitution	Acceptance of the finality of death
Ngoyanile	I am confused	Disorder	Chaos, disarray, violence	Despair, desperation, confusion,	Reassertion of self	Replacement of lost person, self-preservation
Orabelelanga	Do not be sorrowful	Overcoming, triumph	Bravery, confidence, assurance	Fidelity, consolation, calm, serenity, confidence	Assurance of success, winning	Continuity
Okhwefuala khweliye	War regalia	Battle, protest, war	Solidarity, comradeship	Violence, fury, courage, sacrifice	Security guarantee, self-defense	Unity is strength, communalism
Etsitsulukhi	Bulls	Manhood, masculinity or virility	Strength, bravery, fierceness	Invincibility, pride,	Encourage invincibility, bravery	Strength to overcome all misfortunes
Okhuhuliana	Running wild	Fight against death	Agility, violence, chaos	Anger, confusion, despair, fear	Rejuvenation, revival, regrowth	Life after death, continuity
Okhuremula ebimela	Cutting crops	Death, end	Terminal, despair, pain	Pain, loss, anger, hopelessness	Regeneration, value of life	Continuity of life
Omukhasi omukhulundu	First wife	fidelity	Faithfulness, pride	Pride, truthfulness	Instill faithfulness in the youth	Morality
Omusiani omukhulundu	First son	heir	Stability, bravery, strength	Security, stability, hope	responsibility	continuity
Likopo	Circular dance	Pleasure, relief, fun	Flippant, jocular, lighthearted	Joy, vitality, vigour, togetherness	Joy of living	Ups and downs of life
Olleti	Stake	Comfort/support	Firm, strong, supportive	Consolation, hope, relief, comfort, relaxation	solidarity	Communalism, triumph, relief
Okhwekayakaya	chant	farewell	Pride,	Resignation	Acceptance, release	Life after death
Nise ingwe/ Ingwe elalila	I am a leopard/ the leopard is crying	Scary, dreadful, meticulous, fierce, invincible,	Loss, grief, sorrow, fear, courage, invincibility	Awareness, encouragement, empowerment	Reflect qualities of fearlessness and invincibility	Indefatigable spirit against death
Esikumba sie inyama	The meat bone	Temptation, bait, decoy, lure	Greed, delicacy	Desire, yearn, appeal	Discourage infidelity	Sexual morality for family stability
Siamola	It crawling on me	The spirit of music flows	Joyful, humorous, flippant	Enjoyment, pleasure of music	Relieve sorrow or console	Ups and downs of life
Aronyanga Te!	How he falls!	Sudden, unpredictable	Fear, surprise, shock	Stages of death	Acceptance of death	Inevitability of death
Khali echai?	Am I tea?	delicacy	Pride, pleasure,	Encouragement	Encouragement	Value of people