

Religious Experiences of Life After Death in Buha and Unyamwezi Cosmologies, Western Tanzania

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Ideas of life after death dominate African religious practices in the societies. The people of Buha and Unyamwezi in Western Tanzania maintained the relationship with the departed ancestors to address issues arising from the living members of the family, clan and the society at large. With exception of theologians and cultural anthropologists, ideas on life after death have not attracted attention of African historians. In this paper I envisage the ideas of life after death from a historical perspective using Buha and Unyamwezi as illustrative cases. I argue that issues of life after death are historically grounded and involve the interplay of natural and human-induced forces. This study relies on both archival and oral sources that I collected between 2011 and 2012. I employ a comparative approach to provide an account of how issues on life after death have had impacts on the lives of the people in Western Tanzania.

Keywords: life after death, Buha, Unyamwezi

Introduction

The concept of life after death is central to African religious practices in Buha and Unyamwezi. Like other African societies, the Baha, Banyamwezi and Kimbu maintain relationships with their departed ancestors in order to address issues arising for the living members of their families, clans and society. Traditionally, the Baha, Kimbu and Banyamwezi buried the deceased along with some possessions and other necessary items which included clothes, ornaments, drinks and food to accompany a person to the new life. Deceased elderly men and women are very often buried near their homesteads in the hope that they will continue to exercise their roles in their families. Kings, chiefs, and royal subordinates had designated areas for royal burials and were said to intervene in the affairs of their former kingdoms or chiefdoms.

The concept of life after death in Christianity falls under the doctrine of eschatology. Eschatology is a branch of theology (dogmatic theology) that deals with the doctrines of the end of things (*eschata*) or a belief about the last things.¹ Prophetic books of Amos, Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Zephaniah and Joel provide

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¹ Joseph Pohle, *Eschatology or the Catholic Doctrine of the Last Things: A Dogmatic Treatise* (St. Louis, Mo and London: B. Herder Book Co: 1917), p. 1, Johan Auer and Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, translated by Michael Waldstein and edited by Aidan Nichols, O. P. (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1988), pp. 165-238, Paul J. Griffiths, "Nivana as the Last Thing? The Iconic End of the Narrative Imagination" edited by James Buckley and L. Gregory Jones, *Theology and Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), p. 18, Paul S. Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology in the Theology and Literature* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 23, Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), pp. 21, 53, Mary Fairchild, "What is Eschatology?" in <http://christianity.about.com/od/faqhelpdesk/a/eschatology.htm>, retrieved on 12/29/2013; <http://www.credoreference.com/topic.do?uh=eschatology>, retrieved on 12/29/2013.

common prophecies about “the day of the Lord”, “on that day”, “in the latter days” and on “the day of judgment” when Yahweh would punish the evil and vindicate his faithful remnants. The prophetic books of Amos, Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Joel emphasize that on the last day Yahweh will punish the evil and vindicate his faithful remnants. Conversely, the New Testament stresses the second coming of Jesus as a master of history.² Similarly, the doctrines of the Muslim Holy Qur’an stress the last day of *Allah*. Such a day is preceded by the reign of *Mahdi* (the redeemer of Islam). His rule will overlap with the second coming of Jesus (*Isa*) who, according to Islamic doctrines, will assist the *Mahdi* to fight against the false messiah [*Masih al-dajjal*], bringing everyone before God’s judgement.³

Christian theologians have identified several domains of eschatology in their attempt to illuminate issues of life after death. These include cosmic eschatology, individual eschatology, apocalyptic eschatology, present eschatology and future eschatology, to mention just a few.⁴ But on the whole, eschatology falls under two major domains: cosmic or universal and individual eschatology. Cosmic or universal eschatology deals with the final events in the history of the world and mankind as a whole, while individual eschatology is concerned with life after death and the destiny of individual soul or human being in the hereafter.⁵ Ideas of life after death have received substantial attention from theologians, social anthropologists, and a handful of historians who specialize in East Africa. These scholars including John Mbiti, Laurenti Magesa, Raphael G. Abrahams, and William Tripe, have provided theological and sociological perspectives of death and the hereafter.⁶ Only a few Africanist historians who look at Tanzania, such as, John Iliffe and Aylward Shorter, have some details about the subject in western Tanzania.⁷ Thus, we know little about life and death issues in the religious traditions of the people of Buha and Unyamwezi. Their voices have been muted in the existing scholarship, resulting in a lopsided historiography of issues of life after death in Africa.

My study employs a comparative approach to map the vast array of concepts of life after death that the Baha, Banyamwezi and Kimbu had before and after they came in contact with Christianity and Islam. I argue that views concerning life and death are historically grounded and involve the interplay of natural and human-induced forces. Archival sources used in this paper include primary materials I gathered from the University of Dar es Salaam’s main library, and the White Fathers Archives in Dar es Salaam and Tabora. I collected oral source

² Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), pp. 43-44, Jonathan A. Cook, *Inscrutable Malice: Theodicy, Eschatology and the Biblical Sources of Moby-Dick* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), p. 17, Paul S. Fiddes, *The Promised End*, pp. 23-24, Arland J. Hultgren, “Eschatology in the New Testament: The Current Debate” edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), p. 115.

³ Grant R. Shafer, “Al-Ghayb Wa Al-’Alkhirah: Heaven, Hell and Eternity in the Qur’an” edited by J. Harold Ellens. *Heaven, Hell and the Afterlife: Eternity in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Volume 3* (Santa Barbara, Denver and Oxford: Praeger, 2013), pp. 23-24.

⁴ Arland J. Hultgren, *Eschatology in the New Testament*, p. 67.

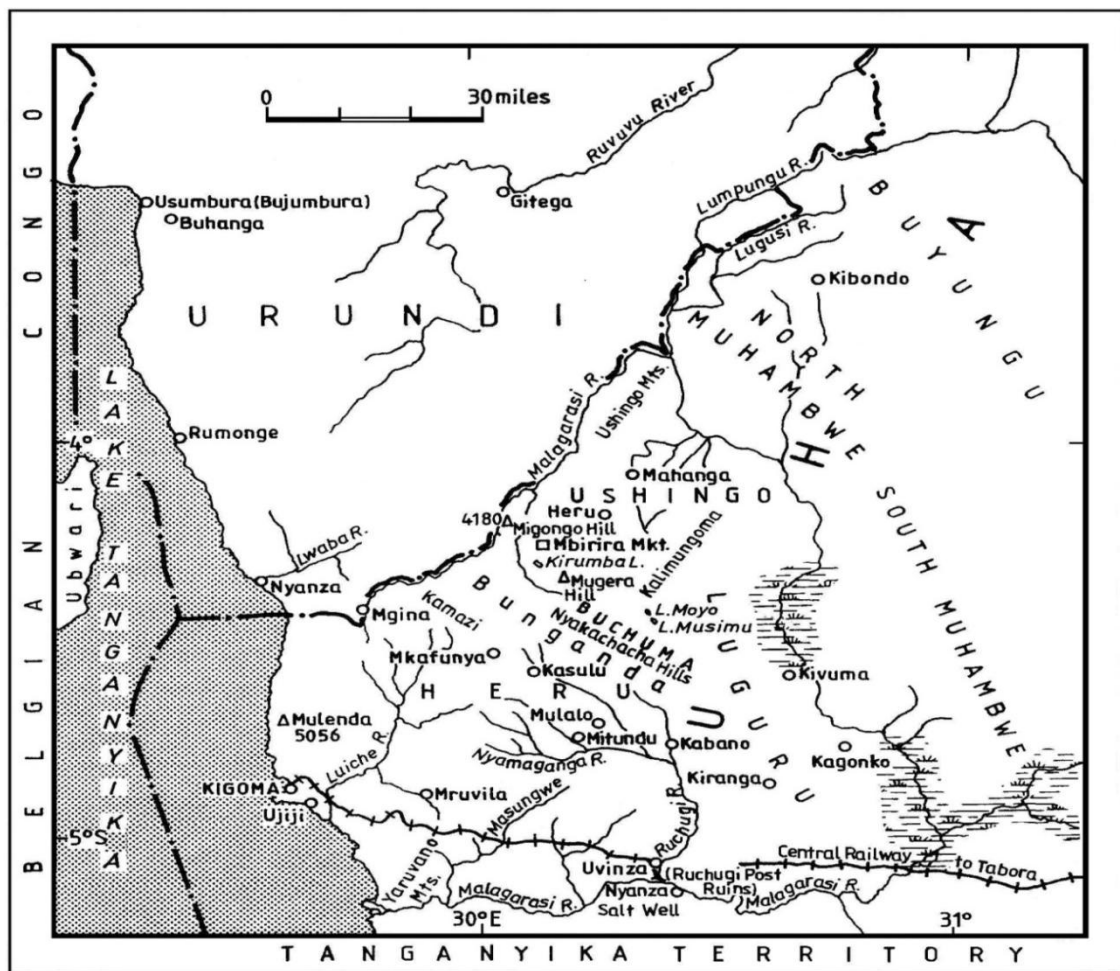
⁵ Paul Griffiths, Nivana, p. 18, Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Task of Christian Eschatology” edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *The Last Things*, p. 11, D. Bruce Dickson, Jeffrey Olsen, P. Fred Dahm and Mitchell S. Wachtel, “Where Do You Go When You Die? A Cross-Cultural Test of the Hypothesis that Infrastructure Predicts Individual Eschatology”, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 61, 1 (2005), p. 55.

⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann International, 1990), pp. 4-5, *Concepts of God in Africa* (New York and Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1970), pp. 253-268, *Introduction to African Religion* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1991), pp. 116-128, Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), pp. 154-159, Raphael G. Abrahams, *The Peoples of Greater Unyamwezi, Tanzania (Nyamwezi, Sukuma, Sumbwa, Kimbu, Konongo)* (London: International African Institute, 1967), pp. 75-77, William B. Tripe, “Death and Replacement of a Divine King of Uha”, *Man*, 39 (1939), pp. 22-23.

⁷ John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 28, Aylward Shorter, *Chiefship in Western Tanzania: A Political History of the Kimbu* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 107-108.

materials in various towns and villages in Buha and Unyamwezi. This process involved a series of interviews that I conducted with old men and women, Christians, Muslims and practitioners of African religions.

Buha, in this study, refers to a region in the present day Kigoma administrative region. The majority inhabitants of Buha were and are still the Ha/Baha ethnic group. Kigoma region has six administrative districts, namely Buhigwe, Manyovu, Kakonko, Kibondo, Kasulu, and Uvinza. According to the 2012 national census, the region had a population of 2,127,930.⁸ Unyamwezi refers to a region in the current Tabora administrative region with the Banyamwezi/Nyamwezi as the dominant ethnic group. Other smaller ethnic groups inhabiting Unyamwezi territory include Konongo, Sumbwa, and Kimbu.⁹ Tabora region is administratively divided into seven districts: Igunga, Kaliua, Nzega, Sikonge, Tabora Municipal, Urambo, and Uyui. According to the 2012 national census, the region had a total population of 2,291,623.¹⁰ Both Buha and Unyamwezi form large part of what is currently known as Western Tanzania.



Map 1. Buha in Western Tanzania.

Source: Captain C. H. B. Grant, "Uha in Tanganyika Territory", 1925: 413.

⁸ Captain C. H. B. Grant, "Uha in Tanganyika Territory", *The Geographical Journal*, 66, 5 (1925), p. 411, United Republic of Tanzania (URT), *2012 Population and Housing Census: Population Distribution by Administrative Areas* (Dar es Salaam: National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance, March, 2013), p. 2.

⁹ Raphael Garvin Abrahams, *The Peoples*, pp. 12-13, *The Political Organisation of Unyamwezi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 1-8, Aylward Shorter, *Chiefship*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰ United Republic of Tanzania (URT), *2012 Population and Housing Census*, p. 2.



Map 2. Greater Unyamwezi in Western Tanzania.

Source: Modified from Raphael G. Abrahams, *The Peoples of Greater Unyamwezi, Tanzania*, 1967.

Historiography of Religion in Tanzania

Historiography of religion in Tanzania has changed over many decades in response to the social contexts of the colonial and post-colonial periods. Throughout the colonial period, explorers, missionaries, anthropologists and Muslims described Africans' religious practices as "primitive", "heathenish", "idolatrous", "fetishist", and "forms of paganism" to mention just a few.¹¹ The attacks on African religious practices

¹¹ See for instance, Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Akan, Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo and Kindred Peoples* (London: The Epworth Press, 1961), pp. 8-10, Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 12, Walter Angus Elmslie, *Among the Wild Ngoni: Being Some Chapters in the History of the Livingstonia Mission in British Central Africa* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, Second Edition, 1901), p. 7, John H. Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1864), p. xvii, Angetile Yesaya Musomba, *The Moravian Church in Tanzania Southern Province: A Short History* (Nairobi: IFRA, 2005), pp. 10-11, Oswald Masebo, "An Overview of the Historiography of Religion and State in Post-Colonial Tanzania, 1960s to the Present" edited by Thomas J. Ndaluka and Frans Wijzen, *Religion and State Revisited: Reflection from Fifty Years of Independence* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2014), p. 6.

persisted until the 1970s, with a few African scholars challenging African religions. For instance, Okotp' Bitek criticized African nationalists and theologians for "hellenizing" African deities and failing to present African religions on the basis of African thought systems.¹² The other critique was raised by Jan Platvoet and Henk van Rinsum against liberal theologians who claimed all humans to be naturally religious.¹³ But, both liberal theologians and nationalists propagated the invention of tradition theory.¹⁴

The invention of tradition theory became popular in the 1980s following the publication of Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm's edited work. Its contributors used the term to refer to particular traditions and identities that were invented, constructed and officially instituted to establish continuities in the past.¹⁵ Hence, the claim that Africans are "incurably religious" was interpreted as a post-colonial counter-invention against pre-colonial and colonial inventions of Africa's image.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the invention of tradition theory is also problematic. Both colonial and some post-colonial scholars, including Jan Platvoet, Henk van Rinsum and p'Bitek, built arguments and counter arguments that were supported by racist intellectual viewpoints. Their criticism against African religions seems to maintain colonial historiography that has fallen out of favour because of its blatant racism.

The independence of Tanganyika in 1961 stimulated the development of a nationalist historiography. Works by Isaria Kimambo, Cuthbert Omari, Israel Katoke, and Steven Feierman among others, demonstrated the centrality of African religious beliefs and practices in enhancing state formation in pre-colonial Tanzania.¹⁷ However, this nationalist historiography was later criticized by the dependency and materialist schools of thought for its romantic emphasis on the African initiative. Consequently, works by Walter Rodney, Gershom Mishambi, Joseph Mbwiliza, Isaria Kimambo, and Karim Hirji studied religion in relation to the capitalist system and its impact on Tanzanian societies.¹⁸ But the materialist school lasted only until end of the 1980s. Since the 1990s, Pentecostal healing ministries in Tanzania have attracted scholarly attention as a new field of inquiry. This new field of research provides an avenue to study the complex relationships between African and

¹² Okotp' Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Kampala, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam: East African Literature Bureau, 1970), pp. 47, 80.

¹³ Jan Platvoet and Henk van Rinsum, "Is Africa Incurably Religious? Confession and Contesting an Invention", *Exchange*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2003), pp. 123,128.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 132-133.

¹⁵ Erick Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Tradition" and Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa" Edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne and Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-14, 211-262.

¹⁶ Jan Platvoet and Henk van Rinsum, *Is Africa Incurably Religious?* p. 135.

¹⁷ Isaria N. Kimambo, *A Political History of the Pare of Tanzania, c.1500-1900* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969), pp. 47-52, Oswald Masebo, "An Overview, p. 8, Isaria N. Kimambo and Cuthbert C. Omari, "The Development of Religious Thought and Centres among the Pare" edited by Terence O. Ranger and Isaria N. Kimambo, *The Historical Study of African Religion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972, Reprinted in 1974), pp. 119-120, Israel Katoke, *The Making of the Karagwe Kingdom: Tanzanian History from Oral Traditions* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, Historical Association of Tanzania, Paper No. 8, 1973), pp. 15-19, Steven Feierman, *The Shambaa Kingdom: A History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), pp. 91-119.

¹⁸ Isaria N. Kimambo, *Three Decades of Production of Historical Knowledge at Dar es Salaam* (Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press, 1993), pp. 9-12, *Penetration and Protest in Tanzania: The Impact of the World Economy among the Pare 1860-1960* (London: James Currey, Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House and Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), pp. 61-63, Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1972), p. 277, G. T. Mishambi, "Colonialism and underdevelopment in Tanzania", *Tanzania Zamani*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1992), p. 25, Joseph F. Mbwiliza, "An Economic History of Rungwe District 1890-1962: Some Aspects of Social and Economic Change among the Nyakyusa" (University of Dar es Salaam: Unpublished MA dissertation, 1975), pp. 111-112, Karim F. Hirji, "Colonial Ideological Apparatuses in Tanganyika under the Germans" edited by Martin H. Y. Kaniki, *Tanzania under Colonial Rule* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1980), p. 192.

Christian religious practices.¹⁹

Conceptualizing Causes of Death in Buha and Unyamwezi Cosmologies

In their search for the possible causes of death, the Baha and Banyamwezi came up with four different explanations of death. The first was that death could have a natural cause. In both Buha and Unyamwezi, it was widely known that death could be caused by natural means such as diseases, curse, natural calamities, and an old age. Death at an old age was, according to Laurenti Magesa, Simon Bockie, and Jean Ntahoturi, “natural” and “a proof of having lived morally” and was generally attributable to the favor of God.²⁰ In Buha, God (*imana*) was believed to curse a person. It was common to use God’s name to curse another person saying *ulagahumigwan’imana* “May *imana* give you stroke” “May you be cursed by *imana*” or *urokichwan’imana* “You will be killed by *imana*”.²¹ Likewise, in Unyamwezi, God (*liwelelo*, *linyangasa*, *weyi*, *limietc*) was associated with mysterious deaths as they would say *lyatulekabuyaga* or *lyatulekamugiti* (God has left us in ignorance, He has left us in the darkness).²²

Besides natural causes, death was also caused by sorcery or witchcraft. In both Unyamwezi and Buha, the occurrence of unexpected death prompted members of the household to consult diviners and fortune tellers (*mfumu*, pl. *bafumu*, *nyamulagurapl.banyamulagura*) about the killer [sorcerer] (*mulogi*, pl. *balogi*, *umulozipl.abalozzi*). Belief in sorcery (*ubulozi*) dominated Baha’s cosmology, so that everything including shortage of rainfall, failure of crops, diseases and malignant forces were suspected to be caused by *balozzi*. Even a death of an old person was often attributed to sorcery, as amplified in the local proverb, “*ntawufaatarozwe-nobody dies without being bewitched*”.²³ In both Buha and Unyamwezi, convicted sorcerers were killed, their houses and all the properties, such as cattle, were killed while crops at home and in the field were set on fire. Sometimes a suspect immediately deserted his or her homestead before villagers took action.²⁴

Finally, death in Buha and Unyamwezi was attributable to nature and ancestral spirits. Even though the Baha and Banyamwezi believed in the existence of the High God, they still believed in the existence of other forces whose status lay in between the people and the Supreme Being. These forces included ancestral spirits

¹⁹ Among the works that have paid attention on disease causation, spiritual healing and spirit possession include: Paivi Hasu, “Prosperity Gospels and Enchanted Worldviews: Two Responses to Scio-economic transformation in Tanzanian Pentecostal Christianity” Edited by *Dena Freeman, Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2012), Katharina Wilkens, *Holy Water and Evil Spirits: Religious healing in East Africa* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2011), Hansjoerg Dilger, “Healing the wounds of modernity: Salvation, community and care in a neo-Pentecostal Church in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 37 (2007), Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, “The Marian Faith Healing Ministry: An expression of popular Catholicism in Tanzania” edited by Thomas Spear and Isaria Kimambo, *East African Expressions of Christianity* (Dar es Salaam: Mkukina Nyota Publishers, Oxford: James Currey and Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999), Evaristi Magoti, “Charismatic Movements in the Context of Inculturation” edited by Mika Vahakangas and Andrew Kyomo, *Charismatic Renewal in Africa: A Challenge for African Christianity* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003) and Paivi Hasu, “World Bank and Heavenly Bank in Poverty and Prosperity: The Case of Tanzania Faith Gospel”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 33, 110 (2006).

²⁰ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997, p. 155, Simon Bockie, *Death and the invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Belief* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 36, Jean Ntahoturi, “African Traditional Thoughts on Death and Afterlife: Perspectives from Burundi” edited by J. Harold Ellens, *Heaven, Hell and Afterlife*, p. 114.

²¹ Rosemary Guillebaud, “The Idea of God in Ruanda-Urundi” edited by E. W. Smith, *African Ideas of God: A Symposium* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1961), p. 189, Interview, Muhoza Kaprea, Rusesa village, 04/01/2012.

²² Fridolin Bosch, *Les Banyamwezi, people de’Alfriqueorientale* (Munster: 1930).

²³ Jan van Sambeek, *Croyances*, 1954.

²⁴ Raphael G. Abrahams, *The Peoples*, p. 78, Interview Muhoza Kapera, Rusesa village, 04/01/2012, NsengimanaNsago HeruJuu, 04/02/2012 and Michael Katabi (Uhemeli), Ndala, 09/12/2011.

(*mizimu*) and nature spirits (*ikisigopl.bisigo*).²⁵ Bad or evil spirits caused all kinds of misfortunes, diseases and sudden deaths following the breaching of societal norms. Opposed to them were good spirits could possess a person who—after performing appropriate rituals—became a traditional healer (*nyamulagura, umulaguzi, mganga, mfumu*).²⁶ It is therefore clear that there was no single death causation in Buha and Unyamwezi cosmologies. Causes depended on people's relationships with supernatural forces and the Supreme Being.

Although the Baha and Banyamwezi held common explanations of sources of death, burial procedures depended on the status of the deceased. Reports by James Grant, John H. Speke, Franz Stuhlman, and Fridolin Bosch of the late-nineteenth and twentieth century, show that only chiefs and notables were buried in Unyamwezi and Usumbwa. Slaves, witches and people who died of lightning, leprosy, hunger and elephantiasis were left unburied.²⁷ Lived experience in Buha does not however, provide such a scenario of side-lining some corpses to decompose on the ground. Both oral testimonies and written sources support the view that both deceased commoners and chiefs were buried.²⁸ But, burials of expectant mothers, children born with their feet first (*kasindi* pl. *basindi*) and twins (*ihasa* pl. *amahasa*) were preceded by rituals. The foetus had to be removed from the mother's womb to prevent her female relatives from dying. Likewise, the births of twins and children born with feet first, had to be preceded by rituals to avert the impending danger or evil (*kimweshi, intezi*).²⁹

Issues of Life After Death in Buha and Unyamwezi Cosmologies

The Concept of Life After Death

Before I present the concepts of life after death in Buha and Unyamwezi cosmologies, it is important to keep in mind that the people of Buha and Unyamwezi perceived issues of life after death as a matter of the destiny of individual souls in the hereafter. They had no understanding of cosmic eschatology as Christians do—especially on matters such as the last day of judgement, resurrection of the dead and the second coming. Their concept of the afterlife was concerned individuals, their fate after death and how the living descendants maintained a relationship with the departed. Such a relationship, as I shall elaborate in due course, was either good or bad depending on the relationship during life between the two.

The Baha, Banyamwezi, and the Kimbu, believed in life after death. The soul of the dead body was believed to go to the world of spirits. The spirit world was very often on the hills, in the impenetrable forests, groves (*iholezo, amaholezo*) and rivers and these places were regarded as sacred.³⁰ For instance in the Kingdom of Muhambwe, in northern Buha, Mwariye mountain was considered sacred by the family of the

²⁵ Salvatory S. Nyanto, "Coping with the Challenges of Evangelisation in a Plural Setting: Experiences of the White Fathers in Buha and Unyamwezi 1878-1978" (University of Dar es Salaam: Unpublished MA Dissertation, 2012), p. 35. Both the Baha and Banyamwezi assigned God different names with different attributes. The Banyamwezi knew God as *Liwelero*, (present everywhere), *Limi*, *Limatunda* (the watcher of everything), *Linyangasa*, *Weyi* (the Creator). Similarly, the Baha assigned different attributes to the high God. They called Him, *Imana*, *Rulema* (the Creator), *Rugilavyose*, *Muganzavyose* (the owner of everything).

²⁶ Salvatory S. Nyanto, Coping with the challenges, p. 38, Osadolor Imasonge, *African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1985), p. 38.

²⁷ James A. Grant, *A Walk Across Africa/Domestic Scenes from my Nile Journal* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1864), p. 84, John H. Speke, *Journal*, p. 108, J. Stuhlmann, *Mit Emin Pascha ins Herz von Afrika* (Berlin: 1894), p. 90 as cited in Raphael G. Abrahams, *The Peoples*, p. 75, Fridolin Bosch, *Les Banyamwezi*, pp. 382-383.

²⁸ Johan H. Scherer, "The Ha of Tanganyika" *Anthropos*, B.d 54, H.5/6 (1959), pp. 882, 901, Interview, Muhoza Kapera, Rusesa Village, 04/01/2012, Kamego Yagaza, HeruJuu village, 04/02/2012, Stephen Mbanga, Bigabiro (Mwandiga), 25/01/2012.

²⁹ Johan H. Scherer, The Ha, p. 902, Interview, NsengimanaNsago, HeruJuu village, 04/02/2012.

³⁰ Interview, NsengimanaNsago, Kamego Yagaza and Selemani Kichuzi, HeruJuu village, 04/02/2012, see also John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 133.

chief/king (*mwami*) would not even be looked at from a far by the chief or any member of the family. The reason for the sanctity of Mwariye was the fact that certain of the more celebrated Chiefs of the past had been buried in a cave near the summit of the mountain.³¹ Again, in Uvinza, chief Lubere was buried at Kaylango Hill on the east side of the Ruchugi River. According to the custom, the living Chief was not allowed to see the hill.³²

The whole nexus of the belief in the relationship between ancestors and the living prompted the Baha, Kimbu and Nyamwezi to air their problems to the ancestral spirits through rituals. Such a means of communication that involves ancestral veneration has been termed by Aylward Shorter a symmetrical mediation.³³ A word of caution is necessary to emphasize that not all dead people deserved to be called ancestors. It was only those who died at an old age, having followed the established societal customs and orders. Evil or bad spirits/ancestors were members of the society who lived a decadent life and committed crimes. These were restless and capricious, causing diseases and all kinds of misfortunes unless appropriate rituals were performed to appease them.³⁴

In recognition of the next world that a dead person was expected to live in, the Baha and Banyamwezi prepared several items to accompany the departed soul. These included food, drinks, weapons, tools, and clothes to assist the departed member in his or her journey to the next world and as a support to the new life.³⁵ It was a usual practice to bury territorial kings with one or two live people who would act as headrest and footrest for them.³⁶ Oral history accounts do not tell exactly when the practice was discarded in Unyamwezi and Buha. But it might have fallen out of favour following the dominance of the Christian and Islamic faiths, in which the efficacy of some of the traditional practices became doubtful to the majority. In the kingdom of Nkalinzi, in Buha, the preparation for the journey of the chief/*mwami* was described by William Borrowdale Tripe in 1939 as follows:

After death, the body is swathed in a simple white cloth and then taken in a chair by eight bearers to the sacred grave called Mkabogo. Half of the articles used by the *mwami* in life accompany the body on his journey; a basket containing four clothes, beef fat, honey, a drinking vessel, a spear, a knife, a bow, and arrows and so on... The skins and ox constitute part of their payments, while the Chief's articles will be used by him in the spirit world.³⁷

This cited excerpt shows how the Baha put into practice their beliefs in the afterlife. The articles presented in the above quotation support John Mbiti's claim that "life continues more or less the same in the hereafter as did in this world" and "the activities [in spirit world] are similar to those of human life in the physical world."³⁸ Data from the kingdom of Heru in Buha, however, provide a different picture from that of Nkalinzi kingdom. When the king/chief *umwami* died, his corpse was desiccated before it was totally buried.³⁹ The practice of

³¹ TNA, Kigoma Regional Book II.

³² TNA, Tabora Regional Book (Western Province), p. 19.

³³ Aylward Shorter, *Prayers in the Religious Traditions of Africa* (New York and Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 11, Interview, Stephen Mbanga, Bigabiro (Mwandiga), 25/01/2012, Paul Bahinda, Kigoma 01/02/2012, KamegoYagaza, HeruJuu village, Msgr. Methodius Kilaini, Bukoba 05/12/2011, Joseph Busanzi, Lububu (Nzega) 29/11/2011 and Rev. Lucas Ngasa, Tabora, 10/11/2011.

³⁴ Interview, Msgr. Methodius Kilaini and Paul Bahinda, Kigoma. See also Aylward Shorter, *African Culture and the Christian Church: An Introduction to Social and Pastoral Anthropology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973), pp. 59-60.

³⁵ John S. Mbiti, *Concepts*, p. 257.

³⁶ N. D. Yongolo, *Maishana Desturiza Wanyamwezi* (London: Sheldon Press, 1953), p. 61.

³⁷ William B. Tripe, "Death and Replacement", pp. 22-23.

³⁸ John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God*, p. 259, *Introduction*, p. 124.

³⁹ Johan H. Scherer, *The Ha*, p. 882.

desiccating the corpse was also applied to the king's mother. When she died, she was not buried in the ground. Instead, her body was sealed in a cow-hide and was desiccated at the selected place for royal burials and her remains were kept until they turned to dust.⁴⁰

The majority of the commoners in both Buha and Unyamwezi were buried near their homesteads to act as guardians of the entire family. In the sub-chiefdom of Manyovu of the Heru kingdom, where cattle were abundant, clan members buried heads of the households in the midst of the kraal (*uruhongole, mw'izizi*) with the assumption that they would protect the cattle against raids. Likewise at Ujiji as the District Commissioner for Kigoma, Mr. C. J. Bagenal, observed in 1926 that the grave was usually dug near the house of diseased especially where cattle stood to be milked and where a fire was usually burnt.⁴¹

The situation was different among the agricultural communities where heads of the homesteads were buried in front of the entrance of one of their huts and performed similar functions as guardians.⁴² These examples demonstrate the fact that the Baha and Banyamwezi believed that life continued after death. This explains why they were buried at crucial areas of the homesteads where it was thought that they would continue to provide protection to the members of the household and properties. This however, remains as I have said a speculation and there is no historical evidence to substantiate these claims that this was the custom on which effective protection was given.

Spirit Possession and the Appearance of the Departed

In order to fully understand the concept of the "living-dead" it is important to know about the ontological setting of Buha and Unyamwezi. It was characterized by nature and ancestral spirits. Nature spirits were called *igisigo*, pl. *ibisigo* or *ishinga*, pl. *amashinga* in the kingdoms of Heru, Nkalinzi, Muhambwe, and Buyungu in Buha.⁴³ Similar spirits in Unyamwezi were called *swezi*, *migabo*, or *katabi* in Ukimbu and Ukonongo; *limudimi*—guardian of bushes in and *lyangombe*—founder of *uswezi* cult.⁴⁴ Other forces besides nature and ancestral spirits included zombies and a number of mysterious forces. All these forces, notwithstanding their being subordinate, affected the lives of the people unless serious ritual interventions were made to address them.⁴⁵ These two illustrations below provide a picture of the subordinate forces that dominated Buha and Unyamwezi cosmologies.

The Baha, Nyamwezi and Kimbu had a concept of the "living-dead" in which spirits of the dead were said to appear in their dreams, in visions and in possession states.⁴⁶ In Ukimbu, people held the belief that the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ TNA, Kigoma Regional Book II, p. 53.

⁴² Ibid, p. 901, see also Jean Ntahoturi, *African Traditional Thoughts*, p. 116.

⁴³ P. van Pelt, "Few Cases of Spirit Possession", *Tanzania Notes and Records*, 77 & 78 (1976), p. 45, Michelle Wagner, "Environment, Community and History, 'Nature in the Mind' in Nineteenth Century Buha, Tanzania" edited by Gregory Maddox, James Gibling and Isaria Kimambo, *Custodians of the Land: Ecology and Culture in the History of Tanzania* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, Nairobi: EAEP and Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996), p. 892.

⁴⁴ Raphael G. Abrahams, *The Peoples*, p. 78, *The Nyamwezi Today: A Tanzanian People in the 1970s* (Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne and Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 21.

⁴⁵ Interview, Stephen Mbanda, Bigabiro, JumaNusura and KassimMbingo, Ujiji, 29/01/2012 and Rev. AllenMpazi, Sikonge, 14/02/2012.

⁴⁶ The concept of the "living-dead" and its manifestations to the living has been described by scholars elsewhere. See for instance John S. Mbiti, *Concepts*, p. 257, *Introduction*, p. 126, *African Religions*, pp. 81-82 and Amon E. Kasambala, "The Impact of an African Spirituality and Cosmology on God-Images in Africa: A Challenge to Practical Theology and Pastoral Ministry", *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 9 (2005), pp. 314-315, Jean Ntahoturi, *African Traditional Thoughts*, p. 118 and Mbengu D. Nyiawung, "The Concept of the Hereafter and the Role of Ancestors in African Traditional Religion" edited by J. Harold Ellens, *Heaven, Hell and the Afterlife*, pp. 121-126.

spirits of deceased commoners could not live in the grave for good. Corpses were traditionally laid in the graves with their feet pointing towards their villages of origin. The belief was that the spirits would soon leave the grave and go back to the villages to join other nature and ancestral spirits in the forests. Such a belief forbade hunters and honey collectors to enter forests near villages as they were peopled by spirits.⁴⁷ In Buha, the belief was that the spirit *umuzimu* pl. *imizuka*, *ikiyaga* pl. *ibiyaga* would leave the grave after burial and would reappear into the nearby forests in form of snakes and animals. As it was in Ukimbu, the Baha were not allowed to burn forests as doing so would let *imizimu* and *ibiyaga* linger around their homestead causing diseases and other problems to the living humans.⁴⁸

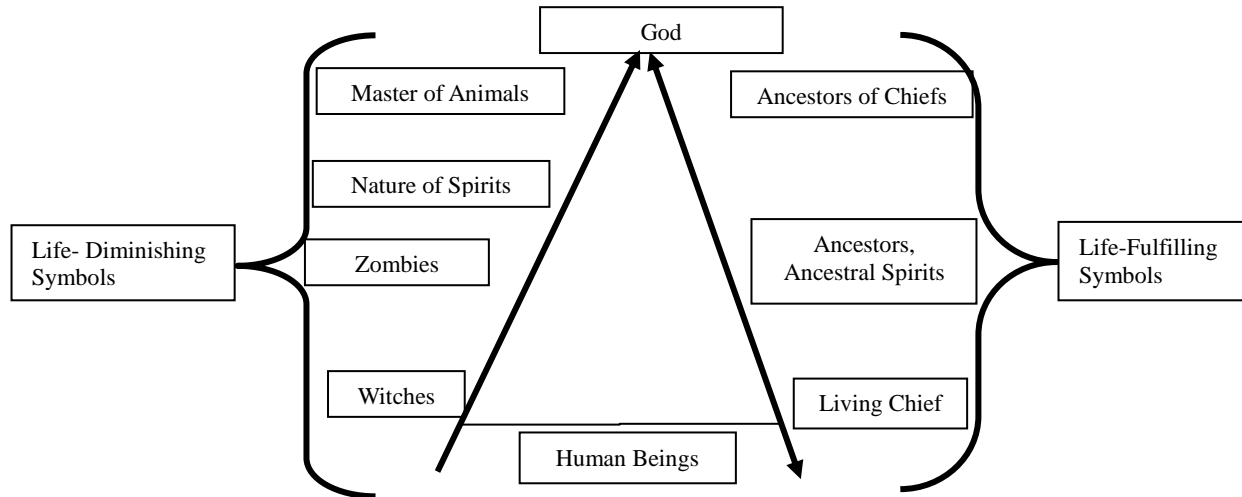


Figure 1. The non-material world of the Kimbu.

Source: Modified from Aylward Shorter, *African Culture*, 1998: 47.

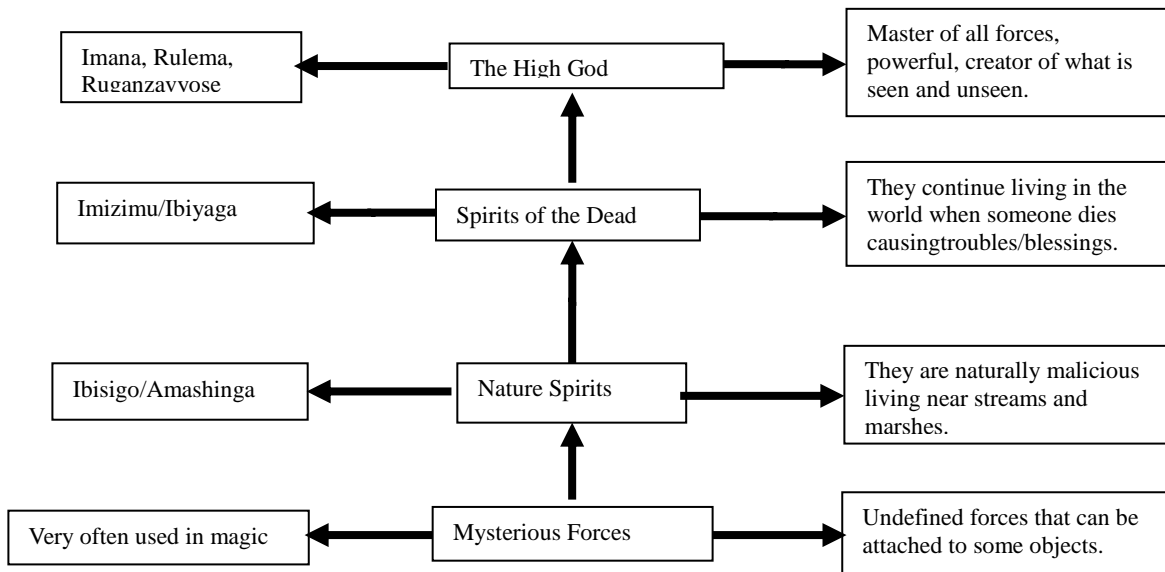


Figure 2. The invisible world of the Baha.

Source: Modified from Ramon Vicens, "The Idea of God among the Baha", 2001: 34.

⁴⁷ Aylward Shorter, "Ukimbu and the Kimbu Chiefdom of Southern Unyamwezi: The History and Present Pattern of Kimbu Social Organisation and Movement", *White Fathers Archives*, WFA 11-03, p. 30.

⁴⁸ Interview, Paul Bahinda, Kigoma, 01/02/2012. For a detailed understanding ancestral spirits and their impact to the living members of the household, see also John S. Mbiti, *Introduction*, p. 79, *African Religions*, p. 80.

However, the reincarnation of the deceased king (*mwami*) in Buha was different from that of deceased commoners. Both oral and written sources from Buha demonstrate that the spirit of the deceased king left the corpse after maggots and worms had come from the skin of the king *mwami*. But before this became noticeable, black and white lions, the reincarnation of the former *mwami* would either be heard or seen lingering near the village while the deceased *muteko* pl. *bateko* (peace makers between spirits and the people in time of disasters, owner of land in Buha) rejuvenated into pythons (*insato*). This explains why pythons were not killed for they were *muteko*'s blood brothers.⁴⁹ They were primarily used for venerating ancestral spirits (*imizimuyakera*). Should this rule be neglected, the *muteko* was duty bound to cool *ughoza*, the land spirits, before problems could arise.⁵⁰

The lingering of the rejuvenated ancestors meant that the people in Buha, Unyamwezi and Ukimbu could not only be attacked by the reincarnated snakes and animals but could also be possessed by nature and ancestral spirits. Spirit possession was a common phenomenon throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The common forms of spirit possession were manifested in the *bamigabo*, *migabo*, or *migawo* secret societies in Ukimbu, *buswezi*, *baswezi* in the rest of Unyamwezi and *imizimu*, *ibiyaga*, and *ibichwezi* in Buha. The impacts of these spirits were easily seen among family and clan members when misfortunes dogged their steps.⁵¹ A person possessed by spirits would shiver, speak in different tongues with obscene language, torture his/her body, harm other people and sometimes the spirit would drag the possessed into the forest.⁵² He/she could not be possessed by the spirit of a recent dead father. Possession was by the spirits of the great grandfathers (*umizimuwasegekulu*, *ikiyaga cha segekulu*). But the *muzimu* could be inherited from one ancestor to the other and it was connected with the family line.⁵³

In Buha and Unyamwezi, evil spirits were placated following the diviner's advice. In Buha, this was preceded by identifying the origin of the spirit. The diviner (*umulaguzi*, *nyamulaguraumupfumu* or *mfumuin* Unyamwezi) had to know the origin of the spirit: Burundi, Rwanda, Muhambwe or Kongo (*ikiyagach'ikirundikazi*, *ch'imuhambwe*, *ikinyarwanda* or *Kongo*).⁵⁴ Finally, the father of the possessed, took a pot with honey (*igichuroch'ubhuki*), mixed with millet, and poured a libation to the troubling *kiyaga*.⁵⁵ In Unyamwezi, offerings to the ancestral spirits ranged from libations of sorghum flour mixed with water (*lwanga*), beer or porridge to the blood sacrifice of a sheep or goat. The choice on what to provide as an offering depended on what nature could support. But as a rule, cattle sacrifices were always destined for royal ancestors and they were only slaughtered when there was a problem (epidemic, drought, famine etc.) to appease

⁴⁹ W. B. Tripe, *Death and Replacement*, p. 24, Salvatory Nyanto, *Coping with the challenges*, p. 38, Captain C. H. B. Grant, *Uha*, p. 416. See also Michelle D. Wagner, "Whose History is History? A History of Baragane People of Buragane, Southern Burundi 1850-1932" (University of Wisconsin-Madison: Unpublished PhD Thesis, 1991), p. 201.

⁵⁰ Johan H. Scherer, *The Ha*, p. 894, see also Margot L. Lovett, *Elders, Migrants and Wives*, p. 33.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 890, Aylward Shorter, *East African Societies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 97-100, "The Migawo: Peripheral Spirit Possession and Christian Prejudice", *Anthropos*, 65 (1970), pp. 117-118, Hans Cory, "The Buswezi", *American Anthropologist*, 57, 5 (1955), p. 25, N. D. Yongolo, *Maishana Desturi*, pp. 25-26 and John Iliffe, *A Modern History*, p. 31.

⁵² John S. Mbiti, *African Religions*, p. 82, *Concepts of God*, p. 266, Interview KamegoYagaza, Heru village, 04/02/2012, Paul Bahinda, Kigoma, 01/02/2012, Michael Katabi, Uhemeli (Ndala) village, 09.12/2011, Paulina Mihayo, Uhemeli (Ndala) village, 09/12/2011.

⁵³ Johan H. Scherer, *The Ha*, p. 890.

⁵⁴ Ibid, Interview, KamegoYagaza, NsengimanaNsago, HeruJuu village and Selemani Kichozi, HeruJuu village, 04/02/2012.

⁵⁵ Pamphili Chubwa, "Tambiko la FamiliaLinalotaja AsiliNnezaWaha: Uguhezagira" edited by J. M. Kihyo, L. Ndimubansi and V. G. Nkondokaya, *Mila na Utamaduniwa Jamiiya Wahana Hatimaya Kimaendeleoya Kiuchumina Kijamiiya Mkoa Katika Karneya Ishirinina Moja* (Dar es Salaam: Makumbushoya Taifa la Tanzania, 2003), pp. 7-8, *Waha: HistoriaMaendeleo* (Kipalapala: Tanganyika Mission Press, 2005), pp. 1-9.

the royal ancestors.⁵⁶

Spirit possession of descendants and children was on other occasions advantageous. It was said to empower the possessed by conferring the ability to cure people from diseases associated with spirits. It also ensured prosperity in the family and good health to the living.⁵⁷ In this context, spirit possession and the lingering of the rejuvenated snakes and animals in Buha and Unyamwezi were regarded as either a warning (*intezi* in Buha) or a calling to become a diviner (*umulaguzi*, *nyamulagura*, *umfumu*).⁵⁸ Oral testimonies in Unyamwezi show how some members of the family were possessed by ancestral spirits and suffered miserably before they became prosperous diviners. The following excerpt from the experience of ShijaNdizu of Chamihwa village in Nzega district, supports this argument.

Kablayakuwakaribishahaowahenga, niliumwasana, chochotenilichokuwanafanyakilikuwahakifanikiwi. Nikifuga kuku nambuziwanakufa. Nilipokwendakwamgangakujuakwaninilikuwaninapatamatatizo, aliniambiakuwawahengawanguwalik uwawanahangaikahapaduniani. Nilipowajengeanyumbayaohapakwangu, sikuuguatena; mbuzina kuku wakaongezeka [Before I invited my ancestral spirits here at home, I was often ill. I did not succeed in whatever I did. I kept chickens and they all died. I finally consulted the diviner who told me that my ancestral spirits were restless, wandering in the world. When I built them a shrine, I never felt sick; my goats and chicken kept on increasing].⁵⁹ [My own translation]

From the above excerpt we learn that small spirits huts were built to accommodate the spirits of the departed ancestors. The size of shrines varied from one place to another in Buha and Unyamwezi. Some were small and others were bigger. As C. J. Bagenal observed in 1927 in Buha, “shrines range from 15 to 18 inches high and are rebuilt every year, after harvest, when the owner will sprinkle some *pombe* [local beer as libation] and food over each and then he will eat and drink himself”.⁶⁰ All in all, shrines, irrespective of their sizes, were built to accommodate departed ancestors. Reasons for their varied sizes remain unclear.



Picture 1. Small shrines for ancestral veneration at Chamihwa village in Nzega District.

Source: Taken by the author on 28/11/2011.

⁵⁶ Raphael G. Abrahams, *The Nyamwezi Today*, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁷ See for instance Jean Ntshoturi, *African Traditional Thoughts*, p. 118.

⁵⁸ Johan H. Scherer, *The Ha*, p. 891, Interview, Kamego Yagaza, Heru Village, Paul Bahinda, Kigoma, 01/02/2012.

⁵⁹ Interview, ShijaNdizu, Chamihwa village, 28/11/2011.

⁶⁰ TNA, Kigoma Regional Book II, p. 55.



Picture 2. Practitioners of ancestral veneration at Chamihwa Village standing near small and medium sized shrines.

Source: Taken by the author on 28/11/2012.



Picture 3. A large shrine for ancestral veneration at Rusesa Village.

Source: Taken by the author on 04/01/2012.

Ancestral veneration was also important for political purposes. Kings consulted royal ancestral spirits to maintain stability in times of epidemics, disease, drought and foreign invasions. In Buha, *mwami* Ntare and Gwassa of the Heru kingdom set up the sacred grove at vugizo (*ikibirach'ivugizo*) for a territorial ritual (*tambiko la mwami*) to maintain unity and to protect the kingdom from impending disasters. Territorial rituals were performed during the annual thanksgiving ceremonies (*indolegwazimpeshi*, *kumpeshi*).⁶¹ In the Nkalinzi

⁶¹ Interview, KamegoYagaza and NsengimanaNsago, HeruJuu village, 04/02/2012, Prof. Joseph Mbwiliza, Dar es Salaam, 15/12/2011, Archbishop Paul Ruzoka, Tabora, 14/11/2011, W. B. Tripe, "Tribal Insignia of Heru", *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 26 (1943), pp. 5-6, "The Installation (Kusamwa) of the Chief of Uha", *Man* 35, (1935), p. 54, John J. Tawney, "Tribal Insignia of Heru Chiefdom of Buha in Kasulu District", *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 18 (1944), pp. 86-87, Gilbert Clemence Gwassa and Joseph Mbwiliza, "Social Production, Symbolism and Ritual in Buha, 1750-1900", *Tanzania Notes and Records*, 79 & 80 (1976), pp. 18-21.

kingdom, *mwami* Rusimbi and Mugasa set aside the present area of Bigabiro, near Mwandiga, for territorial rituals.⁶² There is a comparable case in Unyamwezi where the nineteenth century chief of Unyamwezi poured beer on his predecessors' grave to provide rain to save the Kingdom from drought:

Here is your water!
 Give me rain! Let it rain!
 Why have you abandoned me? [Are you not still] my master?
 I inherited the office from you. It was not stolen.
 [Yet] you have abandoned me.
 If you [continue to] abandon me, so that there is not [sic] rain in the land, the people will depart.
 See, here is your goat, and this is your sheep!⁶³

In order to maintain the harmonious relationship between the people, nature and ancestral spirits, taboos were set up to effect social control. Any deviation from taboos was considered as abuse and inevitably could cause problems. In Buha, Ukimbu, and Unyamwezi, cutting down trees and other human activities were restricted in the forests and sacred groves near the villages, as they were reserved for rituals.⁶⁴ In Heru, the sacred groves were under the guardianship of the distributors of land (*muteko* pl. *bateko*). Other families apart from *muteko*'s clan, were prohibited to collect firewood or cultivate the land. *Bateko* were obliged to remain on the land forever. Evacuation of the land meant abandoning the land and ancestral spirits. Thus they also could not practice shifting cultivation. Thus, production relations remained throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century tied to their ancestral lands.⁶⁵

The established system of the *Bateko* further implies that the majority of the fertile lands in Buha were reserved for them. They were duty bound to allocate land for cultivation and to settle land disputes among clan members, and sometimes between societies. Whenever a homestead was abandoned because of death or migration, the land had to be reverted to *muteko* only to be redistributed to someone in need. Such a practice constituted the main feudal relations throughout the nineteenth century. To effect control over productive lands and the sacred groves, they used the symbol of their office, the python (*insato*) to frighten anyone who could interfere with the *muteko*'s land.⁶⁶

Dynamics of Issues of Life After Death in Buha and Unyamwezi 1890s-2000s

The earliest missionaries to venture in Buha and Unyamwezi were the French White Fathers (1878 and 1879), the London Missionary Society (1880s), Moravian Missionaries (1898), the British Missionary Society (1920s), the Swedish Free Mission, and the Salvation Army in (1930s).⁶⁷ With the dominance of Christianity,

⁶² Interview, Prof. Joseph Mbwiliza, Dar es Salaam, Kamego Yagaza, HeruJuu village and Stephen Mbanga, Bigabiro (Mwandiga).

⁶³ John Iliffe, *A Modern history*, p. 28.

⁶⁴ Interview, Rev. Allen Mpazi, Sikonge, 14/02/2012 and Francis Aloo, Bukene, 30/11/2011. See also Aylward Shorter, *Ukimbu and the Kimbu Chiefdoms*, p. 30.

⁶⁵ Joseph F. Mbwiliza, "The Hoe and the Stick: A Political Economy of the Heru Kingdom 1750-1900" (University of Dar es Salaam, Departmental Seminar Paper, 1979), p. 12. *Bateko* were local or ritual leaders of Buha. They were mainly responsible for carrying out rituals to placate the spirits and to appease the Supreme Being. They were regarded as peace makers between the nature spirits and the Baha.

⁶⁶ Ibid, Gilbert C. Gwassa and Joseph F. Mbwiliza, *Social Production*, p. 17, Margot L. Lovett, *Elders, Migrants and Wives*, p. 33.

⁶⁷ Salvatory S. Nyanto, *Coping*, pp. 51-88, Angetile Yesaya Musomba, *The Moravian Church*, p. 83, John Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church; the Renewed Unitas Fratrum, 1722-1957* (Winston-Salem: Interprovincial Board of Christian Education, Moravian Church of America, 1983), p.609, Francis P. Nolan, *Mission to the Great Lakes: The White Fathers in Western Tanzania 1878-1978* (Kipalapala: Tanganyika Mission Press, 1978), p. 17, John G. Merritt, Ed. (2006). *Historical Dictionary of the Salvation Army* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2006), p. 577.

converted chiefs such as *mwami* Joseph Gwassa and Theresia Joseph Ndalichako were buried following Christian burial procedures in 1946 and 1963 respectively. Their bodies were taken into the local church at Heru, attended by Catholic priests and district officials.⁶⁸ They were neither wrapped in a skin nor were they accompanied by their personal belongings.⁶⁹

As Christianity took root in Heru, twins (*amahasa*) and children born feet first could be buried like others. Some taboos were also challenged as being unrealistic and mystical. Forests that were initially feared to house both nature and rejuvenated ancestors were no longer feared.⁷⁰ Another change was the introduction of common graveyards for both Christians and Muslims. This ended in some urban centres the practice of burying members at their homesteads. While such a practice was welcomed in some towns, and around mission centres, the majority of the people in villages maintained the old practice.⁷¹ The merging of the two cultures persists to date. There are areas in Buha and Unyamwezi with cemeteries that are destined for Christians and others for Muslims while many people irrespective of their religious orientations still maintain the practice of their ancestors.

There was also a considerable decline of ancestral veneration in Buha and Unyamwezi. Some of the Baha and Nyamwezi still venerate ancestral spirits in search of the causes of disease and of healing.⁷² For instance, in 1897, Fr. Brard recounted the common ancestral veneration in Usukuma, but in the 1950s regular propitiations of ancestors, as Ralph E. S. Tanner reported, were no longer common among the Sukuma. Instead, ancestral rituals could be conducted in time of distress and illness.⁷³ The changing character of the propitiation in question was also noted by Ralph Tanner in 1967 when he reported changes in the contemporary ancestral veneration in Usukuma.

Now both educated and uneducated persons neglect their ancestors for years and consider propitiating them only when they are in trouble, so that the cult of the ancestors has changed from maintaining their goodwill by regular rites as was done in the past to the present intermittent recognition of their powers to harm and the ceremonies, individual rather than collective, necessary to recover their goodwill. It is their interference rather than their benevolence that occasions the ritual.⁷⁴

The rate of changes regarding issues of life after death increased between the 1970s and 2000s due to the spread of crusade evangelism within Pentecostal churches.⁷⁵ Sermons and revival meetings on “salvation” “being saved”, “being born again” (*kuokoka*) the “judgement day”, “repentance for an everlasting/eternal salvation” and so forth have become the slogans of many converted preachers of Pentecostal movements in Tanzania in general and Buha and Uyamwezi in particular.⁷⁶ Increasingly, preachers concentrate on the final events in the history of the world, the final judgement, the afterlife and the destiny of individual souls after

⁶⁸ Interview KamegoYagaza, HeruJuu village, 04/02/2012.

⁶⁹ See for instance Johan H. Scherer, *The Ha*, p. 883.

⁷⁰ Interview, KamegoYagaza, HeruJuu village, 04/02/2012.

⁷¹ Interview, Chief Kiwanga Haruni Lugusha, Ngulu chiefdom, Sikonge, 14/02/2012, Bishop Kilaini, Bukoba diocese, 05/12/2011, Rev. Lucas Ngasa, 10/11/2011.

⁷² Interview Muhoza Kapera, Rusesa village 04/01/2012 and KamegoYagaza, HeruJuu village 04/02/2012.

⁷³ Ralph E. S. Tanner, *Transition in African Beliefs: Traditional Religion and Christian Change; a Study in Sukumaland, Tanzania, East Africa* (Maryknoll, New York: Maryknoll Publications, 1967), p. 24.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Josiah L. Mlahagwa, “Contending for the Faith, Spiritual Revival and the Fellowship Church in Tanzania” edited by Thomas Spear and Isaria N. Kimambo. *East African Expressions*, pp. 300-301.

⁷⁶ The spirit of Pentecostalism has also been active among the Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran Churches as Charismatic Renewal Movements.

death. The emphasis on cosmic and individual eschatology among the preachers to their born again believers aptly demonstrates that converted Christians and practitioners of African religions have been influenced by the Christian and traditional conceptions of life after death.⁷⁷

Tanzania (formerly Tanganyika and German East Africa) was colonized by the Germans (1890-1914) and the British (1920s-1960). The German colonial state employed a direct rule system in Buha and an indirect rule system in Unyamwezi, Usukuma and Buhaya because of strong resistance they encountered. In these areas, chiefs were given account books for keeping records of fines and collected taxes from their subjects.⁷⁸ Thus, their power and survival depended on effective handling of the books and not the possession of traditional regalia.⁷⁹ Unlike the Germans, the British employed an indirect rule system that heavily relied on the native administration. They also introduced a native treasury, a poll tax system, regulations, fines and court fees that eroded the power of the ruler to privately collect revenue from his subjects for his private ends. The payment of salaries to native chiefs affected their position as they could no longer receive donations from their subjects.⁸⁰ In both Buha and Unyamwezi, hereditary succession was no more observed. For instance, in Unyamwezi, a chief was chosen by the colonial state subject to meeting the stated qualifications (education and administrative experience). Moreover, it was the colonial state and not the subjects that had authority to depose the chief. He could be deposed for breaking the law and his failure to efficiently rule his subjects.⁸¹

The indirect rule system affected life and death issues in Buha and Unyamwezi. In Buha, the annual ceremonies *indolegwazimpeshi* or *kumpsehi* and territorial rituals lost their values. Moreover, the installation of the new king/chief by the *banyikulu*, *bagohogoho* and *mgabe* or *ngabein* Unyamwezi and *mwami*'s associates in Buha, had to be attended by a representative of the British colonial state.⁸² Kings forced their subjects to pay tax to the British colonial state, work for public labour works and conscripted them for a migrant labour system (*manamba*). As a result, the kings (*abami*) and not the British authorities, were mostly hated by the Baha and Banyamwezi throughout the British colonial period.⁸³

Additionally, the *umuteko*, p. *bateko* who initially distributed land to the people and cooled the country *uguhoza* with medicine in times of epidemics and disasters, were no longer valued by British authorities and neither were they included on the payroll.⁸⁴ The sacred pythons (*insato*), as symbols of reincarnated ancestors, became almost useless in the minds of the Baha. The people were no longer afraid of killing snakes as was the case in the pre-colonial period.⁸⁵ By the 1950s, traditional religious practices had tremendously declined in Buha as Johan Scherer made the following observation:

The sacred connections of chieftainship, which were probably never particularly developed in Buha, are—where they are not yet extinct—rapidly disappearing. Most hereditary chiefs no longer adhere to the faith

⁷⁷ See Amon D. Bruce Dickson, Jeffrey Olsen, P. Fred Dahm and Mitchell S. Wachtel, *Where Do You Go When You Die?*, p. 55.

⁷⁸ Raphael G. Abrahams, *The Political Organisation*, p. 45.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁸⁰ Johan H. Scherer, *The Ha*, p. 884, Raphael Abrahams, *The Peoples*, pp. 56-57.

⁸¹ Raphael Abrahams, *ibid.*

⁸² Interview, KamegoYagaza, HeruJuu village, 04/02/2012, Raphael Abrahams, *The Peoples*, pp. 56-57, Raphael Abrahams, *Political organisation*, p. 36.

⁸³ See Laurenti Sago, "A History of Labour Migration in Kasulu District 1928 -1960" (University of Dar es Salaam: Unpublished MA Dissertation, 1974), "Labour Reservoir: The Kigoma Case" in Walter Rodney, Kapepwa Tambila and Laurenti Sago, *Migrant Labour in Tanzania during the Colonial Period: Case Studies of Recruitment and Conditions of Labour in the Sisal Industry* (Hamburg: Institut für AfrikaKunde, 1983).

⁸⁴ Johan H. Scherer, *The Ha*, p. 884.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 894, KamegoYagaza, HeruJuu village, 04/02/2012.

of their ancestors, whereas in the case of appointed chiefs, sacred associations are in the nature of things out of the question. The desiccation of the corpses of Tutsi rulers is by now a thing of the past [Emphasis is mine].⁸⁶

Similar divergences were noted by Raphael Abrahams in the 1950s in Unyamwezi following the persistence of the indirect rule system.

By means of powers which he obtains on his installation, combined with his ability to influence his ancestors through sacrifices and other rituals, a chief was and to some extent still is held to be able to control those forces such as rainfall which determine the well-being of his subjects. Some chiefs still conscientiously perform traditional rituals and others carry them out simply to appease their subjects. Yet, others perform hardly any ceremonies at all these days. In general, it appears that the ritual aspects of chiefdom organization have become much less important than they were in the past.⁸⁷

Tanganyika attained her independence on December 9, 1961. Its independent government inherited various structures of the former British colonial masters. To restructure the government, the constitution of the Republic of Tanganyika was amended in February, 1962. Under the Regions and Regional Commissioners Act of 1962, provinces and the posts of provincial commissioners were abolished in place of regions and regional commissioners.⁸⁸ In the same year, the African Chiefs Ordinance—enacted in the British colonial period—was repealed following the enactment of the Local Government Ordinance. The new ordinance took away all the powers of African chiefs and their powers were given to district councils. The transference responsibilities for law and order ended the post of a local chief in the government. The district commissioner was mandated to appoint administrative officers to administer the former chiefdoms on various social and economic issues.⁸⁹

Many chiefs in Tanzania in general and Buha and Unyamwezi in particular reacted negatively against the order. To avoid further resentments, the government appointed them as members of the parliament. In so doing, the last *mwami* of Heru, Theresia Joseph Ndalichako, *mtemi* Abdallah Fundikira of Unyanyembe, and Lugusha of Ngulu became members of the parliament. The involvement in politics weakened their power and influence over their subjects. Ancestral propitiations declined considerably. Some weak chiefdoms continued with a diminished influence and in due course many of them fizzled out. I only encountered two chiefs of Itetemia and Ngulu in Unyamwezi in 2012.⁹⁰ The influence of the Christian and Islamic faiths in the two chiefdoms have resulted in the coexistence of two spiritual philosophies on spirit possession, death, and the relationship with those who are still living.

Conclusion

The idea of life after death was embedded in the cultural philosophies of many African societies before and after they were integrated into Christian and Islamic worlds. Although there are some points of convergence and divergence between the African conception of the hereafter and those of Christianity, it seems plausible to assert that issues of life after death in African settings were largely conditioned by particular environments and changing social contexts. Individual eschatology dominated the traditional understanding of life after the death. The complexities of cosmic eschatology appear, as I have discussed, to be less understood

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 887.

⁸⁷ Raphael Abrahams, *The Peoples*, p. 61.

⁸⁸ Aylward Shorter, *Chiefship*, p. 383.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 383.

⁹⁰ Interview, KamegoYagaza, HeruJuu village, 04/02/2012, Chief Kiwanga Haruni Lugusha, Ngulu chiefdom, Sikonge, 14/02/2012.

or absent in African cosmologies before its people were drawn into the Christian and Islamic influences.

A perusal of available written (primary and secondary) and oral sources on Buha and Unyamwezi, shows less attention on issues of life after death. While theologians and social anthropologists have ventured into this field, the converse is true of Tanzanian historians. Historians such as John Iliffe and Aylward Shorter have cited key issues of life after death in western Tanzania, yet a number of them, and the dynamism of ideas and practices remain unknown.⁹¹ What largely accounts for the limited attention among Tanzanian historians is the emergence of new fields of investigation such as environmental history, population history, disease, and diplomacy. These fields have dominated Tanzanian scholarship at the University of Dar es Salaam for almost two decades.

The conspicuous side-lining of African religions, by Christianity and Islam over the past two decades makes my study an invaluable intervention. Important observations have been made on the concept of life after death, spirit possession, the appearance of the spirits of the departed and the dynamic forces that shape the ideas and practices in Buha and Unyamwezi. This study has treated the concept of life after death, a branch of dogmatic theology from a historical perspective. It has employed a comparative approach in studying life after death issues for two regions of western Tanzania that have variegated physical, social and cultural backgrounds. The rationale for this approach is to single out the points of convergence and divergence on the subject matter and to assert the claim that ideas of life after death were not uniformly conceived in many African societies.

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⁹¹ John S. Mbiti, *Concepts*, pp. 253-271, Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion*, p. 157, R. G. Abrahams, *The Peoples*, pp. 75-77 and William B. Tripe, *Death and Replacement*, pp. 22-23.

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