

## Exploring the Dirge-case of Abagusii Community in Kenya

**Job Nyamamba Maoncha**

Email: [maonchajob@yahoo.com](mailto:maonchajob@yahoo.com)

### **ABSTRACT:**

The study analysed euphemism in language. This research focused on the use of euphemisms in the Abagusii traditional dirges. The research sought to collect Abagusii dirges, identify, describe, and classify the euphemisms used in them. This paper focuses on documenting and explaining the traditional Abagusii dirges. The study was based on the Face-work and Politeness theories. The study adopted a qualitative research design. The interview method was used as the instrument for data collection from a sample of five (5) adults of Kisii County of Gucha Sub County. The collected songs were subjected to thematic content analysis. From the collected dirges, it appears that the thematic concerns other than mourning also focus on tolerance, love, morality, justice, injustice, adherence to the traditional network of social relations and hard work. The dirge, just like other types of songs and is a vessel for airing the inner feelings of the community's aspirations and expectations, which it recorded and then passed from one generation to another as cultural heritage.

**Key Terms:** euphemism in language, traditional dirges, thematic content analysis

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## Introduction

Songs permeate the whole spectrum of life. In most societies there are songs for every stage and occasion in a person's life; from the birth of an individual to death: in naming ceremonies, initiation ceremonies, marriage, during work, leisure moments, war and many other occasions – songs are sung by professional artists and amateurs alike. When grieving, it often seems that nothing anyone says can help you. This is where dirges are sung by the bereaved to express their different emotions. A dirge is a song or lament appropriate for performance at a funeral. It is a song primarily intended to accompany a funeral or provide a memorial to the deceased.

In the African context, every person is an active participant of the song and dance being performed. However, according to Mugambi and Kirigia (2013), there are songs meant to be performed by the men only as is in the Meru community: others are for boys or girls only, others that only warriors are allowed to sing and dance to while the rest of the community look on, and so forth. This paper seeks to explain the Kisii dirge concerning the overall meanings of these songs themselves. It aims to answer the question, do the Kisii people have traditional dirges?

The Abagusii are a Bantu speaking community who are part of Western Kenya. They are found in the Nyanza region and are divided into seven clan clusters. Getutu, North Mugirango, South Mugirango, Majoge, Wanjare (Nchari), Bassi and Nyaribari.

In Abagusii culture, it was believed that disease and death could be brought through the action of human agents. Abarogi, witches, could be implicated here for these misfortunes. It is not uncommon in Gusii to read newspaper reports of people whose houses have been burnt because they are accused of practising witchcraft. Whether such accusations are proven or not is not the point. In fact, people never bother to find proof of any

accusations made. They have a deep (and often unfounded) fear, and they feel threatened by the acts of witches and the consequences of those acts. Abagusii have a saying – “*tiyanyagokwa etaberegeti egetondo*” implying that “for each death, there is an ultimate human cause.” To counter the actions of witches Gusii people could turn to a diviner, *omoragori*. For example, if a death occurred in the homestead and witchcraft was suspected, the affected family could seek the services of *omoragori*. *Omoragori* has special powers which enable him to communicate with the other world, to diagnose misfortune, and prescribe remedies (Levine, 1963).

## The Dirge

Music in every society whether secular or religious has its own characteristics. Ekegusii songs have been part of the folklore and have been used to comment on various aspects of the society, both traditional and even current. Among the Luhya communities in Kenya, old women would compose heroic songs about their husbands and sons when they died. The men chanted when one of the members of the community died. The younger generation would not only keep vigil but sang dirges throughout the night. The dirges told the story of the deceased, and educated the mourners about the dead and the community's worldview on the issue of death.

Scholars such as Nketia (1955), Finnegan (1976), Okpewho (1983), Akivaga and Odaga (1982) have all written on different aspects of dirges. Finnegan (1976) looks at sample dirges from different ethnic groups in Africa. She identifies some of the recurrent themes in African dirges. Finnegan highlights the salient points on Akan funeral dirges that Nketia (1955) raises in his book. Most of her examples of elegiac poetry and analysis on them have been drawn from Nketia's book. Finnegan gives a general treatment of the theme of death in African poetry. Her findings are that funeral poems have received insignificant academic attention in Africa, dirges

are less elaborate in performance, the performers are less specialised, and they remain a preserve of women folk in Africa. In fact, Finnegan gives a very general discussion on funeral poetry in Africa, and there is no clear analytical framework guiding her study. The findings of her study are supposed to be generalised for the African continent as a whole. Her examples, however, are mainly drawn from the Akan people, and this is not representative of Africa. She uses a methodology of synthesising and interpreting poems from an already existing document. However, her study sheds some light on some themes of African dirges.

Still on the dirge, P'Bitek (1974) analyses aspects of the subject among the Acoli of Uganda. P'Bitek's discussion centres on the Acoli's perception of death, the manner in which dirges are executed among the Acoli, the meaning of specific dirges as well as the functional aspect of dirges in the Acoli cultural setup. Six main themes have been identified in the Acoli dirge, and they include songs of the pathway, songs of the battle with death, songs of surrender, songs of cruel fate, the attack on the dead, and the attack on the living. (1974:144). P'Bitek also goes beyond the mere point of identifying these themes and tries to trace them to poems from the Western part of the world. P'Bitek's work gives a general discussion of funeral dirges among the Acoli of Uganda. The findings are that funeral dirges exist among the Acoli, both men and women perform the songs or poems, the performances are quite elaborate, and they occupy an essential position in the socio-cultural set-up of the Acoli. The work is a collection of oral poems from fieldwork, and there is no clear theoretical framework guiding the analysis.

Alembi (2002) discusses the role of song and dance in the context of a funeral among Abanyole of the Western region of Kenya. Also, the critic looks at who performs the dirge among the Banyole, the time at which the performance takes place, the structure of the performance as well as the implications of such performances in the

funeral context (<http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol38/alembi.pdf>). In his doctoral dissertation, Alembi (2002) again looks at what oral poetry tells us about the Abanyoles perception and understanding of death". In short, the researcher uses detailed analysis on four primary areas to arrive at the Abanyole's interpretation of death and its causes. These four main areas include; analysis of expressions and statements in the poems that expose the socio-cultural causes of death among the Banyole, the effect of death on the individual and the community, description of the performance and interpretation of the poems, and the poetic features of the oral funeral poetry.

Akivaga and Odaga (1982), also define dirges and the occasion that calls for their performance. They further examine dance as an accompaniment to dirges depending on the community, the age, and status of the deceased. The nature of the song and dance is also contingent upon the same factors. They also discuss the fact that whether we look at death as a natural phenomenon or not, as an end to life or a transformation of life, and as something evitable or inevitable, it is dreaded everywhere and therefore constitutes an occasion for mourning and performance of dirges. Akivaga and Odaga's work (1982) is a collection of African oral poems. In-depth analysis of sample poems in the book has not been provided. Indeed, the two critics collected and published poems from their fieldwork.

Awoonor (1974) examines some Ewe dirges in their essential form. In this book, Ewe funeral dirges are used as the basis for further analysis. The author provides background information on how the dirges have been collected, the importance of drumming in the execution of Ewe funeral dirges, the kind of drum that is used in the rendering of Ewe dirges as well as an in-depth analysis on the contextual meaning of each sample dirge. By so doing, the author can establish a link between the meaning of

each dirge and the circumstances that might have inspired the poet to compose it.

Studies on the Kisii dirge have been lacking. The closest it has got is the research by Omosa (2000) who otherwise examined songs and dances in Ekegusii in general. In his study, he notes that “The Abagusii understood death as an evil that attracted both friends and foes. At death, one won the community's adoration even if he or she was bad during his or her lifetime. Death is the greatest misfortune and painful experience and is a communal concern. The community came together not only to assist in the final disposal of the deceased's remains but also to console the bereaved members and to give them new hope” Omosa (2000:181). Omosa in his work documents two dirges that were used in consoling the bereaved family, mourners, friends and relatives. The first dirge he found is:

*Baba, ng'ina kerubo notana korera okure  
Baba ng'ina kerubo notana korera e ochire  
Bororo mbori goita kanga bwaitire abange  
Bororo mbori goita kanga bwaitire abange  
Makweri namakoro notana korera baba  
Malcweri namakoro notama korera baba  
Ngai ndarusie omwana onga kerubo  
Ngai ndarusie omwana onga kerubo Baba,  
Baba, Ngina omwana notana korera  
Baba ng'ina omwana notana korera okure*

My mother, mother kerubo don't cry she is dead  
My mother, mother kerubo don't cry she is gone  
Sorrow never kills it would have killed many  
Sorrow never kills it would have killed many  
Death is an old phenomenon so don't cry, mother  
Death is an old phenomenon so don't cry, mother  
Where will I get a childlike Kerubo?  
Where will I get a childlike Kerubo?  
My mother, mother of the child, don't cry she is dead  
My mother, mother of the child, doesn't cry; she is dead.

The dirge above implied that death was not to break the family or community down, but it was to provide a base on which the future was to be projected. However, mourners in their funeral dirges agreed that the death of a beloved member of a given family was a very bitter experience.

Another funeral dirge in Omosa's study points to the fact that mourners always accepted that death was a bad experience for the family, which could not be easily forgotten:

*Ngatara aaria Magombo nganyora omongina okorera  
Ngatara aaria Magombo nganyora omongina okorera  
Ngai ndarusie omomura onga Nyanchera?  
Ngai ndarusie omoiseke onga Kemunto?  
Obororo nobororo bwaitire abange.*

I visited Magombo; I found an elderly mother crying  
I visited Magombo; I found an elderly mother crying  
Where will I get a son like Nyanchera?  
Where will I get a daughter like Kemunto?  
Sorrow is sorrow and has finished many

In his analysis, Omosa notes that “mourners communicated the message that physical departure of a beloved son or daughter of a given couple meant a great loss not only to the family but the community in general, it brought a terrible experience. It was a loss to the mother who usually experienced pain at pregnancy and at birth which now becomes a waste as a result of death. Mourners who usually were close to the deceased performed the above funeral dirge in the funeral. They did so out of emotional affliction.”

Dirges are equally used to emphasize the sombre atmosphere of the funeral as well as evoke sorrow and sympathy. Though the first occasion for the execution of

dirges is during funerals, it is sometimes possible for one to hear them outside funeral contexts.

In this research, the study used the Face-Work theory (Goffman, 1955) and the Politeness/Face-saving theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987) as the theoretical framework. The Face-work theory was first developed by Goffman (1955). It should be noted that the overall study was on euphemism use that was analysed against the framework of politeness.

### Methodology

This study was conducted in Kisii County. People in this County speak the same language besides sharing the same culture. The researcher narrowed down to Gucha sub-county conveniently selected Kenyeny District. In-depth interview respondents are drawn from Mogonga sub location and Nyabisia sub location. A descriptive research design was selected for this study because it enabled the researcher to determine and report the way things were; the descriptive research design helped to describe the possible behaviour and attitudes of his subject. Under this design, the study used the interview method as instruments which involved a face to face interaction with respondents. The researcher was able to collect the funeral songs and get explanations as regards to meaning and usage.

The first primary source of data collection for this study was the in-depth interviews of the elderly men and women in Kisii County. Most of the residents in this county are native speakers of Ekegusii and reside in its numerous villages. The sample consisted of men and women aged between 60 years and 95 years. The decision on the choice of the elderly aged 60 – 95 years was informed by the fact that this is the group that is most conversant with the funeral practices in the traditional society because this generation has little knowledge since the practice is dying out and is being replaced with the Christian ones. The study

used purposive sampling, a non-probability approach to identify the elderly men and women to participate in the in-depth interviews. Purposive sampling involves the selection of groups and categories to study based on their relevance to the research questions.

The researcher purposefully identified one respondent, coded – SIR-1, who happened to be the eldest and being the elder and a grandfather, he generally came as the first option. Then he recommended the others till a sample of five was reached. By the end, the researcher successfully conducted five in-depth interviews with the elderly men and women selected through the snowball – sampling strategy. These interviews were solely guided by the interview schedule developed for this purpose.

The following table summarizes the background details of the five individual participants involved in this study. The interviews were five in total.

**Table 1. Interviewees' profiles**

Participant's code	Marital Status	Age	Gender	Status	Current residence	Clan
SIR-1	Married	93	Male	Elder	Kemoroko	Bom baba. Sub-clan - Mwa gesa ka
SIR-2	Married	88	Female	H/wife	Kemoroko	Bom baba Sub-clan - Mwa gesa ka

SIR-3	Widow	88	“	“	Igorera	Bom baba Sub clan - Mwa gesa ka
SIR-4	Married	62	Male	Singer	Nyabisi a	Bom baba Sub clan – mob asi
SIR-5	Married	66	Female	H/wife	Magen a	Bom baba. Sub-clan - Mwa gesa ka

Source: Author's fieldwork (Maoncha, 2015)

The code SIR meaning Selected Interview Respondent will be used for the discussion. The participants in Table 1 are all native speakers of Ekegusii and were born, brought up and have grown up in the community.

SIR-1 is a very old man who from our interaction, the researcher learnt had even participated in World War 2. He is very knowledgeable in the customs and traditions of the people and with the ease of interaction, provided valuable data on the social-cultural background of the community for this study. He is a respected elder.

SIR-2 is an elderly woman who used to participate in the *Eburu* (a day after burial where animals are brought to the graveside as a sign of mourning and to chase evil spirits). Though old, was able to recall, chant and sing most of the

songs selected with such ease. She also gave valuable responses to the questions asked.

SIR-3 is a woman who was also a participant in the *Eburu* and funeral dirge performances during her time. She could recall the songs; though her memory is failing, she got enough information to corroborate SIR-1 and SIR-2's responses.

SIR-4 was selected because of his expertise in singing. He was born blind, and all his life has been going around singing in ceremonies (marriage, burial, church etc.). He was an invaluable resource because he could give different variations of the same song and explain many issues especially on different viewpoints of different clans.

SIR-5 was solely chosen to corroborate the collected data to test whether different clans had the same views. She is of a different clan, but the information she gave was more or less the same.

Following a cue from the singers (the old men and women in the table above), I learnt that the practice of singing dirges and some customs have died and have been overtaken by Christianity and Christian burial practices for some time.

### Results

Data collected was analysed qualitatively. The study made use of qualitative methods of data analysis to analyse data. Qualitative methods of research enabled the analyse and explain deeply and exhaustively (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). Besides, qualitative research methods of data analysis helped the researcher to better understand the subjective perspectives of his subjects by collecting data (verbatim responses), that enabled him to develop a detailed, rich understanding and insight into their attitudes, shared beliefs, aspirations and culture that define their view of the world.

The songs are presented one after the other with a summary of each on meaning and background information specific to the song as explained by the individuals who sang the song and the focus group.

**Table 2: Dirges collected**

Song No.	Song Title	Singers	Approximate time	Place of performance
1.(A)	Arire Eira Ogochora (It has vowed to choose)	SIR-1	10 minutes	Kemor eko
		SIR-4	11 minutes	Nyabisi a
2.(B)	Mokungu Omotakan wa (A widow woman)	SIR-2	5-7 minutes	Kemor eko
		SIR-3	6minutes	Magen a
		SIR-4	6minutes	Nyabisi a
3.(C)	Nyabokeye (My Nyabokeye)	SIR-4	5	Nyabisi a
		SIR-1	6minutes	Kemor eko
4.(D)	Mokungu Siomasiomi (A footloose wandering woman)	SIR-1,	10 minutes	Kemor eko
		SIR-3	11 minutes	Magen a
		SIR-5	10 minutes	Kemor eko
5.(E)	Nyagechence (The jigger)	SIR-5	5 minutes	Kemor eko
		SIR-2	6 minutes	“
		SIR-3	6 minutes	Magen a

Source: Author's fieldwork (Maoncha, 2015)

Song A was sung at Kemoreko village on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013 by SIR-1 who took roughly 12 minutes of singing. There were delays as the old man tried to recall the exact wording and was slower in his rendition. He sang in the comfort of his home at around 10.00 a.m. The following day on 26<sup>th</sup> the same song was sung by respondent SIR-2 who had three verses of the same song and this version took 10 minutes. The other two versions took much less time, and their occasion for singing was different.

Song B – was produced by three respondents differently SIR-2, SIR-3 and SIR-4 and lasted for 5 and 7 minutes. Song C similarly was performed by SIR-1 and SIR-4 taking between 6 and 8 minutes. Song D was sung by SIR-1, SIR-3 and SIR-5 taking approximately 5 and 7 minutes of singing time.

**SONG A**

**ARIRE EIRA OGOCHORA**

Arire eira x2 ogochora.  
Agachora omorugi oye  
Arire eira x2 ogochora.

Inkai achora akogwera  
Arire eira x2 ogochora  
Agachora Nyaribari,  
Arire eira x2 ogochora

Ee bono omosireire  
Arire eira x2 ogochora  
Otigaire omoboranka  
Arire eira x2 ogochora.

Aye okwerwera roche  
Arire eira x2 ogochora  
Oyio ere agwetenyere  
Arire eira x2 ogochora

Bwerumirie nyomba mwaye

Arire eira x2 ogochora  
Bwerumirie nyomba mwaye  
Arire eira x2 ogochora

Oboboranka nobobe  
Arire eira x2 ogochora  
Oboboranka nobobe  
Arire eira x2 ogochora

**IT HAS VOWED TO CHOOSE**

It has vowed x2 to choose.  
It chose his wife,  
It has vowed x2 to choose.

Where has it chosen to fall?  
It has vowed x2 to choose.  
It chose Nyaribari,  
It has vowed x2 to choose.

Yes now she has been lost from him  
It has vowed x2 to choose.  
He has been left a widower  
It has vowed x2 to choose.

You fetch water for yourself from the stream.  
It has vowed x2 to choose.  
He collects his own firewood  
It has vowed x2 to choose.

He mourns in his own house  
It has vowed x2 to choose.  
He mourns in his house,  
It has vowed x2 to choose.

Widowerhood is bad  
It has vowed x2 to choose.  
Widowerhood is bad,  
It has vowed x2 to choose

Arire eira ogochora  
Arire eira x2 ogochora  
Agachora aa Kemunto  
Arire eira x2 ogochora

Aya agachora Kerubo  
Arire eira x2 ogochora  
Achorete Kerubo  
Arire eira x2 ogochora

It has vowed to choose,  
It has vowed x2 to choose.  
It chose on Kemunto,  
It has vowed x2 to choose.

It chose Kerubo  
It has vowed x2 to choose.  
It chose Kerubo,  
It has vowed x2 to choose

Agachora ere Kwamboka  
Arire eira x2 ogochora  
Kwamboka ere okomeirwe  
Arire eira x2 ogochora

It chose Kwamboka,  
It has vowed x2 to choose.  
Kwamboka has been buried,  
It has vowed x2 to choose

The song is explicitly sung by men especially in a case where a man has lost his wife. In the song, people are crying and wailing. They are giving the dead a send-off and trying to show the situation she has left the husband in. It is also used to console the bereaved- the man who has now been left on his own to collect firewood, fetch water for himself- yet he is a man, something that could not have been the case were the wife alive. A notable thing in the song, death is not mentioned, but it is inferred. The reason

given is that people fear to say it lest it strikes one as the following text illustrates:

*“Omanyete abakoro mbaoboeta amakweri, igo tibare kayaatora rahisi rahisi lakini nabo okomanya buna naro akobanwa gose akorabarwa.”*

(you know people of the old feared death so they could not speak of it just so easily, but you will know that it is the one being implied”

Maoncha, 2015:159

Maoncha and Ndambuki (2017) explain that “Ogochora means to pick/choose/select, but the word is used to stand for *killed*. The sense brought out in the use of *ogochora* (select/choose) indirectly depicts the dead as having been the best. **osirire** – meaning “has got lost” is an indirect way of saying “has died”. The dead were always politely called ‘Nyagosira’ (the one lost) or ‘Nyakogenda’ (the one gone) for close relatives or people one was attached to, instead of ‘egetondo’ (corpse) a word that creates a distance between the dead and the living and resulted to fear”.

**SONG B-**

**Mokungu omotakanwa**

*Aiye, chiachire omonanda*

*Ee ee ee ee*

*Chiachire*

*Aiyee chiachire omonanda*

*Aiye omokungu omotakanwa*

*Ee ee ee ee ee baba*

*Omokungu omotokana*

*Rora buna agotanga.*

**A WIDOW WOMAN**

*Aiye they have gone for auction,*

*Ee ee ee ee*

*They have gone*

*Aiye they have gone for auction.*

*Aiye a widow woman,*

*Ee ee ee ee ee*

*A widow woman*

*See how she controls.*

*Tata omororere omonanda*

*Ee ee ee ee baba*

*Tata omororere omonanda*

*Ee ee ee mororere omonanda.*

*Rora buna agotanga eyaye*

*Ee ee ee baba*

*Rora buna agotanga eyaye*

*Rora buna agotanga eyaye*

*Aiye chiachire Nyaronge*

*Aiye ee ee ee*

*Chiachire Nyaronge*

*Aiye chiachire Nyaronge.*

*Chiachire Nyaronge*

*Ee ee ee ee*

*Abamura bachibwatie*

*Aiye abamura bachibwatie.*

*Now see her at the auction*

*Ee ee ee ee mother,*

*Now see her at the auction*

*Ee ee see her at the auction.*

*See how she drives hers,*

*Ee ee ee ee mother,*

*See how she drives,*

*See how she drives hers.*

*Aaiye they have gone to Nyaronge,*

*Aiye ee ee ee mother*

*They have gone to Nyaronge*

Ayie ee they have gone to Nyaronge.

They have gone to Nyaronge,  
Young men should follow them  
Ayie ee ee ee ee mother  
Ayie young men should follow them

This song is on the importance of a man in the family, and it laments his absence. Who will now fill the void? This song initially was used when the cows were taken to the auction market for marking/branding. For a woman whose husband is dead, she has to drive her cattle behind the men. Now in the event of the death of the husband, this song was sorrowfully sung by the mourners to show how lonely the widow has been left and what a big task lies ahead of her. In the song, the woman is driving her cattle to accompany the men as they take them for marking at the auction market in a distant place. She is a widow and laments her being forced by death to fit in a man's world due to the death of her husband.

### **SONG C**

#### **NYABOKE ONE.**

Genda roche Nyaboke one genda roche,  
Genda roche Nyaboke one genda roche  
Obuche amaya amakenonoku  
Obuche amaya amakenonoku,  
Genda roche Nyaboke one genda roche x2

Tira ng'ora Nyaboke one tira ng'ora,  
Tira ng'ora Nyaboke one tira ng'ora,  
**Emerande inchera nemekorekanu**  
Emerande inchera nemekorekanu  
Tira ng'ora Nyaboke one tira ng'ora x2

Ning'o oyo otoretetereire ee baba,

Ning'o oyo otoretetereire, Kemunto nyamacharara.  
Kemunto nyamacharara ee ee baba,

Kemunto nyamacharara agacharara egetiro.

**Egetiro** inkere Ogonga kere Ogonga,  
egetiro inkere ogonga  
inkere Omanga nkere Ogonga ayie baba.x2

Abamura imbagetire, mbagetire abaiseke,  
imbagetire imbagetire imbagetire ayie babax2

Egetiro inkere Ogonga ng'aa ee baba,  
Getiro inkere ogonga getiro Ogonga ng'aa ee baaba

#### **MY NYABOKE**

Go to the river My Nyaboke, go to the river,  
Go to the river My Nyaboke, go to the river,  
You fetch the clear one,  
You bring the clear one,  
Go to the river my Nyaboke go to the river x2

Ascend slowly my Nyaboke ascend slowly  
Ascend slowly my Nyaboke ascend slowly  
Tendrils on the way are tangled and intertwined x2  
Ascend slowly my Nyaboke ascend slowly x2

Who has brought us the misfortune ee mother!  
Who brought the misfortune Kemunto Nyamacharara?  
Kemunto nyamacharara ee ee mother  
Kemunto nyamacharara jumped the hill.

A hill is at Ogonga at Ogonga,  
A hill is at Ogonga,  
Is at Ogonga at Ogonga ayie mother x2

Boys will climb it; girls will climb it,  
(Will climb it x3 ayie mother) x2

Hill at Ogonga ng'aa ee mother  
Hill at Ogonga at Ogonga ng'aa ee mother.

*Tiga imbwate omotwe ng'aa ee ee baba,  
Tiga imbwate omotwe, tiga imbwate omokera  
Tiga imbwate amarwa ng'aa ee ee baba  
Let me hold my head, ng'aa ee mother  
Let me hold my head, let me hold the tail  
Let me hold the knees, ng'aa ee mother*

This is a sad song on the pain and suffering brought about by death. It uses a lot of metaphorical language. The language used shows the inevitable suffering and difficulties brought about by death as a result of our unchecked rash behaviours. At another point, it indicates the disillusionment, hopelessness and the acceptance that the same fate awaits everybody- boys and girls alike when they don't take caution.

The whole song is full of imagery. Metaphors and personification have been extensively used. The focus group explained that the song deals with matters concerning love, sexual engagements and morality; issues that are never directly addressed. Abagusii people are more reserved when it comes to such issues, and many are not comfortable to speak in public anything that may bring shame and discomfort. This doesn't mean that such issues were not discussed, no, in fact, they were primarily addressed but in a more indirect manner. In this song, the first stanza starts with "genda roche" advising Nyaboke to go to the river and get the clear, clean water. The interpretation given was that Nyaboke was informed that she was free, since she is of age, to go and search for a lover, a perfect one, not of bad blood (i.e. coming from a lineage of thieves or witches), or tainted by evils (who has a curse running in the family) and most importantly not one they are related by blood (as a brother, parent or in-laws) such as to result in future catastrophes. Among Abagusii, if you have sexual relations with the one you are related with in any way, you caused your death or the baby born out of such a relationship dies. Especially in cases where the husband slept with his sister in law, the wife died while

giving birth; or if a brother had sex with his brother's wife while the husband was alive, the two could never share a meal or else, it was believed, the husband would die.

In the second stanza, the lady is advised to be careful and take time before she falls in love. That she should not let herself to fall in love blindly but to be cautious because there are obstacles, problems and pitfalls on the way. *Emerande* (tendrils) stands for the challenges and obstacles, and that these problems sometimes are so complicated, intense and inevitable (*emekorekanu*) such that they will lead to one's downfall and disgrace. The singer poses the question "who is this that has brought us this sorrow", and the answer is "it is Kemunto 'the jumper'" the message is that **Kemunto** let herself fall in love blindly and now has brought all these sorrows as a consequence of her affair.

It continues to show that the people are sad and mourning because of **Kemunto** who jumped the hill, that is, who let herself fall blindly in love and now the repercussion is death. She did not go slowly or even walk hurriedly but she 'jumped'. Part of the above song is an adaptation from a Gusii beer party song. This was discussed in the literature review. Omosa (2000) observes that:

Gusii beer party songs developed a lot of symbolic complexities. Artists among Abagusii created their symbols basically from their understanding of the physical and natural environment. For instance, beer was often referred to as 'the long water grasses'. At a beer party, one could hear an artist singing:

**Ning'o Oyo Ondetereire**

*Ning o Oyo ondetereire  
Ning o Oyo ondetereire*

Ning o Oyio ondeteraire  
Amache enunda  
Andeteraire.

Ning o Oyio ondeteraire  
Ning o Oyio ondeteraire  
Ning o Oyio ondeteraire  
Amache enunda andeteraire

**(Who has brought this for me?)**

Who has brought this for me?  
Who has brought this for me?  
Who has brought it for me?  
It is the waters of the long water grass that has brought me this.

Who has brought this for me?  
Who has brought this for me?  
Who has brought it for me?  
It is the waters of the long water grass that has brought me this.

The 'long water grass' in its actual meaning is the plants (reeds) that grow at the riverbanks. Abagusii used it as medicine. In the old days, when somebody suffered from stomach upset, the reeds (*enunda*) were squeezed, and the water that came out was mixed with rainwater to form a precipitate that could cure the stomach upset. Therefore, in referring to beer as the water of long water grass (*amache enunda*), the above beer party song communicated the message that beer was a good thing. It was thought to be a medicine of the souls as it treated some diseases. For example, when one ate the meat of dead cattle and suffered constipation, he was advised to take a little beer. But one was not required to take too much of it as it could lead to problems such as loss of vision, breaking of marriages, accidents and poor decision making.

This emphasizes the point that overindulgence or too much of something is dangerous. Thus, Kemunto is presumed to have overindulged in what has brought about the current situation – what euphemistically is called *egetiro* (a hill). **Egetiro** is a euphemistic word for blind love or irresponsible sexual relations/encounters. The advice is people should take time before they engage themselves into such affairs, but for Kemunto, she jumped into it. The song uses metaphors and a roundabout way of addressing matters concerning love, relationships and sexual behaviour. These are issues people feel embarrassed to talk about openly hence opt to use a roundabout way. In this way, they succeed in pointing out the issue and save their face and that of the listener; thus the social code is maintained.

The song is usually sung by mourners when mourning the death of a young person whose cause of death is attributed to sexual misbehaviour. Sometimes it was also composed to mourn adult dead who died because of scuffles emanating from love issues. In the last stanza, it is characteristic of the Kisii mourners to hold their heads (hands at the back of their heads), knees, hands at their backs (buttocks) as they cry and wail.

**SONG D –**  
**MOKUNGU SIOMASIOMI**

*Mokungu siomasiomi inkai akomanya bwarugeirwe gose mboke gose mbwa'mwana x2*  
*Ee mbwa'mwana ee baba*  
*Ee gose mboke gose mbwa'mwana ae baba-*  
*Gose mboke gose mbwa'mwana.*

*Mokenene okaranda okaribia enchera naregoeta*  
*Inkai ngochia inkai inkorong x2*  
*Ee inkai ngoronga ee baba,*  
*Inkai ngochia inkai inkorong ee baba!*  
*Inkai ngochia inkai inkorong x2*

*Inkai ngoronga ng'ende korora nyandegemira  
Nyandegemira etari mobuko x2  
Ee etari mobuko ee babaa-  
Nyandegemira etari mobuko ee baba,  
Nyandegemira etari mobuko nyandegemira etari mobuko.*

*Mokungu o'isiko moino kae bosibori ensi yaye nero bosibori  
agosera x2  
Ee agosera ee baba  
Nero yoka abwate agosera ee baba-  
Nero bosibori agosera nero yoka abwate agosera.*

*Mong'ererie rotambe nduseri abanto baito roche orweng'e  
nenkegu rwaereire x2  
Ee rwaereire ee babaa...  
Orweng'e nenkegu rwaereire ee baba-  
Orweng'e nenkegu rwaereire orweng'e nenkegu rwaereire.*

#### **A FOOTLOOSE WANDERING WOMAN**

A footloose wandering woman where does she know it has  
been cooked if it's little or it's the baby's x2  
Ee it's for the baby ee mother  
Ee if it's little or for the baby ee mother-  
If it's for little or the baby.

Mokenene spread and closed the way I was using  
Where can I go where can I pass through? x2  
Ee, where can I pass through ee mother?  
Where can I go or pass through ee mother?  
Where can I go where can I pass through?

Where can I pass I go to see Nyandegemira?  
Nyandegemira that is not in my bag x2  
Ee, that is not in my bag ee mother-  
Nyandegemira that is not in my bag ee mother,  
Nyandegemira that is not in my bag Nyandegemira that is  
not in my bag

The outsider woman give Bosibori her grinding stone -it's  
the one Bosibori grinds with x2  
Ee grinds with ee mother  
It's the only one she has for grinding ee mother-  
It's the one Bosibori grinds with x2 Pass me the longest I  
pull our people from the river for the short one has  
reached the bank x2  
Ee has only reached ee mother,  
Short one only reached the river bank ee mother,  
The short one has reached the river bank x2

The song initially was about a woman who used to move  
around in other people's houses, eating whatever she  
found there. The first part of the song was warning her of  
such behaviour for she never knew how the food was  
prepared or for whom it was cooked and where it was  
prepared – maybe it was little or just meant for a baby. This  
is the surface meaning.

The more profound sense according to SIR-1 was that this  
woman, as she went from house to house may encounter  
that which was not meant for her. Maybe, she might land in  
the house occupants' in the middle of secret issues, or  
witchcraft dealings or laying of traps – and if so, she will  
not be let to come out of such a house alive – thus leading  
her into deeper trouble. The song was adopted for  
mourning session where, due to the fear of the mention of  
death, the unwelcome wandering woman – was a  
euphemism for death – that was always unwelcome. The  
bitter relations who sung this song were warning death  
that one day it will not be business as usual and may  
encounter trouble. Most deaths were believed to have  
been brought about not by natural causes but the hand of  
human beings, the witches – thus a warning to them that  
their habit will one day be hazardous to them. At another  
point, the effect of death is lamented. That it has spread its  
fangs and closed all hope in life; the promise of a better  
future is no more for death has taken the one who could  
assure that future.

The above song is a combination of different extracts of other songs which shows the creativity of mourners. One of the stanzas as illustrated below is taken from a work song, but the meaning has been fitted on this particular occasion. In performing work songs, the performers could castigate the tendency of borrowing a neighbour's property or item for a long time without returning it. A thing once borrowed was supposed to be returned to the owner for use. The next song illustrates this.

**Omokungu o'isiko moino**

Omokungu oisiko moino  
Kae Bosibori Ensio yaye  
Omokungu Oisiko moino  
Kae Bosibori Ensio yaye  
Kae bosibori ensio yaye  
Nero akona goseramwaye  
Omaiya Omaiya Omaiya  
Chingero Bonyangero

**(Woman of the neighbourhood)**

Woman of the neighbourhood  
Return to Bosibori Her grinding stone  
Woman of the Neighbourhood  
Return to Bosibori her grinding stone.x2  
It is the one she uses to grind in her house  
O' perfect person, O Perfect person O' perfect person  
Songs and songs

The above song, besides motivating the workers to perform their work flawlessly, communicated an additional message about the Abagusii community and their material relations. Repetition played a vital role in delivering the intended message in work songs. Various themes were expressed in performing work songs. In such songs, ambiguity was avoided to achieve accuracy in communication.

This song was adapted for the funeral occasion where death is equated to the woman of the neighbourhood who takes the ensio- the one dead now but here without any intention of ever returning him/her back. Here ambiguity is used, and straightforwardness is avoided for politeness and the fear of mentioning the reality.

**SONG E.**

**NYAGECHENCHE.**

Nyagechenche, yalire amagoro ane yakorire x2  
Baaba one , otakorigia rigu onduserie x2  
Taata one otakorigia epini monyiye x2

Yabekire ekerebi, ekong'a nyamagoro matambex2  
Imote igoro ekorara 'kong'a nyamagoro matambex2  
Ekero ogonche asirete, okaanka gokura x2

Moka'Ogonche, Moraa moka'Ogonche x2  
Ere agakana Moraa inche tingorusia ekerebi  
Kiane, kerokio, inche tingorusia  
Ere agakana Moraa inche tingochanua etuki  
yane , ero inche tingochanua,  
Moraa moka'Ogonche, Moraa moka'Ogonche x2  
Ekero Ogonche asirete , Okaanka gokura x2

Oyio i'Mogotu Mogotu moka Tebiti ee x2  
Aimoki omoro Mogotu buna omosacha ee x2  
Agenda ekonda mogotu buna omosacha ee x2  
Ning'o gokani baba x2 tiga kondoka omobariri  
Sabera omobere obarire, nchoke nyamoburera x2

**NYAGECHENCHE/THE JIGGER**

The jigger has wholly devoured my feet x2

My daughter, look for a thorn you remove it x2  
My son look for a pin you extract it x2

Has worn a scarf, the long-legged crown crane x2  
Sleeps up on the tree, the long-legged crown crane x2  
When Ogonche died, you refused to wail.

Ogonche's wife, Moraa, Ogonche's wife x2  
She refused I Moraa cannot take off my headscarf  
This my headscarf I cannot remove  
She refused Moraa I cannot shave my hair  
That I cannot climb,  
Moraa, Ogonche's wife, Ogonche's wife x2  
When Ogonche died, you refused to wail x2

That is Mogotu, Mogotu David's wife ee x2  
She picks a panga, Mogotu like a man ee x2  
She goes for casual jobs like a man ee x2  
Who will correct my daughter x2 don't call me the red one.  
Pray the body becomes angry; I streamline nyamoburera  
(the stubborn wayward) x2

In the song, death is equated to the jigger that has devoured one's feet. The song through metaphors shows that death has struck more than once in the bereaved family and they are seeking help to stop its fangs. The song also depicts a widowed woman doing various manly tasks because the husband is not there.

When a family was faced with multiple deaths, one following another, it was a case for concern, and the relatives plus elders came together and offered sacrifices and libations to seek divine intervention to end the misfortunes. This is such a time this dirge was performed.

The song brings out the social issue of loose morals of a woman whose husband has died. The mother-in-law is lamenting that the woman has started being promiscuous and she has vowed not to relent/listen and cannot be controlled. The message here is that young widows sometimes start being immoral and like their state and that

is why they cannot cry, and since the man is dead, he can no longer control them.

Maoncha and Ndambuki (2017) argues that "if a man dies and the widow is young, the process among Abagusii was for one to remove her headscarf, be clean shaven and wear clothes inside out- what was called 'gokobania'. Then at an appropriate moment, the elders after the mourning period selected another man to act as caretaker and mainly ensure the continuity of the dead man's family through procreation. The widow was expected to receive and welcome such a man, who was usually either a cousin or a brother to the dead man. Refusal to accommodate such a practice was brought the fear that the woman will become loose and uncontrolled hence move with any man in the community. This was the fear of the in-laws especially the mother-in-law for it could bring shame to the family and there was a possibility of the woman getting pregnant from undefined sources hence contaminate the family with 'foreign blood'. Towards the end, the mother is sending a stern warning that nobody should come on her way when she decides to correct and streamline this daughter in – law".

The role of the man is underscored here; to hold the family together and be the head to control the woman. In the last stanza, there is a lament about 'Mogotu', a widow in this case who must now do the manly tasks. As one respondent in Maoncha (2015:155) notes:

*"Naende ogotera oko nigo kore igoro yomoichano ase ogosira kwa omosacha bwomochie obeire kagotiga maega omokungu otari na omokia naende otaekorere egasi yaye. Bono obeire otari gotebigwa kende nonde bwensi obeire omonyaka na gwoonchokera abasacha babande erinde bamoe eki atagete. Oyo bono tanga buna mogotu oyo ogwekorera kera egentu buna omosacha nonya mogaka oye taiyo. The song is lamenting on the death of the man who now leaves behind a lazy woman who cannot work*

and provide for herself but becomes defiant, loose and uncontrollable to hook others' men to provide for her. She is contrasted with "Mogotu" who does everything for herself like a man."

### Conclusion

Death is a universal norm. In all societies and cultures, death is seen as painful, and it is usually fear that makes it unnameable in many situations. Many people not only shy away from the stark word of the norm of death, saying more euphemized words instead but also they say that someone has 'passed away', 'departed his life' among others instead of saying directly 'he has died'. Sometimes, people resort to specific phrases and collocations like 'kicked the bucket'. Also, in English, a 'dead' person is referred to indirectly as the 'lost', the 'deceased', the 'departed'. Likewise, 'death' itself is more obscurely referred to by generalized terms and a title like 'end', 'decease', 'passing', and 'departure'. Such soft-boiled expressions and phrases are used to downgrade and belittle the fear which is aroused by the event of death.

Similarly, the results of the present study make it crystal clear that the term *okure* 'has died' is frequently avoided by most speakers and singers when referring to death. Instead, they speak of it euphemistically as *ochire* (has gone), *otimokire* (has rested) and others.

From the collected dirges, it appears that the thematic concerns other than mourning also focus on tolerance, love, morality, justice, injustice, adherence to the traditional network of social relations and hard work. The dirge, just like other types of songs and is a vessel for airing the inner feelings of the community's aspirations and expectations, which it recorded and then passed from one generation to another as cultural heritage.

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