
**THE DOMINATION OF MALE GENDER IN BURIAL RITUAL PERFORMANCE AMONG THE
ACHOLI PEOPLE IN GULU DISTRICT.**

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ABSTRACT

This study was to examine the domination of male gender in burial ritual performance among the Acholi people in Gulu district. The study specifically looked at the various forms of burial practices among the Acholi, the role of men in the burial ritual performance among the Acholi people in Gulu district and the reason why men dominate the burial ritual practices among the Acholi. The researcher adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey designed where quantitative and qualitative data are collected from the sample selected and generalized. The research indicated various forms of burial practices among the Acholi people among the key finding was that when the person dies of a disease classified as gemo (bad spirit), then the burial practices change. The body is not touched and is buried outside or at the edge of the village. It was also found out that the burial of child takes the following forms; normal child who dies natural death, say diseases; burials of abnormal child (rubanmga); burial of twins odoch (Ojok) and the burial of a child who dies of (two gemo) like measles and others. The research also established that the first born child takes different burial style for example the first born children buried while seated in the grave with the leave of fig tree (pot pwoyo). A chief (won bul) is buried with a sack of cattle hide. The key findings revealed that major roles of men in burial practices among the Acholi people include digging of graves carrying the dead bodies washing dead bodies, leading prayers, making shelters for the mourners and killing animals for cleaning ritual, mainly because men are traditionally considered traditionally superior to women. It was there for concluded that the concept of decent burial is simultaneously being understood and practiced however there are indeed many changes among the Acholi people where the LRA war has led to loss of lives of so many people.

Key words: domination, male, gender, burial ritual and performance

Background to the study

Most farming was carried out by women and children, the men doing the heavy work of clearing and preparing the land. Male youths spent most of their time in such occupations as tending herds, hunting, and fighting, while their elders ran the homestead and carried out political organizing (Godfrey et al., 2023). Land was plentiful, so families would occupy as much as they could cultivate, the limiting factor being labour (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022). This was a society in which age-based power relations predominated (Harris 2012a). Older men held political power, including control over access to land. Older women had considerable say within the household and

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polygynous wives ran their own mini-households within the larger ones managed by their husbands (Oromo et al., 2023).

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In many war affected areas, like Luwero and western Uganda, the Ugandan government has erected monuments for mass graves (Ninsiima et al., 2023). But burials in the north remain a local affair, carried out for purely cultural reasons and without any help from central government. Some analysts fear that the lack of documentation of the deaths means the full effect of the war on the lives of the people in the north are excluded from the war history of Uganda (Kazaara et al., 2023).

Statement of the problem.

Traditionally Acholi beliefs that the spirits of the dead can return to haunt the living. It is believed that this is particularly true for those involved in violent deaths (Zulaikah & Rebecca, 2023). In 2006 when the people of the northern Uganda stated resettling to their original homes many formerly displaced persons were afraid of returning to their villages, which they believed to be haunted. Therefore the dead bodies of those who were killed in the bush by the LRA rebels are gathered and their memories honored with formal burials (Vincent & Peter, 2023). But as it has been the tradition, the burial rituals are mostly performed by men and women take little roles in the rituals. Among the Acholi people, the dead bodies are buried directly in the earth, without the use of a coffin, and the top of the grave is smeared with mud (lander, 2000). The burial practices among the Acholi people are suffering deviation because of the modern system of burial introduced in Africa by the western cultural civilization for instance church burial where prayers are lead. For instance in the burial of chief of Patiko who died in year 2017, prayers were conducted. This shows total deviation. What began as a physical problem has given rise to novel spiritual rituals among many the Acholi people. It is against this stated problem that the researcher is prompted to examine the domination of male gender in burial ritual performance among the Acholi people in Gulu district.

Specific objectives

1. To find out the various burial ritual practices performed by the Acholi people in Gulu district.
2. Find out the role of men in the burial performance among the Acholi people in Gulu district
3. To investigate the reasons why men dominate the burial ritual practices among the Acholi people

Methodology

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Study design

This study was conducted through a survey design, where the researcher investigates the population of northern Uganda by selecting samples to discover and analyze the traditional burial practices among the Acholi people. This was made possible with the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. To validate these findings, the study will be compared with other ideas in the literature review.

Sample size

The study targeted 90 respondents in total. The categories of respondents will include 04 chiefs (Rwodi moo), 10 elders, and 26 community development workers. They were selected using the simple random sampling techniques, such that each individual gets an equal chance of being chosen and this ensured representatives and prevents unnecessary biases associated with other sampling methods.

Table 1 Categories of respondents

SN	Category of respondent	Number of samples	Data collection method
1.	Chiefs (Rwodi moo)	04	Interview
2.	Elders	10	Interview
3.	Community development works	26	Questionnaires
4.	Total	40	

Source: Researchers samples used (2022)

Sampling procedure

The researcher used simple random technique for selection of the respondents to avoid wastage of time within which this study was conducted and ensured that each member of the target population had an equal chance of being included in the sample. Purposive sampling was applied in the selection of community leaders who consisted of the local council elders, community development workers and other opinion within the selected districts in Acholi sub-region.

Data collection methods

Questionnaire method

In this method, the researcher develops questions and provide answer spaces for the respondents to fill. Respondent's tick the best alternatives from objective questions and also write down their opinions in the open-ended options. The questionnaire is designed for community development workers. This method is so as to collect vast information on the study topic.

Data analysis

Upon completion of data collection exercise, data clearing and processioning followed; this process involves tabulating, editing and coding all research instruments administered to various respondents according to the major themes using SPSS (Nelson et al., 2022). The aim is to identify any inconsistency that could have aroused during data collection by editing and checking for uniformity, accuracy and comprehensiveness. Qualitative data obtained through observation are presented using content analysis. This also include the use of tables and direct quotations of the respondents to validate the study. The researcher tried to eliminate the likely barriers of the study. Finally the data are entered into the tables and interpretation of row data into percentages done and matched with table of response of questionnaires from selectee respondents.

RESULTS

Forms of traditional burial practices of the Acholi

After one / two years his spirit was said to be called back home to bless the people (my own observations adongRofina) from the burial of the late opera Charles the son of Oboyi Justo in kitgum district . The man died in the bush in Muswini sub country and found after long time. The grave is covered with thrones after burial.

Men who are "jokes are first buried a normal burial and later unearth and reburied around shrine (Abila) with in the homestead .on removing from the grave their bones are collected in a pot and taken into shrine. A man killed by lightening s buried around the well just like any body say a child or even a woman . burial at the water source is because the Acholi believe that lightening dwells in water and they should take back the one killed by it (lightening). A man who died of swelling body (akwoda-akwoda) is brought out through the dug hole on the wall of the house for burial : he is then buried with head of the sheep (Bronica AtooGulu Payira Chiefdom). A man who is intentionally killed by some clan member is first compensated (culukwor) then buried . in Latanga sub country Pader district where a man named Olum Charles a clan of Patogo was killed by banya Kenneth a clan of OriangePudye was buried in this manner. The clan of the deceased raided the victims clan and were paid ransom "kwor" of 3000,000 (three million shillings only) and the sport with all other expenses .

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The deceased was then buried the same manners as that of those who died with all other expenses. The deceased was then buried the same manner as that of those who died a wild death (my own observation).

Burial of women

One of the respondents stated that women are buried on the left hand side of the dwelling house. This is especially the kitchen side and the grinding stone side. They are buried side lying facing outside house while unmarried women was said to be buried outside homestead to prevent the unmarried spirit from befalling other girls in the family (okenywodlamwo). Like akawota and buried the same way men and children are buried as already explained in last chapters. Anybody (women) who commits suicide is first beaten and buried outside, the living compound (my Own observation).

Burial of royal people

“A chief (won bul) is buried with a sac of the cattle. this is when the cattle is killed and flash is removed and it remains as such as such and the chief is push in it as the coffin . This is only done to the chief other than the royal family members “(George William lugai pajule chief pader). When the chief it’s only the royal people to carry the dead body to the grave while other people remains behind . for instance in ngakidi chiefdom according to Rwot” opobo the palabek are to bury the royal in this chiefdom and do the rwotajao ii of paibwore pader district . this people from palaek chiefdom are the only special people do such a job .

Royal people are buried with leopard skin (laakwach) or the leopard toes (lwetkwach) this is put around the head side in the grave in some circumstance they are also buried with golden ling brown in colour (molamakwar) and “bur jok” tiko ma tar “ (while oval beat)(bironica atto, attogulupayira). A small hole is dug within the grave and the body is placed in that hole and buried . The chiefs are also said to be buried with food item and drinks because hey Acholi buried with their beloved wife or son (peter tukopekitgum town council). Rwotlugai noted that Bwala dance is performed in some burial of the royal people but not call chiefdom (nyimoi) and had put the head of a human being from the clan in the bull , so such a bull need to be or kept carried with care so that the skull should not bank othe side of the bull if it did so the calamities will befall that clan/ chiefdom . Hence bwolacannot be performed in a burial of such royal people “. On the other hand other chiefdom which came into being through inheritances and the paramount chiefdom like payira , bwola dance is performed in the burial . Acholi tactical movement accompanied with wer (song) is also done when taking the dead body in the grave . this is to signify that if the mother of death could be seen they would fight her to death. And there is a song by Acholi that too onekolayomcwing kanoanongo min tookonaoalwenyolweny too) (nyeko rehard akia secretary of rwot akio 11 payibwone

Reasons for the burial practices

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Children like the “joks” odoch” Opio are buried with small pots for easy unearthing during transfer to the lives on shines burial round shine is for the worship of family or clan members this is because the Acholi consult the spirit off those diseased at the time of misfortune calamities sickness at the shine or Okango “

The normally give sacrifices to them to appease them so that they way get blessing fertility ,and good harvest . also the transfer of opio / oden at the water is to enable spirit join their fellow spirit which is believed to dwell award water side .

Putting fig tree leave when burying the first born is to show his /her wide responsibilities in the family and the clan as a whole as compared to the wide size of the fig (pwoyo?) burial of children mere closer to the living house and enclosed by other grace of adult signifies needs for Protection by the adult spirit in their next world. Women are buried in the left hand side of the house the kitchen grinding stone side to show that they are always coking and grading even when she is dead . passing the deceased through the broken part of the house because in case of any problem at home the face it but women face outside house because they are brought from out and don’t stand firm in time of problem instead leave or turn the back. Those who died wild death are brought back and put inside the granny lead (wider) to show that home is a family member for descent burial they are not entered in the house to keep the kind of death away from re happening

Table 1 the role of men in the burial ritual performance among the Acholi people in Gulu district.

responses	Frequency	percentage
Digging of grave	12	30
Carrying the dead bodies	10	25
Burying the dead bodies	08	20
Washing the dead bodies	03	7.5
Leading prayers	03	7.5
Making shelters for the mourners	02	05
Killing animals for cleansing rituals	02	05
Total	40	100

Source: primary data (2022)

The table 1 above indicates that the major roles of men in the burial practices among the Acholi people include digging of graves accounting for 30% of the total responses carrying the dead bodies 25%burying the dead bodies 20% washing the dead bodies 7.5% ,leading prayers 7.5% making shelters for the mourners 5% and killing animals for cleansing rituals accounting for 5% of the responses.

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Table 2 the reasons why men dominate the burial practices among the Acholi people

Responses	Frequency	percentage
Because men are believed to be more superior than women	14	35
Because women are considered to be weaker sex in Acholi community	12	30
Men have more physical strength than the women	08	20
Men are strong hearted women	06	15
Total	40	100

Source: primary data (2022)

The table 2 above shows that men dominate most of the burial practices because men are believed to be more superior than women accounting for 35% of the responses because women are considered to be weaker sex in Acholi community 30 % men have more physical strength than women 20% and because men are strong hearted women are considered to be weaker sex in Acholi community 30% men have more physical strength than women 20% and because men are strong hearted women accounting for 15% of the responses.

Challenges of the burial practices of the Acholi.

In an in depth interview with one of the respondents he was quoted saying our burial practices are very expensive in terms of the ritual requirement . for instance buying sheep currently it can take around one hundred fifty thousand Uganda shilling which a common man like me find it difficult to get and added that ,” buying of coffin is expensive , even leopard skin”. Rwottlugai showed fear that “it can easily cause other misfortunes if the rituals are not fully followed / conducted. for instance when the grave is covered with odweng “ a certain tree branches it shows that the person who had caused death should face the consequence of the death and the spirit should follow him or her so when such suspected is not one it re bounces back to the family “ and it the performance of the ritual process or target is misfired say they did not sprinkle the cuds covers into grave before burial the death will reoccur.

Ways of improving on the burial practices of Acholi people

As suggested by some of the respondents Acholi should try to unify their burial system to be the same in all the clans all over Acholi sub-region.it was also suggested that Acholi should incorporate positive changes in their burial practices such as the use of coffin, prayers and exclude other extreme practices of burying the death like the laying with material possession such as drinks food item, beloved wife because it is a waste of resources and violation of

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human right to life. However, Oketa from Gulu says that the remains are buried where they are found: villagers willingly give up their land for burial without asking for compensation as most people are eager to get rid of the remain which they believe bring them bad spirits. he says there are a few cases where families have been able to identify the remains of their relatives and in these cases they are allowed to take them. two years ago, Wilson Ojerakali, a farmer in Labongo in Kitgum district returned home to find a human skeleton next to his well it was a painful sight he said I had to abandon the well and dig a new one, which is far away from where I found the remain

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study of the traditional burial practices among the Acholi people aimed to consider certain aspects of the challenges that faced in the traditional burial practices and suggest some improvements which could be beneficial for the entire Acholi people and strengthen their burial practices. This is because as the concept of decent burial is simultaneously being understood and practiced, there are indeed many challenges among the Acholi people where the LRA war has led to loss of lives of so many people. The experiences got from this research must therefore inform and guide the policy as we strive to improve and preserve cultural practices in Uganda.

Recommendations

This research finding highlights specific challenges faced by Acholi in their burial practices. Based on these findings, the researcher made an effort to make recommendations for improving the burial practices among the Acholi people. The main recommendations include the following:

The researcher suggested that the Acholi should incorporate positive changes in their burial practices such as the use of coffin, prayers and exclude other extreme practices of burning the death like the laying with material possession such as drinks food items beloved wife because it is a waste of resources and violation of human rights to life

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