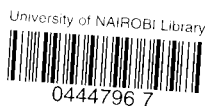


**AN ETHNOARCHEOLOGICAL STUDY OF BURIAL PRACTICES AMONG THE
ABASUBA OF RUSINGA ISLAND, LAKE VICTORIA,
KENYA**

**By
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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES FOR
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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my late mother, Euniah Anyango, who would have loved to live and see me through the academic ladder but death cut her short before she could even see me through form four.

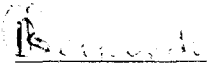
And

My late grandmother, Peres Onyango, who always encouraged me to work hard school and was ready to use all her resources to ensure I achieve the best in my academic pursuit. Unfortunately, she passed on when I was leaving for the field for collect data for this thesis.

To both I pray that God rests their souls in eternal peace

DECLARATION

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

Sign: 

OKUMU-OLOO BERNARD

Date: 22/11/2022

This thesis has been submitted with my approval as the university supervisor

Sign: 

PROF. SIMIYU WANDIBBA

Date: 22/11/2022

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the ethnoarchaeological burial practices of the Abasuba of Rusinga Island, on Lake Victoria of Western Kenya. The burial practices, factors influencing their performance and inferences that can be made from the remains were the major issues that were probed. Specifically, the study aimed at investigating, documenting and explaining factors that influence the burial practices accorded the deceased Abasuba on the Island. The findings were also to be used in making archaeological inferences to assist in explaining and interpreting archaeological burials.

The population consisted of all the adult residents of the Island. The study sample was purposively selected with individuals being the unit of analysis. Interview guides, a standard questionnaire with open-ended questions and direct observation were the techniques of data collection. The data were sorted out, described, interpreted and explained as per the research objectives. Ethnographic summaries, content analysis, direct quotations and selected comments from informants were used in the data presentation. Quantitative data were presented using tables of frequencies and percentages.

The findings suggest that burial practices accorded the dead resemble the social position they held whilst alive. The society's perception and differentiation of its members are manifested in how the deceased are disposed of in this society. Social status, demographic factors and cause of death are the main factors influencing the Abasuba burial practices. Distance from the burial place, personal attributes and forces of modernization also dictate the way burials are conducted in the study area. The above factors manifest themselves physically in such things as the grave location, body treatments, body position and orientation in the grave.

On the basis of the findings, archaeologists can infer that burial practices are behavioural elements of socio-cultural systems and have material correlates. Understanding the contemporary burials facilitates the development and refinement of insights into the past behaviour.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the concept of death among African and Kenyan communities, history and culture of the Abasuba, ethnoarchaeology and burials. I also outline the problem statement, the objectives as well as scope and limitations, and justification of the study.

1.1.1. The concept of death among Africans

The origin of death that leads to burial is still a mystery and unnatural. Africans believe that death is 'caused' by man or gods, even in cases of mystical deaths as old age, accident, disease, lightning, earthquakes, flood, drowning, animal attack and sickness (Mbiti, 1991). The major cause of death, according to African societies, are usually curses, spirits and sorcerers. Africans believed, and many still do, that an individual can only die from either physical or mystical causes when another person or an agent "has brought the death" by means of a curse, witchcraft or magic. They even take the trouble to establish the cause of death by consulting diviners, medicine men or by suspicion and guess work.

Many terms are used to refer to the actual act of dying, for example, returning home, going away, refusing to eat, joining the forefathers, departing, and becoming God's property (Mbiti, 1969). All these terms suggest that the African person does not see death as a complete destruction of an individual since life goes on beyond the grave. Thus, people combine their sorrow over death with the beliefs that the departed one continues to live in the hereafter.

Several rituals are, therefore, performed in cases of death as the corpse is washed with water or traditional medicines, the nails are cut and hair shaved, oil or butter is smeared and skins, leather, cotton clothes or leaves are used to cover the whole body. Burial, as a means of disposing of the dead body, takes place in the backyard of a house, in the family burial place or at one's original place of birth. Other disposal practices included throwing the body in the bush, in a river or keeping it in a house to decompose completely. The grave was usually rectangular, oval and cave-like or a big pot made for that purpose (Mbiti, 1991:120).

Burial goods such as spears, arrows, stools, snuff, beads, domestic utensils, foodstuffs, slaves and money, were buried with the body. People believed that the deceased needed to protect himself, eat, wives and slaves to accompany him, and when the soul reaches the underworld other things would be used to ensure

that he never became poor. Other funeral rites carried out vary in size and importance, according to the age, gender and social status of the deceased.

Feasting to comfort the bereaved and to thank those who officiated the funeral rite continues. Hair of the immediate members of the family is shaved to show that a family member has been separated from them and also to show that death does not destroy life completely, since the growth of new hair shows the springing of new life. People ritualize death, dance it away, drive it away and renew their own life after it has taken one of their members.

1.1.2 Death among Kenyan communities

Death is a universal phenomenon, which is treated differently by members of the society whenever it occurs. When one dies, a sorrowful occasion dawns on the society because of the social gap one leaves behind and the deceased's unknown destiny. The uncertainty of fate that the dead are associated with prompts the society to follow all the cultural practices that are performed in honour of the dead. The varied burial practices done by Kenyan societies reflect their world views over death and the hereafter.

The Agikuyu traditionally believed that all must die and so it was useless to fear what cannot be avoided. The dying even though they may be close relatives, were told repeatedly that they were about to die and they had to accept that. One was rarely allowed to die in the house but, rather, in the bush under a shelter of a few branches. As soon as one died, all bonds of relationship and friendship were broken. Everyone went his or her way: The living to their business, the dead to the jaws of hyenas and jackals (Cagnolo, 1933:140; Kenyatta, 1938). The memory of the dead, even their name, was not allowed to survive and be mentioned because it was regarded as an evil act. The Agikuyu believed that when the deceased body had been eaten by hyenas, then all was over and done with.

The Agikuyu, however, reserved burial for only a few wealthy people. Such a person was buried exclusively by his circumcised first sons, from his numerous wives. The grave was dug shallowly in the forest using pointed poles. The body ornaments were put in the grave and the deceased put in a neutral position with a bent leg as the grave was finally filled up (Cagnolo, 1933:145; Leakey, 1977). The deceased's bed, quiver, shield, cooking stones, poisoned arrows and seats were all heaped on his grave. The deceased's house was also completely destroyed. Lastly, magicians led the burial participants in cleansing themselves before they were allowed to rejoin their families (Routledge and Routledge, 1910; Leakey, 1977).

Among the Pokot, death was considered a cruel punishment from the Supreme Being (*Tororot*) and was the last greatest evil of all, for nothing could soften its sting. The people believed that death must be 'caused' unless it had occurred to an elderly person who had grandchildren. Death was regarded as a journey to the next world and the deceased was only 'escorted' by burial. However, burial remained a sad moment, especially to the bereaved family, and so fear and tension accompanied it. To this end, only close relatives and friends were left to carry out the burial process (Beech, 1911).

The presence of strangers was highly discouraged not only because they might be suspected of causing the death, but it was also believed that this would cause a direct confrontation between the spirit of the deceased and the living, which might cause a curse upon the members of society. In addition, the society believed that the deceased's killers could die if they were present at the burial (Beech, 1911). The dead were buried in the kraal within the homestead, burial cairn, or near the deceased's hut. Victims of war were, however, thrown in the nearby bushes.

Among the Babukusu when it was fairly certain that death was coming, the sick man was placed in front or at the centre of his senior wife's house, and all the relatives were informed of the impending matter. A brother, or a son to the sick man, slaughtered an ox at the family shrine (*namwima*), the meat was eaten by all the family members and the dying man, if he could. This formed the last donation for the dying man to his living dead (Wagner, 1949:450; Mbiti, 1969). Every member of the family was to attend such gatherings since absentees were likely to be accused of having worked magic against the dying man. In addition, such absence might be treated as disrespect for the sick person (Wagner, 1949).

When the patient still had enough strength, he called his sons to his bedside and told them how to share his possessions such as cattle and other livestock. Otherwise he delegated this duty to his brother, who discussed the question of succession and inheritance at the hair-shaving ceremony that took place three days after a person had died (Wagner, 1949: 450). As soon as he died, the senior wife burst out wailing followed by other wives, sons, daughters, relatives, friends and neighbours. The dead body was laid on a hide. It might be covered with hide, banana leaves or leopard skin if the deceased was a distinguished man.

Age influenced the number of days the body was kept before burial among the Abatsotso, Avaloogoli and Abamarama. For instance, the clan elder's body was kept for four days as a sign of respect for him and to please his spirit, while that of an infant took only a few hours before burial (Wagner, 1949: 470). Brothers,

clansmen and friends dug the grave. However, no woman or uncircumcised person was allowed to dig the grave. A father was also not allowed to dig a grave for his son or daughter, or husband for his wife.

The grave for the family head among the Avaluogoli was dug inside his senior wife's house. For women, unmarried sons and daughters, and married men without children or with only up to two children, the grave was dug on the left-hand side of the house. For a rainmaker, the grave was dug at the centre of his house. The deceased who died of an epidemic had a grave dug by the riverside or in the bush so as not to defile the homestead. For the deceased with a humped back or someone who died of suicide, a grave was sited at the back of the compound. Usually the grave was rectangular in shape with grass or banana leaves placed at its bottom, but a cow skin was used instead if the grave belonged to a clan elder (Wagner, 1949; Mbiti, 1969).

The actual burial took place in the morning or late in the afternoon, when the sun was setting for a person of higher standing among the Avaluogoli. The ceremony of "breaking the pot," where a cooking or beer pot was ceremoniously broken by the deceased's grandson to symbolize the loss incurred through death, was only done to a dead warrior, clan or family head, and an elderly man. The body was buried facing west when naked. The "naked" state symbolized birth in the hereafter. A deformed person and a witch were buried without any ceremony and, for barren women, all unmarried persons and those who had no children had to keep away from the corpse lest they were infested by sterility (Wagner, 1949; Mbiti 1969).

Among the Abanyore a new grave became a shrine for the family's living dead. An animal was slaughtered by the gravediggers and the blood sprinkled over the new shrine (grave). These were tokens of thanking the deceased for the fame and wealth he had left to the family. The ceremony of "cattle drive" (*shilembe*) was performed after the burial by Abatsotso. Here, cattle were gathered and decorated with weed or grass and people painted their faces with white clay and wore war dresses of cow or leopard skin or grasses while carrying spears, clubs, shields and sticks. Each clan drove, in turn, its cattle into the homestead and sang warrior, marriage dirges, and praise songs to the deceased as an appreciation of his contribution in the community. The people beat banana trees, bushes or roofs of houses and the "cattle drive drum" was played by the deceased's brothers. This ceremony was intended to drive away the spirit of the dead, so that it did not linger around the homestead to cause misfortunes. However, the ceremony was not performed for the deceased who left no son even if other respects were accorded to him (Wagner, 1949:502; Osogo, 1966; Mbiti, 1969).

Hair shaving was done to all who came into contact with the deceased either in his death bed or during the burial among the Abanyore, Abamarama, Babukusu and Abatsotso. The shaving was done starting with the

widows, gravediggers, sons, daughters and others who had an association with the deceased's body. The communities believed that the deceased's breath caused 'impurity disease' to stick to the head of anybody who had contact with the corpse. Bananas were cooked, and those who took part in the shaving ceremony shared in their eating. Finally, mourners were allowed to disperse from the funeral (Wagner, 1949:488; Mbiti, 1969).

When an old man died among the Luo, the weeping was done quietly, until sunset. In the evening the widows, married daughters, sons and their wives, his sisters and sisters-in-law, burst out in wailing while stripped naked. This is because the old man who used to clothe them was dead. The mourners decorated themselves with ash and also smeared cow dung on their bodies as they ran while weeping all over the compound. The eldest son wailed as he carried his father's crown, *ochimbo*, and his spear (Mboya, 1938).

The old man was put on the verandah of the senior wife's house from where mourning took place. The pre-burial ceremony (*buru*) was performed, in which a delegation of men drove cattle in the wilderness to fight with their enemies. They jubilantly sang ritual songs as they carried twigs, spears and shields. Upon their return, they found the grave already dug in the centre of the senior wife's house waiting for the lowering of the body (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1976).

Total silence was observed among the Luo during burials, and those who held spears had their ends pointing down as a sign of peaceful separation with the deceased. The mourners bowed their heads and their faces showed grief. Members of the family, according to their seniority in marriage and age, threw back the soil in turns. For instance, the first wife threw back the soil first, while young children, helped by their parents, threw theirs last.

Everyone who threw the soil did so with their back turned to the grave. As soon as the grave was sufficiently filled up, the mourners cried loudly as they paid their last respects to the deceased (Mboya, 1938:109; Ocholla-Ayayo, 1976).

In conclusion, Kenyan communities had several ways of disposing of the dead. Culture defined all the unique processes that were undertaken before, during and after burial, with the aim of sending the deceased's spirit peacefully. The burial guidelines were adhered to in fear of the dead man's retribution upon the society concerned.

1.1.3 History and culture of the Abasuba

The Abasuba are a heterogeneous group of non-Luo people of South Nyanza whose origins are the Baganda or the Basoga who came to their present home by various routes. The name "suba" is derived from the word "zuwa" which means "foreigner" in Luganda dialect spoken among the major clans of the Abasuba in the present Suba District. The clans include Waware, Kaswanga, Wanyama, Kakimba, Wiramba, Gembe, Wagasi, Kaksingri, Wakula, Wakinga, Waganda, and Kamasengre.

The Abasuba in the eastern Lake Victoria basin have a close relationship and share historical ties with neighbours in Tanzania. In Kenya, most of them live in the present Kuria, Suba, Migori and Gucha districts. Their clans include Waisenge, Wategi, Wakira, Wagoreme, Wasimbeti, Waikoma, Watabori, Wamohoro, and Wamera (Ayot, 1977:5, 1978:20).

These people had several reasons for their migration such as conflict between them and Baganda, internal wrangles among themselves, population explosion, need to adventure, search for new fishing and pasture grounds, and outbreak of both animal and human diseases such as rinderpest, small-pox, cholera (*ndira*) and sleeping sickness (*nyalolwe*) (Ogot 1967; Ayot 1977, 1978; Abuso, 1985).

Migration myths of the Abasuba state that these people came from Uganda, and settled at Yimbo near Ramogi Hills, before they moved to south Nyanza. They form the last wave of migration from Uganda after the Luo community. The traditional Suba economic activities were fishing, crop cultivation, livestock keeping, basketry, blacksmithing, cloth and mat making, and trade.

Traditional Suba society was purely patrilineal, that is, males wielded power. However, leadership was hierarchically administered from the family to the community where the chief elder was the leader. The chief elder had several roles, such as being involved in settling intra-societal conflicts, peace talks between their society and other communities, administering punishment to the community's criminals, and presiding over societal rituals and prayers, both for thanksgiving and during calamity. He was commander-in-chief of the community's army in times of war. The chief elder's position was not hereditary, but awarded due to the individual's personal qualities, influence, experience, skills and achievements. He was assisted by a council of elders in administering the community (Abuso, 1978:85).

There was division of labour on the basis of sex, age, physique, experience, skills and risk involved. For instance, women and girls were to cook, look after young children, smear houses, work on the family farm and fetch water and firewood, while the men and boys were to build houses, go hunting, go to war, fish, trade, herd livestock, clear farm land and make boats. Polygynous marriage was dominant among the

Abasuba since a man's wealth was judged by the number of wives, herd of livestock, number of children, size and number of granaries, size of land, and number of houses in an individual's homestead. Most first wives urged their husbands to marry women whom they proposed, including their own sisters (serial marriage), a relative or any lady whom the husband admired. Levirate marriage (*ter*) and sororite marriage were allowed when a husband or wife died, respectively. Bridewealth was paid in the form of herds of cattle before one lived with the woman. The Abasuba enclosed their clans in fortified stone-walls (*ohinga, kitono*) to protect them from external attacks by the Maasai and other hostile neighbours. The youth were soldiers who used spears (*tong'*), shields (*kuodi*) and arrows (*asere*), as weapons in times of war when all clan elders (*osumba*) were greatly united against a common enemy (*wasigu*) (Abuso, 1978:85).

The society circumcised (*sero*) boys and girls whom they gave age-set names. There was no defined age when one was circumcised, but cowards or those circumcised while old were fined. There was no fixed time interval for circumcision but initially the years were generally five.

The Abasuba clans had totems, which were wild animals which they believed were their daughters, but, due to some mishap, turned into totemic animals such as leopard (*engwe*), baboon (*engoge, egobe*) and monkey (*kikondo*). The clan members neither ate nor killed these totemic animals even if they destroyed crops. The totemic belief has united this heterogeneous society, since marriage and relation are defined in terms of clans. For instance, clans that share a common totemic animal do not fight or inter-marry while clans with different totemic animals inter-marry and are, therefore, related to another through marriage bonds (Ayot, 1977:96).

Socializing the youth was done by everybody and everywhere in the society. Grandparents, whose houses acted as village schools, instructed the youth on traditional norms, duties, history, values, and discipline. Grandparents used songs, proverbs, stories, riddles and tongue twisters, which were easy and interesting or entertaining, to educate the youth. Grandparents also acted as community physicians due to their knowledge of medicinal plants, which they administered to treat many diseases in the clan, family or community (Ayot, 1977:96).

Law and order were highly observed since punishment such as fines, caning, public ridicules, excommunication and gossip, were administered to offenders. People feared evil acts since they believed they were ever subjected to the watchful eyes of god, the ancestors and other spirits whom they believed would punish even those who committed criminal acts secretly. Taboos also assisted in maintaining law and order. Leaders wisely advised people on the virtues of moral uprightness. Industrious people were

praised and respected by leaders and other members of the society. Therefore, everyone struggled to behave well. People were bound by their philosophy of life, which was accepted by the entire community without reservations (Ayot, 1977:296).

The Abasuba believed in a god who is a father to all people called *Enyasaye*, *Rioba*, *Emungu* or *Enyakoi*. However, god was thought not to be directly involved in the everyday affairs of the world; rather he was thought to have delegated these duties to the lesser gods as the living dead, ancestors and other beings in the heavens. Old men were thought to be next to ancestors and in time of crisis in the society they prayed to god through the ancestors and other gods to grant the society's needs. Old people in this society were, therefore, respected since they were thought to be next to gods (Ayot, 1977:296).

Benevolent and beneficent spirits were believed to inhabit everything. Therefore, Abasuba worshipped everything, for example, the sun (*rioba*); when they prayed they uttered the words *ongababuya rioba omae buya* (sun look well on me. I am a child of god). Spirits are also believed to possess people (*juogi*). *Jujuogi* can use these spiritual powers either for harm or for the good of the people. Hippopotamuses, snakes and other wild animals were believed to be sacred, such that when they came to the house, a magician (*jabilo*) was consulted to reveal why the animal came. The animals were not to be killed since they were believed to be god's messengers (Ayot, 1977:292).

Death was not feared by old people; it was, to them, a beautiful moment and glorious end for they knew they were going to receive a warm welcome from their forefathers, relatives, friends and ancestors in the world below. An old man would call his children at the time of death to instruct them on what to do once he was dead; he blessed the children and commanded them to perform his burial in a certain way. The dying sees death as a passage leading to the world below. However, to those left behind, death was a cruel and sad moment, although the Abasuba hoped sooner or later they were all going to go "into the unity of all things" (Ayot 1977:291).

After death, relatives, friends and family members moaned and this was followed by burial. A homestead head with cattle was buried in a cattle kraal, but ordinarily, a male family head was buried on the right hand side outside the house of his senior wife, while a married woman was buried on the left hand side of her house. The family offered prayers and sacrifices later at the grave-yard (*kibaga*) when there was a crisis (Ayot, 1977:293).

In conclusion, Abasuba had specialists such as priest (*jodolo*), medicine men (*jobilo*), prophets (*jokoro*), women herbalists (*nyamrerwa*) and rain-makers (*jojimb koth*). All these specialists had their role to play in ensuring the continuity and harmonious existence of the entire Suba society.

1.1.4 Ethnoarchaeology and burials

Ethnoarchaeology is derived from the words ethnography and archaeology. Ethnography deals with the systematic description of culture based on first-hand observation. An ethnographer gathers data, which he or she organizes, describes, analyses and interprets to build and present an ethnographic picture of a society or culture. He lives in small communities and studies their local beliefs, customs, social life economics, politics and religion (Kottack, 1994:7). Archaeology studies the life-ways of a people from the past through excavating, analyzing and interpreting the things left behind by these people as artifacts (for example, tools and pottery), features (for example, buildings and graves) and ecofacts, that is, non-artifactual materials such as food remains and sediments.

Archaeologists are limited to working with material culture since ideas and behaviour patterns are not preserved in the absence of people in thousands or millions of years (Feraro, 1994:5). Archaeologists are unable to either observe the past human behaviour or learn about their thoughts. They are, therefore, forced to infer these aspects of human life from the material remains of what these people used and have managed to survive. Archaeologists, thus, infer behaviour and ideas from archaeological material (Clarke, 1968; Schiffer, 1976; Binford, 1983).

Archaeologists, therefore, establish correlations between artifacts and various aspects of human behaviour and beliefs that are valid to historically relate ethnographic cultures and, by historical approaches, use the correlations to infer the specific form of behaviour or beliefs in historically related archaeological cultures, (Hall, 1979; Donnan, 1976; Nicholson, 1976; Hodder, 1982, 1986; Schrire *et al.*, 1986). This approach is called *ethnoarchaeology*. Ethnoarchaeologists advocate for this approach to give explanations that adhere to those followed in the natural sciences; after observation, questions are formulated, hypotheses are formed to answer the questions, and the hypotheses are tested against data (Binford, 1965). Their aim is to formulate laws.

According to Schiffer (1978:231), ethnoarchaeology is the study of material culture in systematic context for the purpose of acquiring information, both specific and general, which will be useful in archaeological investigation. Ethnoarchaeology is based on the assumption that some behavioural elements of social systems have material correlates and can be used to develop inferences about the behaviour with which

they were associated. Also, "observations of contemporary behavior can facilitate the development and refinement of insights into the past behavior" (Kramer, 1979:1).

The overall objective of ethnoarchaeology is to employ relevant information obtained from living peoples to explain and interpret human behaviour patterns revealed by archaeological material. Specifically, an ethnoarchaeologist aims at improving the quality of the gathered ethnographic information to make it more useful to archaeologists by applying analogies. To achieve this an ethnoarchaeologist collects detailed information on all organized human activities that are likely to leave imprints on the archaeological record. In addition, he needs to understand the relationship between the patterns of the traces left by the materials being studied and the patterns of activity producing them. It is the above aims that make the study of burial or mortuary practices relevant to an ethnoarchaeologist (Hodder, 1982:39).

Human burials have been useful in interpreting past cultural features and religious practices that developed in certain places and times (Moore, 1985:105). To this end, they have been a source of evidence in constructing past cultures and activities. Burial cemeteries or common graves, which came with the Europeans, are a recent phenomenon, while Christianity and Islam are greatly influencing burial practices in Kenya today (Moore, 1985:185). However, African societies had their own burial practices that have withstood the foreign influence. Thus, this study focused on the Basuba people who still practise traditional ways in disposing of their dead.

1.2 Problem statement

A lot of archaeological research may be carried out without reference to ethnographic data. However, there are many cases in which ethnographic knowledge is crucial to the understanding of the archaeological information. Such kind of information is important in explaining and interpreting human behaviour patterns. It is also crucial in understanding the relationship between patterns of the traces left by the material being studied and the pattern of activities producing it. Studies of such nature, however, are normally out of bounds for traditional ethnographers since they "focus on relationship of human behaviour to the physical world: the influence that the physical world will have on the behaviour and the imprint that this behaviour will have on the physical world is for future archaeologists to puzzle out" (Stiles 1977:91).

Ordinary ethnographic studies normally stress the social, economic and linguistic aspects of society, while largely ignoring the physical manifestations of activities related to these aspects. Therefore, archaeologists looking for ethnographic information with linkage to the material objects have long been frustrated by the failure of many ethnographers to collect data about such linkages (Thompson, 1991). To rectify the

situation, archaeologists have to collect much of their own information about the material world (Watson, 1979; Hodder, 1982:39).

This study, therefore, attempted to answer the following research questions on the Abasuba burial practices.

- What are the burial practices of the Abasuba of Rusinga Island?
- What influences these burial practices?
- What archaeological inferences can be made from these burial practices?

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of this study was to obtain ethnographic data on burial practices among Abasuba of Rusinga Island and to make inferences that can be used to interpret and explain archaeological burials.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- To investigate factors that influence the burial practices of the Abasuba of Rusinga Island.
- To explain the factors that influence these burial practices.
- To draw inferences from these burial practices that can be used to interpret and explain archaeological burials.

1.4 Justification of the Study

Ethnoarchaeological findings on the burial practices of any society can be useful to archaeologists and anthropologists in various ways. This study aimed at getting information on a part of the Abasuba culture, that is, burial and its associated activities, which leave imprints on material remains that could be used by archaeologists to interpret and explain archaeological remains. However, it was not possible to generate archaeological inferences from the data. Nonetheless, the study has come up with ethnographic analogies which can be used by archaeologists in their investigations.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This study only dealt with burial practices of the Basuba of Rusinga Island and not the entire Abasuba community. I would also have wished to carry out a comparative study of burial practices between the Abasuba and their neighbouring Luo, Abagusii and Abakuria. However, this was outside the scope of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Archaeological background to the burial practice

Burial is an old human practice, which has changed through time just as any other human practice. Evidence shows that it was the Neanderthals who first buried their dead (Feder, 1981). There is a reconstructed burial site at Teshik Tash in Uzbekistan, where a young boy was carefully laid in a shallow grave and around it were placed six pairs of Siberia mountain goat horns as a memorial (Movins, 1953). At Chappelles-aux-Saint in France, an old man was laid in a shallow trench surrounded by tools and a bisonleg, perhaps as food thought needed in the after life (Bousyssonin *et al.*, 1980).

In Shanidar Cave, Iraq, a reconstruction has shown a deceased man placed on a bed of pine and covered with wild flowers, bachelors buttons, hollyhoek and grape hyacinth (Solecki; 1971). Frank Harrold, who analyzed the Neanderthal remains, found that there was strong evidence of intentional burial since there was evidence of grave digging, special positioning of the body and indisputable grave offerings, all of which show that the Neanderthals had a belief in the hereafter when death occurred to one of their own (Movins, 1953).

Burial sites associated with anatomically modern humans show a greater variation from the Neanderthal ones. For example, the Sangir grave in Moscow shows five excavated burials with goods that reflect an enormous investment in time and energy. They portray care and love provided to the dead by the living (Solecki, 1971).

In China, cemeteries exist containing more than 1200 burials, eleven being for China's rulers. These royal tombs had an enormous construction; they had precious bronze, jade anthers, stones, bones and shell. Hundreds of people were apparently sacrificed to accompany the kings in their afterlife. The burial differentiation presents a strong case for social stratification since some human remains supposedly for the poor were found in pits with no accompanying grave goods. Both China's civilization in 2400BP (Chang, 1968; Garnet, 1987) and Egyptian civilization in 5500 BP showed this differentiation.

Lloyd (1978) states that the Ziggurat at Ur in Mesopotamia has a cemetery with more than 2000 graves, which showed social classes in their construction and the burial belongings. It indicated that the people of Mesopotamia knew death as a journey and the dead continued to live in the after world and hence their queens and kings were buried in great splendor in death.

In Kenya, there is a Late Stone Age burial site complex at Lothagam. Here 23 skeletons have been excavated. These burials had archaeological material but it is not clear whether they were intentionally associated with the skeletons. Morphological comparisons suggest affinities of the population who probably inhabited the site with modern Nilotes (Angel *et al.*, 1980).

At Ngamoratung'a (people of stone), Kenya, a series of sites with standing monolith pillars are associated with burial artifacts and domestic funeral remains. There are two huge cemeteries with 173 graves. These sites are believed to belong to the Eastern Nilotes (Turkana and Samburu of today). Kalakol site in Kenya is also of the same type (Soper and Lynch, 1977).

Lokaridede and the Jarigole pillar sites in Kenya show no discrete burial but several skeletons much older and dated to 4000 BP. It is believed that this was the tail end of the Middle Kingdom of Egypt, when the population living around the lake coming from the north possibly had boats and hence the presence of their remains around the lake (Kibunja, 1998).

Methods and rituals governing the disposal of the dead varied at Hyrax Hill and Njoro River cave in Kenya. For instance, at Hyrax Hill no particular care appears to have been paid while burying the dead and only women were buried with domestic utensils such as stone platters. At Njoro River Cave, Kenya, on the other hand, the deceased body was adorned with red ochre and diatomite before it was smoked and cremated. The grave goods at the Njoro River cave site showed that each body was provided with plenty of domestic goods for its day-to-day use. The body treatment and concern for proper body disposal suggested that the societies who lived at these sites believed in life after death and the immortality of the soul (Leakey, 1945; Leakey and Leakey, 1950 cited in Onyango-Abuje, 1977). In general, burial practice shows the people's belief with reference to life after death, social differentiation, social status and political influence of a group or individuals in these ancient societies.

2.2 Determinants of burial practice in society

There are numerous ways of disposing of the dead even in the same community. These variations are at times not traceable to immigrant influence. Bendann (1930: 13) reports that varied ways of getting rid of dead bodies among the Dogon in Mali depend upon the deceased's sex and age, environmental condition and attitude, which reflect the cultural background of a society to which the deceased belonged. Usually, the living showed deep respect for the dead because of the living's belief in the hereafter.

Social status or rank difference, as pointed out by Bendann (1930: 97), affects the burial of the dead. The burial of a common person is simple and is done almost immediately after death while those of rulers or superior persons are quite elaborate and take days or weeks after their deaths. Ucko (1969: 269) cites cases where the wealth and status of an individual are reflected in the provision of the grave goods. He argues that the grave goods are seen as a way of respecting the dead by the living and, among the Yoruba, only individuals of high ranks are buried with goods. Social status also determined burial practices among the Abasotso as observed by Wagner (1949). For instance, a deceased headman had his grave dug at the centre of his senior wife's house, the burial was performed at sunset and the body was kept for four days before burial. This was done as the "...ye, ye, ye" wailing was performed in his honour.

Saxe (1970) observed that types of differentiation in burial practices vary with the dimensions of the social status of the deceased, that is, his contribution to the society while he was still alive. For example, an important person is given a colourful burial ceremony as opposed to an evil person.

Goody (1962) reports that most burials among the Ashanti depended upon the deceased's behaviour when he was still living. For example, wrongdoers of any kind were given forms of burial that radically distinguished them from those who observed social norms.

Tainter (1975: 1) argues that burial systems are determined by society complexity, for instance, the difference occurs in burial practices of a complex society as compared to a less complex one in social organization. It is due to this structural system that we experience burial clusters in a society.

Goody (1962: 142) argues that some burials are conducted according to the cause of death. For instance, one who commits suicide is given a burial that distinguishes it from the other normal cases of death such as old age, sickness, accident or witchcraft. In addition, Among the Pokot, those who met their death through violent means such as being killed in a raid, road accident or through suicide, had their bodies thrown or left in the bush. This was because they were regarded as being evil to the society (Beech, 1911).

The distance at which the death occurs from the homestead also determines the type of burial. Binford (1971) states that deaths, which happened far away from the homestead, were given special treatment as cremation and dismemberment to avoid transport expenses while deaths caused by epidemics were corporately buried in mass graves due to the accidental coincidence.

Wedgwood (1927: 395) argues that in Melanesia distinctions made in life such as age, sex and wealth determine the burial given to the dead in a society. For instance, there exist burial differences between adults and children, and between the poor and the wealthy. The rich are given splendid burial ceremony due to their wealth and valour. Cagnolo (1933:142) also reports that among the Agikuyu poverty or destitution was expressed in the way the dead were buried. For instance, a dying poor person who could not get himself outside the house to die, was left lying on his rough bed waiting for his end. When he had died, his neighbours threw a branch or a broken pot at the entrance of his hut, as a warning to passers-by not to enter the hut. A hole was made in the wall of the hut for hyenas to come in and feed on his remains.

Social observations of the deceased may influence the burial location, the body treatment and grave goods to accompany the deceased's body as argued by Binford (1971) and Wedgwood (1927). For instance, a ruler may be buried in pomp with the material symbols of his office such as a stool, while an ordinary person is differentiated only with membership group affiliations and sex.

Failure to give birth in marriage by a woman determined the burial practices her body was given in death among the Luo, as pointed out by Mboya (1938). For instance, if she died in the house, a hole was dug in the wall and the body was passed through it to be laid on the veranda for mourning. The mourners who attended the funeral before burial carried with them thorns which they pricked and broke against the deceased's feet to prevent the spirit of barrenness from being passed on to the next generation in the family. Mourners who attended after the burial broke their thorns on top of the grave. In addition, the widower never wore the mourning garment.

2.3 Significance of burial practices

Studies on burial practices among societies have contributed to the development of archaeology and anthropology, especially where written records are lacking. They assist in measuring the extent to which material traces of traditional burials are in the archaeology record (Chapman, 1982: 200).

Burial sites contain valuable information to be used in tracing the socio-cultural characteristics of prehistoric society. Chapman (1982) argues that the burial practices symbolized cultures of various societies and, through their analysis, we can trace the cultures of these societies before the coming of written history.

Burial studies enable archaeologists to interpret and compare rituals across societies, and to understand the role played by socio-cultural factors in causing variation. Binford (1971) argues that analysis between social differences of the living and those portrayed in the body treatments at death are archaeologically

useful in such studies. On the other hand, Goldstein (1981: 57) points out that burial practice is a multidimensional system that enables an archaeologist to know the body treatment, burial context within the grave and the method of body disposal in society.

Burial studies are also useful in inferring the religious beliefs of a society. Nida (1954: 14) argues that death and its rituals are usually accorded the greatest religious ceremony since it is taken to be a transition to the spirit world. On the other hand, Viollien (1911:12-13) reports that information on religious beliefs can be obtained from some burial sites of certain communities. For instance, a burial site with a weapon, an agricultural tool and food such as meat, shows that the deceased belonged to a society where people believed in life after death.

The burial items reveal the type of person buried. For instance, a burial site with a spear, an arrow and a shield, indicates that the dead was a warrior or hunter, while a skeleton uncovered in association with a spear and animal bones is interpreted as the journey between the two worlds (old and new) is long. This means that the person needs meat for the journey, but upon his arrival in the new world, the deceased will use his spear for hunting (Fagan, 1991). In addition, the Egyptian Pharaohs, princes of the Sheng and Zhuo dynasties in China, royal graves in Ur in Mesopotamia and in Polynesia were buried with equipment and remains of the killed attendants to accompany the bodies of their dead leaders (Renfrew and Bahn, 1991:363).

Changes, especially those in the mode of the disposal of the dead, can be traced. Tainter (1975:1) states that information on the changes of social organization among prehistoric people in their burial practices can be revealed by the presence of burial cemetery at one point in a habitable site.

Analysis of burial remains also permits the establishment of a chronological sequence on the basis of socio-cultural factors. As Clarke (1960:130) noted, " ...it is possible to obtain a fair idea of the relative age of individual graves even when provided with no closely datable grave goods" (Cited in Ucko, 1969:276).

2.4 Theoretical framework

2.4.1 The theory of mortuary differentiation

This study was guided by the mortuary differentiation theory. This theory was proposed by O'Shea (1981:40) to correlate the social configuration of a society with its practices for the disposal of the dead. O'Shea (1981) argues that an archeologist's ability to get social information from the mortuary remains depends upon passage of time during which the samples of the society's dead accumulated. The interpretation of this data requires an understanding of the complexity of the society where the death has occurred.

The theory enables us to realize that even at death, society still applies all cultural aspects in the manner in which it deals with the dead. The way the dead are disposed of in a society still reflects the society's knowledge on the deceased's age, sex, social status, cause of death, belief in the hereafter and societal religion. All these are served in the symbolic body treatment, grave goods, grave ceremonies, grave location and all the rituals before and after burial. These practices mirror the society's culture and perception or worldviews that are difficult to dispense with even in this time of rapid socio-economic, political and cultural changes that weigh down on the burial practices of many societies. The theory focuses on the factors that are considered to influence burial practices, why they are performed and the examples of these practices. The theory has been used by Were (1991) to guide his research on mortuary practices among the Pokot of West Pokot District. Were concluded that age, gender, cause of death and social status played a major role in dictating the way the burials are done among the Pokot community as shown in Figure 2.1 below.

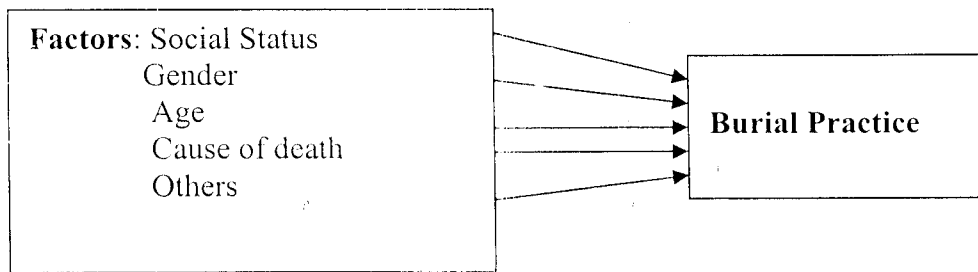


Fig. 2.1: Conceptual model of mortuary differentiation

2.5 Hypotheses

This study was guided by the following hypotheses

- Abasuba burial practices are influenced by the social status of the deceased.
- Demographic factors, that is, age and gender, dictate the way in which the Abasuba bury their dead.
- The cause of death dictates the way in which the dead are disposed of among the Abasuba.

2.6 Operationalization of variables

2.6.1 Dependent variable

Burial practices: all activities done before, during and after disposing of the deceased's body in a grave, or bush.

2.6.2 Independent variables

Social status: the way the society ranks its members, either by their achievements, skills or experience.

Gender: The social condition of being a male or a female.

Age: The number of year one lived before dying.

Cause of death: That which makes death happen to people in a society.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research site

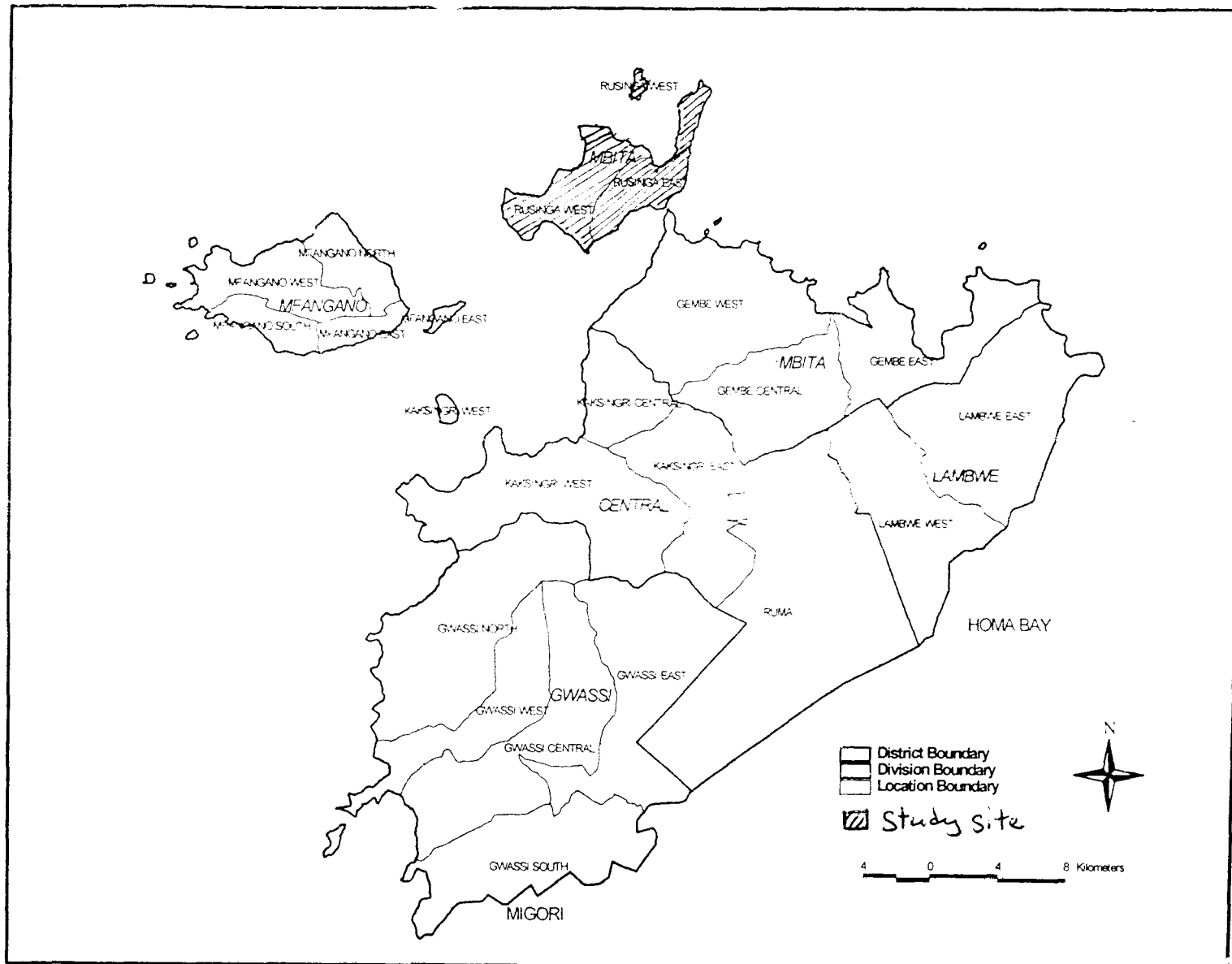
Rusinga Island lies in Suba district of Nyanza Province, which is to the southwestern part of Kenya along Lake Victoria (Map 3.2). The district borders Kisumu and Siaya districts to the North. Homa Bay district to the Southeast, Migori district to the South, and the Republic of Tanzania to the South-West (GOK, 1999).

Suba district covers an area of 1048 km², exclusive of water surfaces. It has 16 islands, the largest ones being Mfangano and Rusinga (Map3.1). The district has upland plateaus and hills such as Gwasssi and Gembe, Lambwe Valley, and to the end of the shore lowland is Lake Victoria with its fishing potential. Rocks such as basalt, granite, grit, conglomerates and turf ash deposits characterized the geology of the district. Alluvial gravels and superficial deposits cover Rusinga. The lakeshore lowlands of Mbita are dominated by alluvial sandy soils while soils developed from ash sediment such as chromic melic solonets are found along Lambwe valley. Vegetation varies from deciduous seasonal forests to thickets savannah common in Gembe, Mfangano, Rusinga and other parts of Lambwe (GOK, 1999).

The district experiences an inland equatorial climate modified by effects of altitude and closeness to Lake Victoria. Annual rainfall ranges from 700mm-1200mm, with 60% reliability. The long rains occur in March/ May and the short ones in August/December. High temperature is experienced throughout the year and it ranges between 17.10°C and 34.8°C (GOK, 1999).

The district is divided into five divisions, namely, Central, Mbita, Mfangano, Gwasssi and Lambwe. The divisions are further divided into 20 locations and 40 sub-locations. Rusinga has two locations, namely, Rusinga East and West and six sub-locations, that is, Waware North, Waware South, Wanyama, Kaswanga, Kamasengre East, Kamasengre West and Ngodhe Island. There are two electoral constituencies (Mbita and Gwasssi) with eight wards constituting Suba County Council.

The population in the district is about 479,916 (GOK, 1999) with a growth rate of about 3.19%, females being slightly more than males. Rusinga Island specifically, has a population of about 34,749 people (GOK, 1999). Mbita has the highest population, while Mfangano is the most densely populated division.



Map 3.2: Administrative boundaries of Suba District
(Source: CBS, 1999)

3.1.1 Economic Activities

The district is endowed with fresh water Lake Victoria which covers 37% of the district. The lake provides abundant fish and about 75% of the total fish from Nyanza province comes from the district. The chief catches are Nile perch (55%), tilapia (9%) and *Argentia (omena)* 36%. The fish produced here is exported to the big towns such as Kisumu, Nairobi, and Mombasa as well as to the neighbouring districts (GOK, 1999).

The district has some minor deposits of copper, zinc and lead. Sand and building stones are available for building purposes. In addition, the district has beautiful scenery of Gwasssi and Gembe hills, the scenic beauty of Lake Victoria, sport fishing on Rusinga and a wider variety of birds in various islands. There is also Ruma National Park with a varied wildlife. Lastly, there is Nyamgodho historical scene in Gwasssi. All these form tourist attraction points in the district.

Agricultural activities in the district include cultivation of crops such as sorghum, cassava, maize, cowpeas and finger millet, which are grown for subsistence. Cash crops include sunflower, groundnuts, and horticultural crops such as tomatoes, cabbage, onions and sukuma wiki. The inhabitants rear livestock such as cattle, poultry, goats, sheep, pigs, donkeys, and bees for both local subsistence and for sale. People are also engaged in fishnet making and repair, cloth making, haircutting, bicycle and watch repair, and shop and hotel keeping (GOK, 1999).

3.1.2 Transport and communications

The district has poor impassable murrum roads especially those in Gwasssi division. The main road in the district which runs from Homa Bay to Mbita Point, is not tarmacked. Other parts of the district are connected by rural access roads, while Mfangano has no roads at all. The district is connected to Homa Bay, Siaya, Bondo and Kisumu districts through water transport on Lake Victoria. The same case applies to the manner in which the district is connected to the republics of Tanzania and Uganda. Motor boats, dhows, and ships which either belong to the government or to individuals are used to transport people and goods to their destinations.

Postal and telecommunication services are confined to the divisional headquarters, while there are Mfangano and Rusinga airstrips to facilitate air transport. The whole district has no electricity supply save for private institutions that use generators to get their power such as Mbita High School and ICIPE Centre (GOK, 1999).

3.2 The universe

This refers to the total population of the study subjects (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996). According to the 1999 census results Rusinga Island had a population of 5491 adults (GOK, 1999). The researcher decided to consider this total population as his study population. However, this could have been too large a population to be studied entirely and adequately in a study of this nature. It was therefore necessary to draw a sample as described below.

3.3 Sample selection and size

The first step was to select four sub-locations from the island using simple random method in which all the sub-locations were given identification numbers and then four of them were selected using the lottery method. The four sub-locations were: Kamasengre West, Wanyama, Kaswanga, and Waware South. The unit of analysis consisted of individuals considered by the community to be knowledgeable in the burial practices of the study population. The researcher enlisted the assistance of assistant chiefs and clan elders to identify such individuals. At the end of this exercise, the researcher had 200 individuals who then constituted the sampling frame that was used to come up with the required number of respondents. The 200 individuals were given numbers and the lottery method used to select 100 respondents.

3.5 Data collection

In this study, both primary and secondary methods of data collection were used.

3.5.1 Secondary sources

These included journals, theses, government official publications, and books. Most of these were used to get background information to the study. However, secondary sources continued to be used in the study whenever appropriate.

3.5.2 Primary methods

3.5.2.1 The survey method

This was conducted through a standardized questionnaire (Appendix A). Informants were asked to respond to a set of questions touching on the society's attitudes to death, causes of death, factors influencing burial practices and reasons why they are performed. The method was useful since it provided for the direct interaction between the informants and the researcher. However, before the administration of the questionnaires the researcher ensured that translations were properly done from English to Kisuba.

3.5.2.2 Focus group discussions (FGDs)

Focus group discussions were held with group that had interest and were knowledgeable in the burial practices of the Abasuba. Members in the focus group discussions also had taken part in the structured interviews and the interview guide composed of a minimum set of questions was used (Appendix B). The researcher facilitated each focus group. Field assistants took notes, although most discussions were tape-recorded for transcription. Focused group discussions were conducted as a follow up to the survey questions and to explain other emerging issues from the research. In this study six FGDs were conducted with ten participants in each group.

3.5.2.3 Direct observation

This is a form of non-reactive methods, and consists of observing and recording anything interesting as far as the subject under study is concerned. The method was convenient because, in some instances where the respondent may cheat or say what he or she thinks was to impress the researcher, the researcher had a second chance of verifying the validity of the response by observing. Other variables such as ceremonies and the order of refilling the grave when burial is being done were obtained mainly through this method.

3.5.2.4 Key informant interviews

This involved interviewing people who could talk easily, understand the information needed and were glad to give it to the researcher. The method provided in-depth information on the burial practices of the Abasuba. An interview schedule (Appendix C) was used to obtain information from ten informants.

3.6 Data analysis

Data from key informant interviews, open-ended questionnaires and focus group discussions were sorted out, tabulated and interpreted in relation to the research objectives. The data was also crosschecked with other information gathered from different researches on the society understudy for validation. Other methods such as content analysis, ethnographic summaries, direct quotations and selected comments from the informants have been used in analyzing data from the study. Verbatim quotes in the informant's local dialect have been translated into English.

3.7 Problems encountered and their solutions

There were several problems that I met in the field such as suspicion from the respondents. In such situations, the researcher fully introduced himself and his intentions to win the confidence of the respondents. Transport was a problem because the place is an island with rugged terrain that made it difficult to access other parts. To solve this problem, the researcher woke up early to cover the needed

distances in time. Language was also a problem because most old respondents only talked in their dialect. This problem was solved through the use of a research assistant from the area.

3.8 Ethical issues

All the ethical observations in social science research were adhered to. Specifically, respondents' names were optional for them to give and in the thesis, pseudo names have been used. Respondents' particulars such as age and gender were handled secretly by the researcher. Permission was sought from both the relevant government authorities and the respondents. Proper introduction and explanation of the research theme was done to create confidence in the respondents. Finally, the researcher was aware that he bore responsibility to the discipline, studied community, sponsors and the government. Therefore, cases of debriefing and adulterating the research findings have been avoided at all costs.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BURIAL PRACTICES OF THE ABASUBA OF RUSINGA ISLAND

4.0 Introduction

Death marks a physical separation of the individuals from other human beings in the society. It is a radical change and the funeral practices done draw attention to this permanent separation. Burial practices are elaborate and when performed, their meanings are culturally held and cherished. The practices are intended to send off the departed peacefully to sever his/her links with the living and to ensure that normal life continues among the survivors. Therefore, meticulous care is taken to fulfil the burial or funeral practices to avoid causing any offence to the departed (Mbiti, 1991:120). In this chapter, I discuss the burial practices performed in honour of the deceased before, during and after burial on Rusinga Island. Lastly, I discuss taboos that guide the performance of the burial practices on the island.

4.1 Practices before burial

The survey and key informant interviews showed that when death occurs in this society, people, especially women, wail and weep, lamenting the departure of the deceased. They recall the good things the dead said and did, including his virtues such as kindness, politeness, respect, truthfulness, honesty, reliability, keeping promises, hard work, hospitality, helpfulness, considerate nature, ability to look after the homestead, practices of justice in public life and keeping the traditions and customs of the society. Mourners show how life will be desperate in the absence of the deceased as was expressed in this dirge:

Wana donj kanye? Wana nind kanye? Wana tim nang'o? Majarwakji osethoni?

(Where shall we be welcome? Where shall we sleep? What shall we do, now that he who used to welcome people is dead?).

In spite of the sorrow caused by death to the relatives and friends, however, mourners remind themselves that the deceased lives in the under world. The belief was shown when a mourner at a funeral wailed:

Imosna owetena, jonywolna kod kwerena mosetho. (Greet my departed brothers, parents and grand parents).

Mourners believe that the deceased are alive and omnipotent, and that they accomplish certain tasks from the underworld. For instance, a parent, while pinching the ears of her dead son uttered:

Kang'ato ema onegi to inegima itimne. (If it is someone who has killed you, then know what to do to him/her).

The above accounts show that death is seen as a sad occurrence in this society but the members are hopeful that it only marks a window to a better existence for the deceased to help, punish or revenge in the society. Several activities are performed to symbolize that death has occurred in this society. Such activities include: people not taking bath for some days, smearing of the body with ashes, wearing a particular cloth

for some time (*law chola*); animals go without milking for several days, people suspend sleeping with their spouses for several weeks or months; and certain goats, sheep or cattle are slaughtered to mark the death of someone in the society. By doing these activities, the society believes they are coming to terms with the agonies, sorrows and disruption caused by death.

Findings from key informants and direct observations showed that upon the death of an individual in a homestead, fire (*mageng'a*) is lit. The fire is not supposed to be put off until the mourning period is over. However, this fire is to be lit by close family members or relatives of the deceased. Big logs, dry tree branches and several bundles of firewood are used to keep the fire burning. Although *mage'nga* provides heat or warmth and security to the mourners who sleep around it, symbolically it also portrays disorder or 'heat' in the family, which is to last until the end of the mourning period. A key informant explained the cultural importance of this fire as follows:

Ka liel otimore to an ginyithinda waoyomageng'a nyaka lielkee, nikech jowuota kaonindo wutegi gi mond gi to ginyalo 'kere'kapok thuolo oromo. (During funeral, my children and I warm ourselves around *magen'ga* [fire] up to the end of the mourning period. This is because when married sons sleep in their houses with their wives, they are likely to 'disperse' [have sex] before the right time).

Warming and sleeping around the fire are cultural ways of suspending the playing of sex during mourning time in a family.

The burial date is usually dictated by the possibility of the body decomposing due to the tropical heat. However, traditional methods are used to preserve bodies as they await relatives who live far away and also for performance of other rituals before burial. Direct observation revealed that traditional herbs are used in preserving the body; the corpse is also laid on wet sand to preserve it.

It also showed that homesteads still serve as the major cemetery among the Abasuba of Rusinga. The grave is dug in the backyard of the victim's house (*ading'ot*), in the family burial place (*kar limbo*) or at the deceased's original place of birth. The grave shape is rectangular since the deceased are laid to rest horizontally. The society designates no specific group of people to dig the grave, but youths, relatives, friends and neighbours do this. However, they work under the guidance of community elders, elderly relatives and the religious leader who is supposed to carry out the religious ritual of identifying and blessing the graveyard.

Information from an FGDs revealed that a pre-burial (*tero buru*) is done in the morning before burial. It is believed that the soul of the deceased is sent to join those of the communal heroes through the pre-burial.

Here, young men set out with cattle in the direction where the society fought with their enemies. The youths decorate themselves with tree leaves and twigs, they dance, play drums, and sing warrior songs. In addition, they carry weapons such as shield (*kuot*), spear (*tong'*) and club (*rung'u*). They stage a mock fight but nobody is supposed to be injured in the process. Other pre-burial destinations include forest (*thim*) and a societal boundary (*tong'oganda*).

The Abasuba of Rusinga direct their pre-burial delegation to the causeway that joins the mainland and the island. The suitability of this site was stated by an informant as:

Wan joter buruwa chomo daraja nkech kanyo emane wagore gi jo-gembe ka ng'amocho en diwachwo. (We direct our pre-burial delegation towards the causeway when the deceased is a male because that is where we fought the Gembe people).

On arrival at the causeway, the delegation leaders light fire, and slaughter a cock whose meat is roasted and eaten by every member of the delegation without ugali (*yatho ring'gweno*). The blood is poured on the ground to feed the ancestors. The feasting at the site serves to unite the soul of the deceased in the underworld. It also ensures a happy send-off of the dead man's spirit from the physical world.

Key informant interviews revealed that pre-burials are also done for married women. However, these are not as elaborate as those performed for men. Women do not sing war songs, beat drums, slaughter a cock or decorate their bodies with leaves and twigs. The woman in the pre-burial team instead head towards the lake carrying water pots; some wail as others sing praises of the deceased woman. Pre-burials are, therefore, only done in honour of the departed married males and females.

Death is seen as a journey to the next world while the deceased is seen as a 'visitor'. Thus, just like a visitor prepares before setting out on a journey, the deceased is also prepared for his/her journey to the underworld. The body is washed with water mixed in some cases with traditional medicines, the hair is combed or shaved and the nails cut. Oil or butter is put through the mouth and nostrils, ears and other bodily openings; oil is sometimes applied on the whole body. The corpse is dressed in clean clothes, bangles, headgear, and a special hide. These body preparations are keenly done because they show how the dead man was valued by the living. Love, care and appreciation for the deceased is shown in the manner the body is treated. The preparations are done also to ensure that the deceased remains pleasant for the mourners to look at.

Only close family members, friends, relatives and neighbours under the supervision of the ritual leaders and elders in the village, do the body treatments. However, some individuals are not allowed to touch or come

near the dead body in fear of misfortune befalling them or their families. Such individuals include children, pregnant women and suspected killers.

The research revealed that only close family members directly eulogize the dead (*wuonyo gi kitundu*). The eulogists may talk about the deceased's age, attributes and cause of death or suspected cause of death. The dead may also be 'asked' to bless the living members and to forgive or punish those who harmed him or are planning to mistreat his offspring. The deceased is requested to relay the living's gratitude to the departed members of the society. The departed protection to the family, individuals and society is sought through such eulogies. One relative eulogized as follows:

Owadwa dhi maber, to igwethwa wan wedeni modong'. Wakwayo in gikwerewa machon mondo ogeng'nwa masira mar det bonyo modonjonwani. Imosnwa jogewa mosenindo oriti. (Brother, travel well; bless us, we relatives who have remained behind. We request our departed grand parents and you to deliver us from the locusts' calamity that has hit the society. Greet our people who have died. Good-bye).

4.2 Practices during burial

The survey and direct observation results in Rusinga showed that burial is used mainly as the means of disposing the dead. The prepared body is laid in the grave, some clothes are put where the head is to serve as a pillow and give the deceased 'comfort when laid to rest'. In Rusinga grave construction requires a lot of manpower due to the rocky nature of the land, while the tools used for digging the grave such as hoes and forks are also crude.

Inclusion of grave goods has been interpreted as a way of showing the deceased social status (Taiter, 1975). The inclusion of such goods among the Abasuba is, however, considered as taboo. The research revealed that only one individual was buried with a bottle of alcohol. Further probing showed that the deceased was an alcoholic and willed an inclusion of a bottle of *chang'aa* when he was dead.

There are several beliefs among the Abasuba which discourage the inclusion of grave goods. For instance, the Kaswanga clan believes that everything belonging to the earth must remain on earth in death. Such inclusions may cause trouble, sickness, and death in the clan. The Kamasengre clan believes that grave goods would be a mistake, as this would bring punishment to the whole clan from the ancestors. They say such inclusions detain the deceased in the vicinity, thereby causing misfortunes to the living. The Wanyama clan believes that inclusions are harmful to the living. However, where they are put by mistake the grave is uncovered and the goods removed ritually. In general, therefore, the use of grave goods to signify status differentiation is lacking among the Abasuba.

Songs, prayers, proverbs and short poetic recitations which explain the society's understanding of death, its nature, where the dead live and their ability upon the living, are stated by religious leaders conducting the burial. The society leaders' use this time to warn members on the need to observe cultural norms which, when violated, could cause death, and how the living, particularly members of the family or relatives where death has occurred, need to take heart. Lastly, the leaders offer prayers and lead in putting soil into the grave. In doing so a leader would utter: *Wadwok uru loo kwom luwo*. (Let us return dust to dust). Family members, relatives, friends and neighbours follow in throwing soil into the grave, and youths finally fill the grave. At this point, some friends and relatives mourn as they bid their last farewell to the deceased.

Results from key informant interviews showed that the Abasuba of Rusinga always put a cross (*msalaba*) on the grave, as an outward sign of the deceased's and society's religious beliefs. It is a sign that one is born in a religious society where one is expected to partake of all the societal religious rituals. In death, one is 'sent off to the spiritual world' (buried) in a religiously defined manner. The religiosity of a person in this society is still being judged by the person's ability to live by the cultural dictates of the society as was stated by a key informant:

Ng'uma luwo kweche mag ogandawa en jalemb ogandawa. (A person who follows the culture of the society is fellowshipping with the society).

This means that a person is born in a religious society and as he follows the societal culture, he remains religious even in death.

It was observed in the field that stones, tree branches, thorns and, in some cases, a fence, are put around graveyards. These are to protect the site from destruction by domestic or wild animals, water or wind erosion, grave looters and witches (*jojwuok*). Some families plant remembrance trees by the graveside. This reminds the family members of the gravesite, the deceased's significance and age at death. Grave epitaphs are rarely used in this society but, where they are used, they portray the age, social status, occupation and the life long motto of the deceased.

In Rusinga, the graveyard is a protected sacred site, which is constantly in use by the family members. Prayers, sacrifices and libation are offered and the deceased "talked" to by their graveside. For instance, an informant stated what he does when he is faced with problems in this manner:

Kamiethiero omaka to adhi eliend wuonwa nyise mondo okonya to bang' ndalo matin nyaka ayud resruok. (When I am in trouble, I go to my father's graveside to request him to assist me and after a few days I must be helped).

4.3 Practices after burial

Members of the deceased family and relatives are expected to sleep in his home for some days (*tweyo chola*). During this period sexual intercourse among the members is still suspended. When the duration has elapsed family members disperse or are set free to sleep in their houses while relatives are also freed to go to their homes (*keyo liel*). The head of the homestead or the eldest person in the affected home is to be the first to 'disperse', where he is expected to play sex with his wife to allow others also to 'disperse' and play sex with their spouses.

When dispersing from a funeral, it is expected that every married relative of the deceased will have the first sexual intercourse with his/her rightful partner. Violating this cultural dictate is believed to cause mysterious diseases, death and calamities (*chira*) to the victim and the society. For instance, a key informant stated:

Ka ikeyo liel to chike ng'amotho ng'ato ticko mana gichiege. To ka ng'ato oketho chik no to chira nyaka lowe. (When people disperse from a funeral, one has to fulfill the entire cultural dictate of the deceased with one's wife. If anyone violates this rule mysterious death or sickness must befall him).

As an outward sign of death in a family, shaving (*lhedo*), is done to all family members. An elderly member of the family does it using a razor blade in public. The shaving process is witnessed by the society to ensure that the shaven members do not engage in the normal dealings in the society until the mourning period is over. The dead man's family members are considered to be unclean (*gigak*) until all the death rituals are fully performed

All the married female offspring, siblings and relatives (*wagogni*) are supposed to come and 'cook' at the deceased's home (*duogo wagogni tedo eliel*). They usually make a variety of dishes and serve it to all the gathering family and community members. Entertainments such as songs and dances are performed during this festive moment in the family. Members of the aggrieved family use such an occasion to thank community members who assisted and encouraged them during the trying moment of mourning. By participating in such occasions, the aggrieved members are urged to rejoin the daily communal activities and to forget the bitter past.

A key informant confirmed that there is a set time, usually a year, when relatives, friends and siblings of the deceased reconvene in his homestead (*duogo e liel*). The deceased's estate such as farms, cattle, hat, walking stick, bangles and wristbands, are shared out among his relatives, siblings and offspring. Tradition dictates how inheritance is shared. For instance, the wife to the last born son of the late mother-in-law

inherits a family plough and household items of a mother-in-law. The deceased's will (*lamo*) if available is also followed strictly because it is believed that *ng'amothono* (a dead person sees) and can punish those who go against his will over sharing the estate. However, among the Abasuba of Rusinga ladies and married offspring are not culturally allowed to inherit their father's land and any other estate.

When the deceased is a male head of a family or a homestead, a new homestead or family head is chosen to ensure that reproduction and protection in the family is restored. Levirate marriage (*tero*), therefore, takes place. The levir (*jater*) is recommended to be a brother-in-law (*yuoro*) to the widow. The widow is to choose a levir, who has to be approved by elders. The role of a levir was explained by an informant as follows:

Jater onego orit kendo orie od owadgi motho (A levir is to protect and straighten his brother's house).

'Protection and straightening' means a levir is supposed to direct the deceased's household uprightly according to the cultural demands of this society. He is to lead as the head in all activities (such as planting, weeding, harvesting, building a new home and dispersal when death has occurred in a family), which are started or ended with sexual intercourse between couples in the family.

The first sexual intercourse between the widow and a levir is to be done in the widow's sitting room and on a mat (*par*). The blanket used by the couple is provided by the levir and the outcome of the intercourse has to be reported in the morning to the elders. In case the mating is not successful the levir and the widow are to take local herbs (*manyasi*) since the failure may be caused by the discontentment of the deceased husband over the re-marriage. When the union fails several times, an informant stated:

Jatero nyaka we bedo gi yuoreno. (The levir must stop re-marrying the sister-in-law).

After a successful union, however, a levir immediately assumes the family leadership and as an outward sign of this changeover he is expected to replace the roof stick (*loko osuch tado*). A new house is later built (*loko ot*) where a levir is treated as the full household head. On the other hand, when a woman dies among these people, the widower is to stay in the late wife's house after burial until he is 'released' by the wife.

The 'release' aspect was explained by an elder as follows:

Ka dhako otho, to bang' iiko chuore nindo e od chiege mothono nyaka jaodeno 'gonye'. Nyisoni, nyaka chieng' moro olek ni onindo gi chiege manothono. (When a woman dies, after burial the widower has to stay in the deceased wife's house until he is 'released', that is, until he will dream that he is 'sleeping' [having sex] with the late wife)

The 'released' widower is free to re-marry any other woman who could be his sister-in-law (sororal marriage) to take care of the orphaned children and the husband. In this community, however, the house of the first wife is so important that it has to be built and maintained even after her death. This is expressed in this saying:

Mikayi kiloki .(First wife is unchangeable).

Meaning, even in death she remains the first wife and other women married later can never take her place or have their houses located where hers should be erected. The stress on the location of the first wife's house is vital since in a homestead it gives a general orientation of the main gate, and determines the location of other women's houses and structures such as kitchen, cattle enclosure, poultry house, servant's quarter and sons' huts (*simbini*). When death occurs in a homestead, siting of a graveyard is directed by the position of the main gate as determined by the location of the first wife's house.

In conclusion, the re-marriage of the couples whose partners are dead, erection of new houses by a levirate widow and by the widower for his deceased first wife is a cultural symbol that life has been revitalized in the aggrieved family. Normalcy (cooling effect) is assumed to have been achieved (restored) in the former disordered (heated) family as result of death.

4.4 Taboos guiding the Abasuba burial practice

The society upholds taboos (*kweche*) in the manner in which they dispose of the deceased in their midst. When taboos are violated in the performance of the individual's burial, his spirit is believed will haunt (*chieno*) the living in the society. Therefore, the society leaders and members are bound to observe all the taboos which relate to death and burial of its members (Mboya, 1938).

If a dead body smells before burial, mourners are to show self-control by not spitting anywhere since this may be interpreted as misbehaviour and disrespect for the deceased. To guard against this behaviour, there is a warning to members which states:

Ka ingu'dho olawo ka kitundu dum to iyi biro kuot. (If anyone spits when a dead body is produced with a bad smell, the victim will suffer from stomach upset).

When the grave has been dug in readiness for burial, members of the clan are not to work in their farms until the burial is accomplished. The reason was stated thus:

Tiyo e puethe chieng' mobar bur egweng' kelo koth pee maketho cham duto epuothe. (Working the farms on the day when a grave has been dug in the clan [burial day] causes rain with hailstones which can destroy all crops in the field).

To this end, nobody dares violate this taboo lest the community suffers from calamity due to hailstones, which leads to hunger and famine in the long run.

The grave awaiting burial is to be covered with a mat and be properly guarded to prevent any wild or domestic animal and poultry from falling in it. Should any animal accidentally fall in the grave, it is to be slaughtered and a cleansing ritual is performed for the grave to be used again.

Were (1991) states that it is taboo to mention the deceased's name anyhow unless the name has been re-used for a newborn among the Pokot. In this study, a key informant reported that 'loose talk' (*wuoyo mapusore*) about the dead particularly among the youth at night is highly discouraged in the Abasuba society. It is believed that the ancestral spirits are active at night and can hear their names being mentioned. This could lead to punishment in the form of lightning and sickness to the concerned family. The Abasuba of Rusinga believe that the spirits of the dead live within the society although they are invisible to the living.

The burial site is sacred and acts as a source of community identity (Feder, 1981). The graveyards on the farms belonging to relatives on the island are preserved. When people work on such farms they do not destroy the gravesite but rather, they put stones around to protect and make them distinct. The preservation notion of the gravesite is expressed in their saying as:

Kar liel kipur. (A graveyard is never to be cultivated).

An informant stressed the need to preserve deserted homestead when he said:

Gunda oting'o liete mag kwerewa kod mag wadewa emomiyo en kwero ka wakethogi. (The deserted homesteads have graves of our grand parents and relatives; that is why it is a taboo to destroy them).

In conclusion, the Abasuba of Rusinga still observe taboos in guiding their burial practices. The society has ensured that the burial sites are conserved. In addition, the graves are seen as sacred spots connecting the living and the dead in the underworld.

CHAPTER FIVE

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE BURIAL PRACTICES OF THE ABASUBA

5.0 Introduction

The living are classified differently in society. The way the dead are buried correlates with the society's configuration or perception of the deceased when he/she was living (O'Shea, 1981). In this chapter I discuss social status, demographic factors, cause of death and other factors that influence the Abasuba burial practices.

5.1 Social status

In a society people occupy different social ranks as a result of their differential achievements, skills and experiences. Indicators used in gauging an individual's social status are numerous. These include one's personal qualities such as oration and knowledge in dealing with problematic situations, as well as wealth status such as owning a large herd of cattle, crops, many wives and children. Among the Abasuba of Rusinga Island living people are divided into different social strata. In death, the kind of burial accorded and its related practices reveal the community's categorization of the social status of the deceased (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: The Abasuba social status classification

High status	Middle status	Low status
Homestead heads	Married women	Unmarried girls in puberty
Rich elders	Unmarried men	Divorced women
Chiefs	Male family heads	Homestead servants
Rain makers	Girls before puberty stage	Levirs
Medicinemen		Strangers

On Rusinga Island burials are done in a homestead, that is, the homestead acts as the cemetery. However, traditions are followed in guiding the location of a grave. This is to ensure that all the deceased in each homestead are accorded their rightful burial sites and practices. Before a grave is dug, cultural landmarks such as the location of the homestead's main gate in relation to the first wife's house (*od mikayi*) and the demarcated homestead boundary (*chiend dala*) are considered. Homesteads in Rusinga are mainly fenced using euphorbia hedges (*ojwok*). The first wife's house is usually located directly opposite the main gate. The *od mikayi* is important in this society because it gives an orientation of where the main gate is to be located in a homestead. A key informant stated other roles of the first wife's house as:

Her house is the hospital, mortuary, and the cemetery of the homestead's head; the co-wives houses' only act as hotels and resort centres for the homestead's head.

Therefore, the first wife's house sets pace as to where the grave for a high social status individual (homestead head) is to be located. He is buried to the right in front of *mikayi's* house opposite the main gate.

Direct observation indicated that burial conducted with social status as the influencing factor showed variations in the grave location and practices that followed. The deceased numbers also varied with social status as shown in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2: Number of the deceased according to social status

Social status	No.	Percentage
High	7	29.1
Middle	12	50
Low	5	20.9
Total	24	100

The findings showed that people of high social status (29.1%) also doubled up as homestead heads in this society. Further probing revealed that such people included chiefs, medicinemen, rainmakers, clan elders, sages and the rich elders who are males. Their burial places are in front of their first wives' houses to the right. They are buried lying sideways on their right handside. They are laid to rest in a figurative posture portraying a warrior carrying a spear and a shield with the head facing the gate. A probe in this unique burial position for a homestead head or high social status individual was answered as follows:

He is to protect the family from external interference hence a warrior position. In addition, he is laid on his right hand because that is the 'male hand' (*kor mach*), meaning power, leadership and domination.

Body treatments such as oiling, washing, hair shaving and powerfully nice scented perfumes are applied on the bodies of high social status individuals. Clean, brightly coloured clothes that are made of very expensive fabrics are used to cover the bodies of the deceased. Both internal and external grave decorations are keenly done with the number of mourners and consequently the herd of cattle slaughtered being many. The eulogy, pre-burial and actual burial ceremony for people of high social status are colourfully conducted. The gravesites for such people are big and often specific stones, trees, flowers and well-decorated crosses are put on their tombs for remembrance. Libation and sacrifices are usually offered by the gravesides of high social status individuals in the homestead. It was stated that many children are often named after such persons in this society.

Burials of the middle social status individuals accounted for 50% of the cases. They consisted of married women and girls before puberty who are buried on the left hand side of their houses and mothers' houses, respectively. These married women and their offspring are laid to rest on their left handside with their heads facing away from the main gate because the left hand side (*kor budho*) is a 'woman's hand', showing powerlessness and the submissive nature of women. Women are also viewed as visitors in the homesteads because they are brought into the homestead (they are temporary members of the society).

A key informant described a married woman's position in a family as:

Dhako en wat ang'iewa. (A woman is a 'bought' [temporary] relative).

This notion reveals that a married woman in this society is lowly regarded despite her contributions to the family or home; in essence, her social status is equivalent to that of her unmarried daughters before puberty. Unmarried sons are laid on their right handsides, their graves being located on the right hand side of their mothers' houses, and their heads pointing away from the main gate. They are buried in such a manner because they are 'insiders' (*yawuot dala*), that is, they belong permanently to the family homestead.

Married sons who die before building their homes (*pok gigoyo dala*) and live in their parents' homesteads are buried near their huts (*simbini*) on the right handside lying sideways on their right sides. On the other hand, deceased daughters-in-law are buried on the lefthand side of their husband's hut while lying sideways on their left sides and their heads facing away from the main gate.

Other burial practices accorded the deceased in the middle social status in this society are modest, that is, not very many people attend their burial, and their graves are not very much modified, either internally or externally. The clothes they are dressed in and the actual burial ceremonies are not very colourful. The deceased in the middle social status are not likely to be re-named, their grave sizes are moderate and the remembrance stones, trees or very beautiful crosses are rarely used. Other practices done after burial are less elaborate for the deceased middle class members of the society.

It was stated that it is taboo to bury a married woman who died before being beaten by her husband. Therefore, the widower has to slap or cane the dead wife before the burial. The practice has a latent meaning as one informant observed:

The beating revealed the marriage status of the deceased woman; therefore, she was under the authority of her husband. It also signifies the husband's love for the wife even in death.

The practice re-affirms the society's notion that a woman gauges the husband's love through such beatings. When this was not done in her marriage, it has to be accomplished in death.

Sons who die having attained maturity age but still not married and those who are divorced are accorded burial similar to the one given unmarried sons in the middle social status. However, to show that the society is not allowing mature men or divorced ones (*wasumbini*) to be buried without marrying, pain or punishment is symbolically inflicted on the dead bodies by pricking their buttocks with thorns, which are not removed in burial. A probe into this strange practice revealed that it serves as a physical warning to the divorced or mature men in the society to marry at the right time; failure to do so leads to embarrassment of the body and spirit in death.

Table 5.2 shows that people of low social status in Rusinga whose burials were reported during the research were 5 or 20.9%. Members in this category include unclaimed homestead servants, levirs (*jokowiny*), divorced daughters who died in their father's homestead and unmarried girls in their puberty stage (*nyiri moseng'e chuo*). Deceased strangers whose relatives are not known (*jomwa* or *waganda*) are also in this social class.

Findings from the survey and direct observation revealed that all the members in this category had their graves located outside the homestead fence (*ooko mar dala*). Males are buried on the right and females on the leftside of the homestead, the males being laid on their right handsides and females on their left handsides. The heads of those who are buried in this category face outside the homestead and mourners who attend such funerals are few, the graves lack both internal and external decorations, and the eulogies, pre-burials and the burial ceremonies are less colourful. In some funerals cattle are not slaughtered, the graves are small in size, and remembrance stones, flowers, trees and decorated crosses are lacking. Further revelation was that no child is supposed to be named after a deceased low social status individual in this society.

FGDs revealed that levirs, servants and strangers are called *jooko* (outsiders), that is, they do not have the direct biological links with members of the homesteads. Therefore, when their bodies are unclaimed by their relatives, they are buried outside the concerned homesteads with their heads facing away from these homesteads. These burial practices suggest that these people were despised in life by their relatives and in the homesteads where death has occurred to them. The rituals that ought to have been done are not performed in their honour; they leave little or no property to be inherited by the living. Their spirit should 'go outside' the concerned homestead and should not come back to disturb the living members of the

society. The treatment accorded these deceased confirms the societal say that 'once poor on earth, so it is in the underworld'.

The divorced daughters and ladies in their puberty stage have both social and biological links with the members of their parents' homesteads. However, their bodies are buried outside the concerned homestead fence. A key informant justified the action when he said:

Nyiri gin kaka ogweng'e. (Girls are like wild cats).

This implies that, just like wild cats are a threat to homesteads since they kill chicken, girls at puberty and divorced women are not expected to be buried in their father's homestead. They are 'outsiders', and should have been married outside their father's clan, where they would have been buried at their husbands' home (*kachuogi*). The burial of the divorced daughters in their father's homestead is thought to cause or spell doom to the concerned family where, it is believed, ladies from the affected homestead will continue divorcing and dying at their father's homestead. Therefore, such burials are done in the society as a last resort when the concerned in-laws have refused to reclaim 'the body of their wife'.

The Abasuba believe in exogamous marriage, where ladies are to get married outside their clan or lineage and to non-relatives. In addition, divorce and separations are not allowed. When a married woman dies, her body is returned for burial by her former husband's clan, family or lineage. A marriage relationship in this society is permanent once established and the couples are re-united in death if they were divorced or separated. It was stressed in the FGDs that marriage promotes a lady's social status, while divorce or separation lowers her social status and these are evident in the practices women are accorded in death.

The reported burials of low social status individuals were the lowest (20.9%). This is due to the fact that homestead servants and levirs are supposed to be known in the society, and should be individuals 'who have their people' (*joma nigi jogi*) who would collect them either when sick or dead. Divorced and separated women are to be returned to their former husbands' homes. The society recommends that an unmarried girl at puberty should be buried at her brother-in-law's place as 'his wife' (ghost marriage). Sometimes arrangements are made with the concerned son-in-law that he will be given a girl to marry after agreeing 'to bury his sister-in-law'. In addition, an unmarried woman can be buried at her grandfather's home as his 'small wife' (*chiege matin*). This is because there is a teasing relationship between a grandfather and a granddaughter; for instance, a grandfather refers to his granddaughter as *jaoda matin* (my small wife). Therefore, the grandfather is 'free' or allowed by culture to 'bury' his granddaughter as

'his wife'. Strangers are strictly not allowed in a homestead, and so there are only a few cases of strangers buried outside the fence of the homesteads among the Abasuba of Rusinga.

In conclusion, the Abasuba of Rusinga classified members in various social statuses. The stratification is used to dictate which burial practice needs to be accorded a deceased member in the society. The Abasuba believe that *jomotho neno* (the dead sees), and so all the cultural dictates have to be performed in relation to the social status of the deceased. The dead are also reported to be 'sending dreams' to complain to the living about their discontent with the burial practices they were accorded if these felt short of their social status. Therefore, the Abasuba society is programmed to accord every member the ritual that befits his or her social class in fear of both the omnipotent and haunting (*chien*) natures of the deceased.

5.2 Demographic factors

Demographic factors refer to both age and gender of the human community. Gender is defined as the relationship between men and women in the ways in which their roles are socially constructed and to the cultural interpretations of biological differences between men and women (Wood, 1999). Gender roles, relations and identity are socially constructed through the process of socialization. During the socialization process, society's ideas and ideals about what is considered appropriate gender roles and relations in a given cultural context are defined, demarcated and transformed into different cultural situations. Thus, gender relations are power relations, which are socially distinct and culturally defined. Gender embraces cultural ideas about 'maleness' and 'femaleness' and the structural expectations which emanate from those differences (Commonwealth, 1995: 14; Stolen, 1991: 4).

What women and men do and how they relate socially are important aspects of gender systems and reflect cultural interpretations of female – male differences (Adepoju and Oppong, 1994). Women are socialized to derive their identity through marriage, motherhood, reproduction and other self-actualizing roles whose values are still deeply rooted or ingrained in the culture which are strongly safeguarded. The traditional authority structure, patterns of family decision-making and gender division of labour have tended to persist in most African societies. An African society is a gender structured one where cultures are male dominated. A number of activities still persist and are defended because they protect the male power. Such activities include polygny, levirate marriage, female genital mutilation, gender violence, early marriage, women's minimal political participation and under-representation in leadership positions where they could participate in decision making process in their societies.

Age refers to past life existence of an individual in a society. One's age covers a long progression of life stages such as conception, birth, childhood, initiation, adulthood, marriage, old age and death. Therefore, as one grows in a society or a culture, one is given responsibilities to accomplish with regard to one's age and stage in life. There exists a symbiotic relationship between an individual and the society, that is, the older one is in society the more numerous and challenging the responsibilities one is given by the society. On the other hand, the society respects and treats its old members with dignity.

In this research, demographic factors (age and gender) were found to play a great role in influencing the burial practices done in honour of the deceased in this society. When death occurs a grave has to be dug for the disposal of the body; however, for it to be sited, the position of the main house or any other house where death has occurred in relation to the homestead gate is considered. The gender of the deceased becomes a crucial factor when deciding on what side of the house the grave is to be dug. The findings on this aspect are summarized in Table 5.3

Table 5.2: The distribution and location of graves according to gender

Gender	No.	Percentage	Grave location
Males	22	46.8	Right hand side
Females	25	53.2	Left hand side
Total	47	100	

Table 5.3 shows that the Abasuba categorize the deceased as males (46.8%) and bury their remains on the right hand side. On the other hand, females (53.2%) have their graves dug on the left hand side of the concerned houses.

The age of the deceased influences the distance the grave is to be located from the house. Table 5.4 below shows approximately how far the graves are sited from the house where death has occurred with reference to the deceased's age.

Table 5.3: Influence of age on the distance of the grave from the house

Age range in years	No.	Percentage	Burial title	Approx. distance of the grave from the house in metres
0-10	7	14.9	Infants	1.5m from mother's house
11-27	22	46.8	Unmarried youths and adults	3m from the house
28-44	13	27.7	Married adults	3m from the house
45+	5	10.6	Elders	5-6 m in front of the first wife's house opposite gate.
Total	47	100		

Table 5.4 shows that infants have their graves dug closer (1.5m) to their mothers' houses. This burial distance is supported by the societal beliefs that infants are young and helpless, and so require closer attention, protection and nursing by the parents, even in death. Since most infants are breastfed, the society believes that the deceased infants return to their mothers to suckle. After an infant's burial the father is supposed to sleep and have sex with the bereaved mother (*luvo tipo*). The society believes that the spirit of the dead infant may quicken the mother's conception of another child. Close burial of an infant to the mother's house is also believed to facilitate the dead infant's chance of being re-born or reincarnated in the family.

The burial practices for infants take approximately a day and are usually not elaborate. This is because the spirit of an infant is believed to be harmless to the living in the society since the infant only lived for a short time. The infant's burial time is preferred to be in the morning to show that it died in its early years of growth.

Youths and unmarried adults (11-27 years) formed the largest number (46.8%) of those who died and their burials reported. A probe into why youths and unmarried adults die in great numbers in this area was responded to by an informant as:

Piny tinde olokore nyithindo ema odonjo etero, miyo ginindo nyaka gimon madong'o ma ok mbesegi machuogi otho gituo mar ayaki. Mon go giwachoni ema ong'eyo rito gi nikech miyogi pesa, lewni mag chuogi mothogo kod chiemo magiawaro. Rawere mayowuowi tinde ok dwar tich, gidwaro mana ni opidhgi gi mond liete. Nyiwa maindo to okadho tong', gichodo e dhonembegi kendo gilandogo touche kaka ayaki. Nee kaka miere odong' gunda nikech tho mar ayakini. (The world has changed; youths are the ones who engage in levirate marriages. They engage in sex with women who are not of their age group whose husbands' die of AIDS. They say such widows know how to take care of them because they are given money, the late husband's clothes and plenty of food. Youths nowadays do not want to work; they only want to be cared for by the widows. Our ladies have gone overboard, they prostitute at the nearby beaches and they are spreading diseases such as AIDS. See how homesteads have remained deserted because of deaths caused by AIDS).

The youth and unmarried adults have their graves located close to their parents' houses according to their gender. Their burial practices are less elaborate, mourners are few and the mourning period is short. The burial ceremonies and other practices such as planting of remembrance trees and stones are rarely done. Newborn babies are not to be named after dead unmarried adults and youths. Direct observation revealed that the youth and unmarried adults are buried at noon to show that they died almost in the middle of their life span.

5.3 Cause of death

Death is perceived by the Abasuba as the separation of spirit from the body. Because the spirit is closely associated with breathing, the Abasuba realize that the spirit has gone when one stops breathing. They think that the spirit goes through the mouth, nostrils or eyes. In such an event a person is pronounced dead. Death has remained one of the most universal and mysterious experiences in this society. Although Mbiti (1991: 116) has advanced several myths that seek to explain the origin of death among the Abasuba such myths only emphasize that death almost came by mistake and it has remained among men. The blame for the origin of death is laid upon people, animals, spirits or monsters but death's major role in this society has remained killing, destroying, taking away and terrorizing people.

The Abasuba believe that death comes through several means, such as curses (*kuong'*), breaking taboos (*ketho kweche*), witchcraft (*juok*), sorcery (*ndagla*) and breaking the society's morals (*timo anjawa*, *maundu* or *achach*). Sicknesses, accidents (*masirni*), lightning (*polo*), flood (*ataro*), animal attack, evil spirits and God also cause death. However, the burials performed for the dead due to these causes are mainly influenced by the deceased's social status, age and gender as already discussed. The Abasuba also believe that there are many causes of death (see table 5.5). These causes also influence burial practices among these people.

Table 5.5: Causes of death which influence burial practices

Cause of death	No.	Percentage
Cholera	3	15
Drowning (unidentified victims)	3	15
Wild animal attacks (crocodiles and hippos)	2	10
Snake bites	2	10
Suicide (hanging or poisoning)	2	10
Road accidents (unidentified victims)	5	25
Leprosy	3	15
Total	20	100

People who die of cholera (15%) have their burials done immediately, food is not cooked and mourners are few. Cultural ceremonies such as *tero buru* (pre-burial) are not performed; in addition, the burial time, which is dictated by the deceased's age, is not followed. Body contacts and close association with the

deceased's body are avoided. Therefore, body treatments such as washing, oiling, clothing and nail cutting are not done, because it is believed that such contacts may form soft spots for the spread of cholera bacteria to the body handlers. The haste in such burial was explained by a key informant as follows:

Tuo mar ndira landore gi yamo kod lwang'ni emomiyo ruothne ogolo chik mondo oyik mapiyo kendo chiemo kik tedi eliete makamago. (Cholera is spread by air and houseflies, therefore, the chief ordered for an immediate burial and food should not be cooked in such funerals).

For the unidentified drowned people (15%) all the formal burial procedures such as pre-burials, body treatments, and special location of the graves are put to a halt. Neither are the taboos that are obeyed and differentiate the burials in the society followed. This is because it is difficult to decipher the identities of the deceased to give room for adherence to the traditional burial dictates. The victims are buried along the lakeshore with their heads facing away from the lake. The burial orientation is believed to enable the spirits of the buried not to cause more deaths of such kind in the society. An informant stated:

Jo motho epii ma ok ong'e, iiko ka wiyegi ochomo ooko mar nam mondo mi ogen'g masira mar tho pii. (The drowned unidentified people are buried with their heads facing away from the lake to prevent the calamity of drowning from occurring again).

This explanation provides an answer as to why there are several mounds along the lakeshore of the island. The deceased whose bodies disappeared in the lake, constituted 10% of the reported cases. These kinds of occurrence are regarded as bad omen in the society. However, since the names, gender, age and social status of the dead are known, logs are buried to symbolize the dead bodies. Other burial rules are followed as though real bodies were buried. However, practices such as oiling, washing and nail cutting are not possible because of the nature of the 'bodies' being buried.

Those who died of snake-bites (10%) are subject to quick burials because the snake venom causes quick decay of their bodies. Gender, age and social status determine their burial practices. However, after burial, the graveyard has to be guarded because the people believe the snake that caused the death has to collect earth from the tomb for its cleansing. In this case the guards anticipate the killing of the snake when it shows up. The vigil is also mounted in the belief that the snakebite could have not been due to an accident, but was rather caused by witches who are believed to need the grave soil for cleansing. The tomb guarding has to continue until the snake is killed or the affected witches caught. When the guards fail in this mission, magicians are consulted to explain the mystery behind this cause of death in society. These unique practices confirm the society's notion that *oong'e gimatimore ma onge gimomiyo* (nothing occurs in the society without a cause). Therefore, the cause of death in the society must be attributed to human beings, gods or God.

Those who died of suicide (hanging or poisoning) constituted 10%. Such people are not given any colourful send off since suicide (*deruok*) is treated as bad omen. No religious leaders are willing to officiate at the burial ceremonies or start digging the graves of suicide victims. Body treatments, flowers, and the planting of remembrance trees to show love and care for the deceased, are not done. Nobody wants to associate with the deceased bodies because of the belief that the ill luck may follow them and their families. Children are not supposed to be named after suicide victims.

Focus group discussions revealed that both the living and the dead in the hereafter condemn suicide victims. To show the extent of this condemnation the scene where such suicide has been committed has to be destroyed completely. For instance, a house has to be burnt with all its contents while a tree has to be dug out and be burnt completely. The practice is aimed at preventing repetition of such an occurrence (suicide). According to one informant:

Gige jaderuok iwango gi ot mondo otam jimoko kik chak dere kendo edhoodno. (The property of those who die after committing suicide are burnt with the house to prevent others from committing suicide in the lineage).

The complete destruction of property and scene where suicide has been committed serve as a physical warning to the living. Any member of the society who commits suicide has his estate destroyed and not inherited by his offspring. The “spirit of suicide” is believed to be destroyed by the symbolic destruction of the victim’s property in the society. Finally, the destruction shows the societal verdict against the deceased. Life is considered to be so sacred that any attempt to take it away by anybody, including oneself, is abhorred by this society.

Unidentified bodies of road and fire accidents (25%) are buried at their respective scenes. Specific burial positions, grave location and other burial practices normally done are not followed. Instead, burial is done in a mass grave. The reason for it is that:

Jomotho e masira mar ndara kata mar machma ok ong’e iiko kuonde ma masira go otimore mondo oful gima onegogi. (The unidentified dead road and fire victims are buried at their respective scenes to show the cause of their death).

Therefore, the large raised mounds in some strategic habitation sites and roadside in this society are likely to be mass graves.

Those who die of leprosy (15%) are not buried. In life, such people are secluded from the healthy members of society. When they die, their remains are transported to caves or bushes far away from the homesteads

where they decompose without burial. Other practices are not carried out because the bodies are not buried. Leprosy is believed to be caused by a curse to the victim. The healthy members believe they can get the disease through body contacts, and so everyone in this society keeps his/her distance from leprosy patients or their bodies.

In conclusion, cause of death has been shown to be a major factor that dictates the way the deceased are disposed of in this society. It influences the burial sites, the mourners' population in specific funerals, places of body disposal and burial time. It also influences the performance of unique practices such as burying logs, burning of scenes where some deaths occur and guarding the graveyards to kill the snakes which bit the deceased or the person who bewitched the victim.

5.4 Other factors

The way the deceased are disposed of among the Abasuba is dictated by various factors. The deceased's social status, demographic factors and cause of death have been shown to mainly influence the burial practices accorded the deceased in this society. However, the research findings reveal other factors which are also considered as crucial in judging the type of send-off the deceased are given (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6: Other factors influencing burial practices

Factors	No.	Percentage
Distance from the burial place	2	22.2
Deceased's attributes (character, wealth, will and religious beliefs)	5	55.5
Modernization	1	11.1
Family commitments	1	11.1
Total	09	100

The distance at which death occurs from the homestead (22.2%) dictates the way the deceased are buried. One informant reported that if a male who was not a family or homestead head died away from his native home, only close family members were transported to where death had occurred to attend the burial. However, his clothes and personal belongings were brought home to confirm to the society that he was really dead. Symbolic burial was not done but pre-burial and mourning were done in such cases.

A homestead head who died far away from his home, had his head cut off and transported home for burial. A probe into the practice was answered by a key informant that the Abasuba culture does not allow them to bury their elders, homestead heads, chiefs and other members of high social standing "outside". This is

because there is a belief that the deceased spirit may haunt the family or society when buried away from the homestead. Therefore, the dead homestead's head must be 'laid' where his parents and grand parents were buried.

The deceased's attributes (55.5%) also influence the burial accorded to the dead. For example, a person who was respectful, kind, brave, hard working, truthful and polite was reported to have died in the study area. He was mourned by many members from inside and outside the lineage, and his pre-burial and actual burial ceremonies were colourful. The eulogy, body treatments and general mourners' dirges were very emotional due to the loss of such a virtuous person in society. The wealthy members of the society contributed a number of cattle, which were slaughtered during the funeral. The practices revealed that virtuous and upright living in this society is cherished. It also promotes a person's social status as shown by the burial practices which were accorded the deceased. One informant, for instance, had this to say with regard to the burial of the above person:

Waywage kendo waike karuoth. (We mourned and buried him like a king).

The wealth of the deceased dictates the way he is buried. In this research, it was reported that a rich man (*okebe*) who had died, had been accorded a magnificent burial in a grave which was decorated both internally and externally. The body was clothed expensively; and oil, lotions and perfumes that were applied on the body were expensive and nicely scented. A number of cattle were slaughtered to feed the mourners who attended the funeral in large numbers. On the other hand, the poor are said to be buried with no splendour due to their low status. A key informant remarked:

To jachan to waiiko kaka gichal. (To the poor we bury them as per their status).

Therefore, poverty or affluence of the deceased manifests itself in burials in this society. The will of the deceased dictates the way they are buried. For instance, one man willed that when he died, his body should be wrapped in a hide from one of his bulls. This had to be obeyed because the society believes in the haunting nature of the deceased's spirit when their wills are violated. However, some wills that go against the cultural dictates in the society are likely to be violated, for instance, if a married woman willed to be buried on the right hand side of her house.

Religious beliefs also influence how one is buried. Christians in the society are urged not to follow all the cultural burial practices. Instead, the Christian doctrines dictate the way the bodies of their faithfuls are disposed of. For instance, direct observation revealed that a born-again elder was buried lying on his back and practices such as eulogy, pre-burial, open mourning and wailing were scoffed at. It was also confirmed

that the deceased's wife was not re-married. In addition, Muslim faithfuls were observed to be burying their dead with their heads facing the city of Mecca.

Modernization also influences the way the deceased are buried. The introduction of wooden coffins and specialized clothing for the dead such as suits, ties, watches, hats, shoes, wrist bands, earrings and many other inclusions distort the traditional burial attire in this society. The emergence of homestead cemeteries has clearly influenced the burial orientation and the specific grave location points. Therefore, it is not possible to infer the deceased's age, gender and social status in these homesteads. It was observed that a dead woman had her grave sited beside her son's tomb in a family cemetery.

Finally, the modern individual and family commitments influence the way the dead are buried. The school, work, trips, church and other professional commitments have directly contributed to determination of the day and time when burials are to be conducted. For instance, most burials are now conducted over the weekends after the bodies have been brought from the mortuary where they were preserved. The weekend burials are preferred since most family members and relatives are free. The burial has to be done early enough to give mourners time to travel back to their various destinations of work. Thus, practices such as pre-burial, levirate marriage, building a new house (*loko ot*) and cooking by the married daughters and relatives of the deceased (*tedo wagogni*) have been interfered with. The culturally recommended period to be spent before mourners disperse has also changed. Individual preferences on the styles and preferred places where shaving of family members is to be done has indeed changed to suit the new socio-economic engagement of the people in this society.

CHAPTER SIX

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INFERENCES

6.0 Introduction

This chapter was supposed to discuss archaeological inferences from the findings of the study. However, it is not possible to draw any archaeological inferences because of the way the data was collected and analysed. Nevertheless, the study has come up with ethnographic analogies that archaeologists will find useful in their professional pursuits. These are discussed below under a number of headings.

6.1 Burial site preservation in the society

The Abasuba burial taboos prevent them from destroying the graves; looters are also kept at bay by these taboos. The gravesites are regarded as sacred places and their landmarks such as stones, trees and fences are thought to be sacred too. The sites (*kibaga*) serve as the family shrine where sacrifices, offerings and libations are poured for the dead; prayers are also offered by the graveside in this society. The notion that 'the dead see' and punish those who destroy their graves has seen the sites being securely preserved. The broken pots, shells, calabashes, food remains and stones around the graveyard are ever protected and re-arranged by the society or family members.

6.2 Beliefs of the society

Numerous beliefs are held by the Abasuba regarding death and the dead, for example, the dead are viewed as living in the hereafter. Death is seen as a transition by one from the physical state to the spiritual world; therefore, life is seen as a continuous process where death is just a stage. The dead are omnipotent and influence the living's actions as well as intervening for the society in the spiritual realm. Death too is seen as a 'journey' and the dead as a 'visitor'. All these beliefs are expressed symbolically by the body treatments, clothing and grave positioning of the dead. Therefore, the material remains of items such as oil pots, perfume containers and cloth remains are manifestations of these beliefs. Finally, the sites have crosses used to demonstrate the religious belief of the dead and the society. The deceased is, therefore, portrayed as a cultural adherent and hence religious.

6.3 The society land dispute resolution

The numerous scattered graves in the habitable and deserted homesteads (*gundni*), the evidence of cross remains on tombs in people's plots, the presence of burial remembrance trees and stones in certain farm spots are relied upon when resolving land disputes among the community members. For instance, when an individual can trace the gravesites of his parents, grandparents or any of his relative up to the third generation through the burial remains or the location of graves in the homestead and plot, then the piece of

land is regarded as legally his. On the other hand, intact graves used by clans or families as shrines with sacrifice and libation implements such as bowls, calabash, food and container remains lend credence to land ownership by the concerned families or clans.

6.4 Social differentiation

The grave location and arrangement in the homestead, the deceased's burial position and direction in the grave, show how members are differentiated in the society. For instance, all males are buried within their biological parents' homesteads. The graves for males are located on the right hand and those for females are sited on the left hand of their houses. The infants' graves are located very close to their mothers' houses. Married males and females who are still residing in their parents' homestead have their graves located near their houses (*simbini*) inside the homestead. Lastly, the grave sited in front of the first wife's house opposite the main gate is meant for the homestead head. This grave arrangement in a homestead demonstrates how age, gender, and social status, are used to stratify members in the society.

6.5 The causes of death

The way some people are buried shows the cause of death in this community. For instance, the mounds along the lakeshore are likely to be graves for unidentified people who accidentally drowned in the lake. Big mounds in deserted habitation sites or by the roadsides are likely to be mass graves for those who died of fire or road accidents, respectively. Finally, unburied human remains in a solitary cave or forest is likely to be from a leprosy victim.

6.6 The social structure

The study has shown that Abasuba society is highly patrilineal. This is expressed in death when only the blood male offspring are buried inside their parents homestead. Males are regarded as 'insiders' and have their distinct burial places in the homestead. Again, only a male homestead or family head has a defined burial place and not a female head. This reveals the patrilineal nature of this community. The burial of divorced and separated women as well as girls at puberty is done outside their parents' (father's) homestead, that is, they lack a defined burial location in their parents' homes. The cultural demand that the bodies of such persons be buried at 'their husband's place' (*kachuogi*) shows how exogamous marriage is cherished. The low status of the divorced or separated woman is shown in the orientation of her body in the grave. The denial to perform burial practices such as *tedo wagogni* and renaming a lter the divorced or separated woman and of any deceased girl at puberty are indirect indicators of how exogamy is valued in this society.

6.7 Economic activities of the society

Large quantities of cooked foods during the funeral are usually thrown away as leftovers. Food remains such as *ugali*, *nyoyo* (a mixture of boiled maize and beans), fish bones and animal bones show the economic mainstay of this society. Maize stalks used as fuel and the uncooked grains from sorghum and millet are good indicators of the society's economic activities such as fishing, cattle rearing, and crop farming when analyzed.

6.8 The physical environment

Analysis of remains such as grains, firewood, ash and charcoal remains, bones, crosses and the types of remembrance trees planted, would reveal the past environment of the study area. The grave depth and the analysis of libation and sacrifice remains could also show the existing environment. For instance, on Rusinga, cattle, goats, fish, millet, maize, bananas and sorghum remains are found all over. Acacia crosses and poles used as posts in erecting shade (*kiwanja*) are found scattered in homes where death has occurred, a reflection of the island's savannah environment.

6.9 Gender power relations

The domination of women by men is portrayed in the burial practices of the Abasuba society. For instance, no woman occupies a high social status and, therefore, none has a reserved burial position in the homestead, but a man has. Women's pre-burial is less elaborate and colourful; only pots are carried towards the lake, symbolizing the woman's domestic duties in the society such as fetching water. Women are buried on the left side of their houses and laid on their left hand-a less active hand and always dominated by the right hand. The left hand is also known as "the devil's hand," meaning, those who are associated with and buried on the left hand side (women) are regarded as 'devilish'. In fact, it is said, *mon gin jochiende* (women are devils).

On the other hand, men are buried on the right hand of their houses and laid on their right hand- a powerful male and God's hand. Male offspring are all buried in the homestead while female siblings who are divorced or separated and girls at puberty are 'outsiders' or wild cats (*ogweng'e*) and are, therefore, buried outside the homestead. No woman owns a home in this society; consequently, in burial their heads are not positioned to face the homestead's main gate. Finally, a married woman must be subdued and beaten (*dhako nyaka go*). For instance, if a married woman dies before being beaten by her husband her body must be symbolically slapped or caned before burial to show that she was married and was under male authority.

6.10 Cultural change

The common use of homestead cemeteries, wooden coffins with glass and metallic fittings, new styles of dressing the body in expensive ties, coats, shoes, sun glasses or spectacles, earrings, watches, wrist bands and belts, all deviate from the traditional attire of dressing the dead. The laying of the deceased on their backs, plastering and erecting houses over the graveyards, and saying of eulogies by numerous people where eulogists address the mourners while idolizing the deceased's good qualities are common in the study area today. All these activities represent the changed version of how traditional burials are performed. The use of gravestones where the deceased's name, year of birth and death, life long or biblical epitaphs are engraved, the use of metallic or expensively made wooden crosses and plastered ones are nowadays common, and distort the traditional image of tombs in this area. In Kamasengre, there is the Tom Mboya Mouseoleum, which is cone-shaped to resemble a bullet; this reminds those who come to pay their last respects to the late politician and tourists what the deceased died of (he was gunned down). These accounts show how burial practices and hence culture that relate to burial, have changed in this society.

In general, to understand and explain the complex nature of burial practices, it is important to carry out more systematic ethnoarchaeological studies. The reason, as argued by Wandibba (1999), is that the past and present are in the present.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

This study's main objective was to collect ethnographic data on the Abasuba burial practices and also to investigate and explain factors that influence the burial practices of the Abasuba of Rusinga Island. The findings were to be used in drawing analogies that could be used by archaeologists to interpret and explain archaeological burials. This section, therefore, discusses the research findings in relation to the above objectives.

7.2 Summary and conclusion

The research findings reveal that the Abasuba of Rusinga Island perform numerous and elaborate funeral practices. For instance, when one passes on, people wail and weep lamenting the departure of the deceased. They recall the good things the dead said and did while living. The family members wear mourning clothes, smear their bodies with ash and suspend sleeping with their spouses. These activities show how the society comes to terms with agonies and sorrows caused by death. The grave is dug in the backyard of the victims' house for burial. Pre-burial ceremonies are conducted and eulogies by relatives are done before burial.

Songs, prayers, proverbs, poetic recitations and teaching by society leaders are said to explain the nature of death and where the dead lives and their power upon the living. The grave is filled and a cross is fixed to reveal the deceased's religiosity. Stones are put on the grave mound to protect it from water and wind erosion. Fences also are erected around some graves to prevent them from animals and human destruction.

Family members are shaven and stay in the deceased's home for some days after burial. The married female offspring and relatives (*wagogni*) 'cook' in honour of the deceased as the division of his estate is done. Remarriage is performed by the aggrieved spouses and a new house is built to replace the one where death occurred. All these are done to restore order in the former disordered or 'heated' family.

The findings also suggest that social status dictates the way one is buried. The living occupy different social categories due to their differential achievements, skills and experiences (Table 5.2). Indicators of determining one's social status include wealth, knowledge in dealing with problematic situations and personal qualities such as oration. In death, the type of burial accorded one reveals the community's knowledge of this social categorization (Table 5.1). For instance, body treatments such as oiling, washing, hair shaving, nail cutting, and application of nice scented perfumes are performed on the bodies of high social status individuals. The graves of such people are also big and specific stones, trees, flowers and well-

decorated crosses are put on such tombs for remembrance. On the other hand, people of low social status have their graves dug outside the homestead fence, their graves are small in size, and remembrance stones, flowers, and decorated crosses are lacking.

Gender influences burial rites accorded one in this society. In death, the gender classification determines the side of the house or homestead where the grave is located (Table 5.3). For instance, all males are buried on the right handside and females on the left handside of the concerned house or homestead. The study also established that the Abasuba classify people in different age categories. When one passes on, age determines the distance of siting the grave from the house (Table 5.4). Other burial practices that follow are dictated by one's age and social status.

Cause of death also dictates the way burials are conducted among the study population. Specific burial locations mirror certain causes of death in this society. For example, the lakeshores are for the unidentified drowned people, buried logs symbolize the remains of those whose bodies got destroyed completely or disappeared in the lake, and the isolated bodies in the bush or caves are for leprosy victims. Strange practices have been shown to follow after some burials, for instance, burning of scenes where some death occurred and guarding the graveyards to kill the snakes which bit the deceased or the person who bewitched the victim.

Other factors have been found to also dictate the way burials are conducted (Table 5.6). For instance, modernization has influenced the type of grave goods that accompany the dead body. Homestead cemeteries influence burial orientation, and specific grave locations which make it difficult to decipher the deceased's age, gender and social status. Individual, family and professional commitments influence the days and times when burials take place. For example, most burials are presently done over the weekends before noon to give mourners time to travel back to their different stations of work. Burial practices such as pre-burials, levirate marriages, building new houses and cooking by the married daughters and relatives of the deceased have been interfered with due to the present pressure on traditional culture to change.

In conclusion, the findings show that burial is an element of socio-cultural systems which leaves material correlates. Understanding the contemporary burial practices provides insights into the past behaviour of a society. This study, for instance, has given hints at the traditional burial behaviour of the Abasuba of Rusinga Island. Through the research, archaeologists can draw several analogies on the Abasuba beliefs, family structure, causes of death, social differentiation, physical environment, economic activities, gender relations, burial site preservation and cultural change.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Structured questionnaire

1. Name of the location:

Sub location:

2. Interviewee's Name (optional):

General Knowledge

1. What are the causes of death that you know?
2. Can you explain what is done when one dies?
3. How are the dead disposed of in the Suba society?
4. What factors influence the way the dead are disposed of in this society? (Tick appropriately)
(i) Age (ii) Gender (iii) Social Status (iv) Others (specify)

The burial attended and observed by interviewee

1. Have you attended any burial?
2. What was the deceased's: (i) Age (ii) Sex
3. How long did it take for the deceased to be buried? (Give reasons for your answer)
4. Which people identified the graveyard or site? (Give reasons for your answer)
5. (a) Where was the grave located?
(b) Why was the location chosen?
6. What was done before the digging of the grave?
7. Who first dug the grave?
8. Who else participated in the grave digging?
9. (a) What was the shape of the grave?
(b) Why was the grave dug in that shape?
10. Who conducted the burial ceremony?
11. What body treatments (washing, oiling, clothing, shaving, nail cutting) were given to the body before burial? (Give reasons for your answer)
12. What was the body put in or covered with before burial?
13. Who participated in both 11 and 12?
14. Who carried the body to the grave? (Give reasons for your answer)
15. (a) (i) Were there grave goods? (ii) What were they?
(b) Why were they put or not put?

16. How was the body put or laid in the grave? (Give reasons for your answer)
17. What was the direction of the body in the grave? (Give reasons for your answer)
18. What was done when the body was in the grave?
19. (a) Who first refilled the grave? (State the order)
(b) Who else participated in refilling the grave?
20. (a) What items (things) were put on the grave?
(b) Why were they put on the grave?
21. What other things were built or erected around the grave? (Give reasons for your answer)
22. (a) What rituals were done on the grave in relation to the buried person?
(b) What were the reasons for or against these rituals done on the graveside?

APPENDIX B: Guide for Focus Group Discussions

PART (A)

1. Name of the location: Sub-location: Venue.....

PART B

1. Factors influencing the disposal of the dead in the society
2. The way these were determined
 - (a) Duration the deceased take before burial
 - (b) Type of body treatments given to the deceased
 - (c) The deceased body orientation and position in the grave
3. Those who participate in
 - (a) Conducting the burial ceremony
 - (b) Grave digging
 - (c) Body treatment
 - (d) Identifying the burial yard
4. The general burial site for:
 - (a) Head of the homestead
 - (b) A married woman
 - (c) Unmarried lady at puberty
 - (d) Divorced woman
 - (e) Levir
 - (f) Those who have committed suicide
 - (g) Unidentified drowned person (s)
5. Burial time for various death cases and their reasons.

APPENDIX C: Key Informant Interview Guide

PART A

1. Name of the location Sub-location
2. Participant's name (optional) Social status

PART B

1. How are the deceased disposed of in this society?
2. Are these factors influencing the disposal of the dead in this society?
 - (a) Age
 - (b) Gender
 - (c) Social status
 - (d) Cause of death
 - (e) Others (Specify)
3. How are these determined when constructing the grave?
 - (a) Location
 - (b) Shape
 - (c) Size and structure
4. What are the determinants of burial rituals done in honour of the deceased in this society?
5. What are the physical marks put on or around the graveyard and reasons for them?
6. What are the society's grave taboos and their roles?