Article

isw

International Social Work
2022, Vol. 65(2) 314–327

DOI: 10.1177/0020872819896826
journals.sagepub.com/home/isw
SAGE

Beyond solidarity and mutual aid: Tension and conflict in burial groups in rural Uganda

Laban Kashaija Musinguzi
Makerere University Kampala, Uganda; University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Jude T Rwemisisi
Uganda Management Institute, Uganda; University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Emmanueil Benon Turinawe
Makerere University Kampala, Uganda; University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Danny De Vries
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Marije De Groot
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Denis Muhangi
Makerere University Kampala, Uganda

David Kaawa Mafigiri
Makerere University Kampala, Uganda

Achilles Katamba
Makerere University Kampala, Uganda

Robert C Pool
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Corresponding author:
Laban Kashaija Musinguzi, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, School of Social Sciences, Makerere University, P.O Box 7062 Kampala, Uganda.
Email: musinguzilaban16@gmail.com

Abstract
Drawing from ethnographic data collected between 2012 and 2014 and January and June 2018 in Luwero district, Uganda, this article questions the romanticised depiction of burial groups as a means of enhancing social support, a sense of solidarity and mutual aid. We found that the felt sense of identity and belonging for members is not shared across community members, and that solidary relations between members and non-group members in the community are fraught with tensions and conflicts. Beyond the romanticised view of burial groups, we need to study burial groups as a model of solidarity in disunity and diversity.

Keywords
Diversity, Luwero, obligations, togetherness, unity, solidarity

Introduction

Whereas many people in Uganda rely on friends and family members to meet funeral demands, there is a general shift from spontaneous community-based support to a more business-like support arrangement. In urban areas, especially among the wealthy and middle-working class, there is a noticeable increase in demand for funeral services provided by mushrooming private funeral insurance companies. In most rural areas, the proliferation of burial groups has changed how funerals are managed and how social support is extended to a bereaving community member. Based on the findings of an ethnographic study that examined endogenous burial groups in Luwero district, this article unravels the inherent tensions and conflicts that have emerged around funeral practices in rural central Uganda. Contrary to the romanticised depiction of burial groups as mutual-aid self-help groups providing social support to its members, the solidary behaviours enacted under burial groups are fraught with tensions and conflicts. These tensions emanate from contradictory community conceptualisations of the origins of burial groups. On the one hand, some sections of the population regard burial groups as entities that have emerged to fill the gap owing to dwindling solidary behaviours, while on the other hand some sections of the population perceive burial groups as contributors to obliterated solidary behaviours among community members. Given the differences in community perception of burial groups, conflicts between group members and non-group members have become a defining feature during funerals. Given these conflicting opinions about burial groups, this article seeks to challenge the romanticised view of burial groups and argues that study burial groups be studied as a model of solidarity in disunity and diversity.

Emergence of burial societies across time and space

Whereas some studies suggest the existence of burial societies can be traced back to as early as 1919 in Zimbabwe (Dafuleya, 2012; Hall, 1987), and 1938 in Botswana (Grant, 1987), the literature generally alludes to their popularity as a post-1950s phenomenon in Africa (Brown, 1982; Hall, 1987; Jones, 2007, 2009; Little, 1953; Ngwenya, 2002). Regarding burial societies as a post-1950s phenomenon suggests that their formation was driven by developments shaped by social, economic and political changes. These include challenges of market economy in West Africa (Little, 1953), demand for funeral insurance for migrant workers and a form of ecumenical movement in South Africa (Oosthuizen, 1990), and political processes in Ethiopia and Tanzania in the 1960s (Dercon et al., 2006). As a result, burial societies have been categorised as work-based or professional associations; religious, ethnic and tribal oriented; community based; gender based; or migration based (Ngwenya, 2003; Ranger, 2004).

In Uganda, particularly central Uganda where this study was conducted, the perceived waning role of the extended family system and the impact of HIV and AIDS have affected care responsibilities in households (Nobelius et al., 2012) and exerted pressure on the informal structures of social support (De Coninck and Drani, 2009). As death became an 'everyday' phenomenon due to HIV and AIDS, political upheavals and human vulnerability, 'a tradition of "*munno mukabi*," a form of self-help' in which people informally helped each other arrange funerals was adapted into community-based burial groups (Lewis, 2001: 51). Burial groups therefore emerged as a form of 'community self-help structures, a form of social capital, [and] as an adaptive response to social welfare needs' (Lewis, 2001: 51). Consequently, as an adaptive response, burial groups in central Uganda have taken on the generic name *munno mukabi*, 'a friend in need', to signify forms of sociality and reciprocity. Similar approaches are documented among the Banyankore of Western Uganda (Twesigye et al., 2019) and Eastern Uganda (Jones, 2007).

Burial groups have been studied as quintessential forms of social solidarity and mutual aid (Kasente et al., 2002) that provide social relief and support in times of distress (Ngwenya, 2003: 90–91). Several studies also describe burial societies in Africa variously as a form of social change and organisation (Little, 1953) or a form of insurance (Dercon et al., 2006; Mariam, 2003; Shale, 2014). Others describe them as a form of social protection (Dafuleya, 2012, 2018), a form of financial security and keeping social ties (Hall, 1987), and a form of community resilience (Twesigye et al., 2019). While studies have alluded to the existence of conflicts in funeral practices in several African countries (Bähre, 2007; De Witte, 2003; Evans-Pritchard, 1949; Geschiere, 2005; Ngwenya, 2003), descriptions of burial groups in several parts of Africa have remained mute on the attendant conflicts, only projecting conflicts and tensions as having been part of funeral practices pre-burial societies.

Central to discussions on burial groups is the notion of solidarity among the members. Solidarity is an awareness of a common humanity and a recognition of an interdependent world (Sachikonye, 2004). Shipton (2007) claims that humans have inherent obligations towards one another, encapsulated into 'entrustment'. Entrustment is 'obligations but not necessarily obligations to repay like with like' but as a framework for understanding social interconnectedness (Shipton, 2007: 11). These obligations shape solidarity relations and constitute debts that can be settled through reciprocal exchanges, such as provision of labour at a funeral. The concept of indebtedness depicts some form of symbolic power between the 'creditors' and 'debtors' to represent exchanges involving individuals in the community (Shipton, 2007).

In reference to burial groups, solidarity means shared responsibility, which implies that when people join burial groups, they are entrusting each other with that responsibility. Given the interconnected nature of African society, this shared responsibility often extends to a member's social connections or networks of family and friendships to such an extent that in some communities, decisions to join burial groups involve a commitment to one's social connections to the group (Ngwenya, 2003: 96). This also means that understanding the impact of burial groups goes beyond mutual aid and support for and within groups to relations across the entire community. It is the impact of these relations beyond obligations enacted within the group that generates conflicts and tensions in funeral practices.

Setting and methods

The community where fieldwork was conducted is relatively remote, located approximately 5 km off the Kampala–Gulu road, 60 km to the north of Kampala city. The term 'community' is used here to refer to a cluster of villages from which the participants were drawn. Luwero district is estimated to have a total population of 456,958 people with over 79 percent (361,284) living in rural areas

(Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The majority are peasant farmers. Owing to inter-marriages and migration, the population is ethnically diverse with the dominant tribe being native Baganda. Luganda, the native language, is commonly spoken in the community.

Although the first three authors all carried out research in Luwero between 2012 and 2014, the first author collected additional data between January and June 2018. In addition, the first author collected the ethnographic data for this paper and results are presented in the first person when they derive directly from his fieldwork experience. The first three authors spent 1.5 years living and taking part in the community activities, including burial events, and attending burial preparatory meetings, contributing condolence money, playing games with youths, and attending church and religious gatherings. Consequently, the team was able to observe and document people's cooperation and their participation in burial groups, organisation of funerals, and other communal mundane activities. In accordance with Spradley's (1980: 54) recommendations, we engaged in activities and the physical aspects of the situations as and when they unfolded. We attended, observed and participated in six burial ceremonies. Field notes were taken during observations and later used as points of reflection in the field.

Field observations were supplemented with 91 open interviews, 42 focus group discussions (FGDs) and several informal conversations. Selection of participants for interviews and FGDs relied on qualitative sampling techniques, mainly purposive, snowball and theoretical sampling. Participants were mainly members and non-members of burial groups, adult women and men (aged 18 and above), local leaders (LCs), non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff, and district and local government officials. Following a theoretical sampling procedure, we asked participants to describe the events that bring people together in the community as a broad entry topic (Glaser, 1978: 45). Whenever we asked participants 'What are the events that often bring people together?', events such as funerals, parties of all kinds, local village meetings, and clan meetings were always mentioned. Follow-up questions always involved a discussion on how these events bring people together. For example, whenever funerals were mentioned, follow-up questions focused on their arrangements and descriptions of the changes in funeral arrangements, particularly the influence of burial groups on solidary behaviour, locally known as *Obumu*. Subsequent sampling decisions were based on the emerging categories and themes in the data. We ceased to sample more participants when interviews and FGDs yielded no more new insights based on the principle of data saturation. As a result, out of 91 interviews, 30 interviews focused on burial groups, while 10 of the 42 FGDs directly discussed burial groups. Although we pay attention to issues discussed in these thematic interviews (30) and FGDs (10) to illustrate the central argument in this article, conclusions about the impact of burial groups are based on overall observations and descriptions of many other situations in which solidarity obligations were discussed.

All interviews and FGDs were conducted and recorded in Luganda and transcribed in English. The transcription process was highly iterative, allowing reflections on the data, identification of interesting issues and emerging patterns in the data. Transcribed data were imported into NVivo10 software for further analysis. In line with suggestions by Braun and Clarke (2006), coding was done for the entire data set paying attention to each data item and 'identifying interesting aspects in the data' that showed repeated patterns.

The study received ethical approval from the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Amsterdam, the School of Public Health at Makerere University, and the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST). Informed written consent was obtained from participants before formal interviews and FGDs were conducted. Oral permission was always sought and received from the key organisers or leaders for observations during communal events. Pseudonyms are used in this article to protect the privacy of participants.

Results

The nature of burial groups in Luwero

Whereas all groups were known by the generic name, *munno mukabi*, the emphasis on solidary relations during death is depicted in their 'relational' names such as *Kigudde w'ani?* (Where has trouble occurred?), *Abataka abaagalana* (residents that love each other), *Ssekiliba kya ttaka mpaawo atalikyambala* (every person dies and ends up in the soil), and *Tuyambe muvubuka mmunaffe* (let us help our fellow youth). The community members noted that the selection of the names for burial groups is meant to depict what the group stands for.

Whereas some burial groups, such as *Abataka abaagalana* and *Ssekiliba kya ttaka*, had a clear leadership structure with a chairperson, vice-chair person, treasurer and secretary, most groups did not have a clearly recognised leadership structure. The people themselves without any external support started all burial groups. All burial groups hold meetings either on a monthly basis or at the time of the burial of a member. Most meetings are held to plan how to support the bereaved person and to collect members' contributions towards burial expenses. Unlike burial societies described elsewhere that operate with formally written rules and constitutions and are registered with authorities (Dercon et al., 2008; Ngwenya, 2002), the Luwero burial groups were largely informal community-based arrangements. None of the burial groups was registered with any government office. To most of the members, the rules were largely an unwritten script, which they followed with little or no complaint.

Membership in the groups could be termed as fluid in nature, which also meant that it was difficult to know the exact number of burial groups that existed and their membership. However, data from a household survey we conducted in the same community revealed that over 46 percent of participants belonged to at least one group. Estimates from interviews and discussions indicated membership averaging between 20 and 80 members per group. Membership in a group often starts with close neighbours/homes and villages and shared interests or economic activity, for example a group of motorcycle riders. Later, the membership would be open to all adults irrespective of status. For example, *Tuyambe muvubuka mmunaffe* started in 2011 as a burial youth group for motorcycle riders initially attracting only motorcycle riders; by 2013, it had opened up membership to all. Membership tended to be localised, although some groups, such as a case of *Tuyambe muvubuka mmunaffe*, had members as far as Kampala city, which, as Smith (2004) points out, indicates an attempt to 'keep ties with the place of origin' (p. 569). Some groups, such as *Ssekiliba kya ttaka*, required members to pay a membership fee of USh5000 (US$1.78) and monthly subscription of USh500 (US$0.17), while others collected contributions only when a member died. Most groups emphasised active participation of their members, which in this context meant adhering to the group requirements.

Mobilisation of tangible and non-tangible contributions adhered to pre-determined procedures per group. Most groups provided support when the deceased was a member or close kin to a group member. Contributions were in the form of labour, cash and food items, with slight variations across groups. All groups had records of members' contributions handwritten in a book. Whereas it was uncommon to announce publicly individual contributions, unless it was a 'big' contribution made by a politician or a prominent person seeking political capital, groups' contributions were always publicly announced. Members of specific burial groups always noted whether their entire group's contribution had been announced. Group contributions were usually food and non-food items. Some burial groups also had basic utensils or assets such as saucepans, plates, dishes, cups and tarpaulins as a source of identification, which they used during funerals for members.

Whereas group contributions depict the tangible benefits to bereaved members, discussions with participants downplayed their 'tangibility' and emphasised the meaning attached to the act of

pooling resources. Pooling resources was more about a shared sense of sadness than direct benefits derived from contributions, supporting the idea that groups' 'economic and social or moral support often entwine' (Jindra and Noret, 2013: 22). Its not one or the other. Group contributions signify a sense of shared responsibility:

> For groups like *muno mukabi*, you can't say there are tangible things that will benefit members. . . . What is important is that there is *okukunakuwarilako* [sharing sadness with the person]. So, people know that when they join the group they will not be expecting to get money or anything tangible but to feel that others are sharing with them. (Interview with a member of a burial group)

Members of burial groups posited that within a given burial group, members have obligations towards each other as support networks providing and receiving support and comfort. It is clear that groups are intended to cement lasting bonds. Being together with people in a group and seeing group members provide at a funeral not only comforts members, it is also a measure of identity and belonging (Durham, 2002; Smith, 2004; Teshome et al., 2012).

Beyond individual felt sense of shared sadness to community good: Why groups do not matter

One afternoon in July 2012, I met three women at one of their friend's home engaged in a conversation about a burial they had failed to attend. Although their conversation started on general goings-on in the community, it drifted to the burial of a deceased person who at the time of his death had moved to a nearby village. As they discussed the reasons for not attending the burial, one of them said, 'You know, I wanted to attend the burial not because the deceased was close to me but for the good of the village'. As soon as she said this, others appeared to agree with her that they should have attended the burial for the good of the community because it was a shame that many people from the village did not go to bury him, yet he had been an active person (*mujumbize*) in the community. Active participation defined a person who, in this context, always attended burials, contributed resources, attended night vigils and was always 'available' to help whenever others were in need irrespective of whether he or she belonged in a group. Such an individual is generally referred to as a good person, locally known as *muntu mulamu.* Their discussion raises questions about the distinction between participation for individual and/or community good. In this regard, the burial of Ouma's mother is particularly illuminating.

On 12 June 2013, I joined a group of women knitting for a conversation, in what had become my daily routine. Our conversation meandered into the death of Ouma's mother, which had been announced earlier in the day; the burial was scheduled for the following day. During our conversation, I asked whether the group of *Kiggudde Wani* was going to do something, and one of them said,

> We will not do anything because Ouma has not been 'active' whenever we lose people in this village. Even when his mother died, he was not here; he was in Kasana [neighboring town]. It was Namande [Ouma's wife] who was always there as if she was her real mother. Ouma is [was] not a good man. However, people will just take a few things tomorrow morning.

Ouma, though a resident in the study community, worked in the neighbouring town of Kasana, a few kilometres from the study community. As a first born and an heir to his late father, taking care of his mother was his responsibility. In Buganda, an heir is considered the head of the household; s/he makes all-important decisions on matters concerning the welfare of the home. Because of his work, Ouma rarely came to the community and hardly participated in community burials. Ouma's

two young brothers lived in the community and were considered active members. Ouma was not a member of any burial group, but his wife, Namande, was a member of one of the burial groups.

On the day of the burial, Ouma's home was a beehive of activity, with women gathered peeling green plantain, sorting the rice, and preparing saucepans to cook food. Men, on the other hand, were digging the grave and fetching water and firewood. This appeared a contrast to earlier descriptions of Ouma as a non-cooperative member. Later, during conversations with John and Mukesi, it became clear why people like Ouma would still get the support, although he was not necessarily active in the community:

Laban:	So, why are there very many people even before the burial time?
John:	Many people here came for various reasons because there are people who came as friends to Namande and Okello's brothers
Mukesi:	But most people here have known even the old woman herself but she has not been well looked after by her sons, especially Ouma. He just left her alone; it was terrible to see where she was sleeping!
Laban:	Okay, so do people always work like this?
Mukesi:	It is a commitment; when someone dies you have to work and help. It is very important because you know you will die and you have to be buried with respect.
John:	That is very true; even when Ouma was not active, in some way, people have come. If you do not come, then you are labelled as someone who is not active in the community.

From this conversation, we note two things indicative of what was going on: first, 'if you don't come then you are labelled . . . ', which links funeral participation to social pressure – while this pressure can be felt among group members, it appears to be felt even more among people who are not in groups; second, the level of interconnectedness – while people pointed to the lack of participation of Ouma, there was significant support from the friends of Namande and Ouma's brothers, which depicts the role of social network (Musinguzi, 2016).

When it was time for the burial, as people gathered in front of Ouma's house, the chairperson of *Kigudde w'ani* burial group announced to members to give cash condolences. With a container and a small book, he immediately started collecting and writing each member's contributions, which were later publicly announced. One of the two men who were seated behind me murmured to his friend, 'People have come to bury but Ouma never attends people's burials'. His friend responded, 'He is lucky because the people here are many, but you know you can't refuse to help someone like that. He is a resident and has people like Namande who are good'. After the sermon, announcements were made of groups that contributed food, labour for cooking, cooking utensils and cash. Food items, cooking and cash contributions were made by *Ssekiliba kya ttaka* and *Kigudde w'ani*, burial groups where Namande belonged.

In the vignettes presented in this article, it is clear that community good and belonging is not about group membership. It is more about the individual participation than it is about group membership. In fact, for some members, groups are a source of conflict and have done little to promote a sense of solidarity.

Conflicts and tensions during funeral ceremonies. At the time of serving food to the mourners during the funeral of Ouma's mother, a scuffle ensued between two women. One of the women, Katie, was carrying two plates of food to serve some of the mourners when another woman confronted her. She grabbed the plates of food from Katie, and in a raised voice, said, 'This food is for group members [*ab'ekibiina*], do not take this food. Where are you taking it?'. As an exchange of words

ensued, one of the other women also serving food came to them and said to Katie, 'Sorry Katie, I think Gertrude [the woman who grabbed the plate] didn't understand; take food and give it to the residents [*ab'ekyalo*] as well'. Katie, although a sister to Namande and an in-law to Ouma, did not belong to a burial group but attended the burial and participated in the activities as a close family member. Serving the food cooked by the group members did not please some group members even though Katie was a close relative of the deceased family member. While this incident appeared to contrast with what had happened earlier on in the morning when people had worked as one, it appeared to be a general trend, as at some of the burials I attended, it was common to find group members serving food they had cooked to a section of the people while leaving out others.

After the burial, during a conversation with Mukesi, a group member, he noted that the incident mirrored tensions attributable to burial groups during funerals. Mukesi mentioned that because of burial groups, whenever there is a funeral, non-group members sometimes bring food items and 'dump it there' for the group members to cook. Reflecting on the incident at Ouma's home, Mukesi noted,

> Indeed people were divided and many who attended did not like it. At the same funeral, we heard people say, 'when you prepare food as a group you don't want to serve other people at the funeral'. The non-group members complained, 'You do not even bother about us yet we brought food'. We heard all that . . . and yes, that is true, there is some form of disunity between the group members and non-group members.

Mukesi also mentioned that sometimes non-group members only appear at the time of burial and leave immediately thereafter. Accusations and counter-accusations were common during most burials. These accusations always hovered around who brought food, who should cook, who should serve, and often times, who should eat, between group members and non-members. These divisions, especially over food, contradicted traditionally held beliefs that eating at a funeral is a sign of solidarity. Tensions between group members and non-group members have made the burial groups unpopular among some people. For example, Katie faulted burial groups as a source of divisions. She noted that some people stay away from groups because of the internal disagreements within groups that often spill over into the community, leading to conflicts within the groups and the community in general. She explained,

> Burial groups have divided us. For example, when my sister lost a daughter, the group members refused to support yet she was in that group. From that incident, some other group members got annoyed . . . So, do you see how divisions come in? Justine [referring to another resident who left a burial group] lost a grandchild, the group refused to work and support her, she and others got annoyed and left the group. Whenever there is a burial, tensions are high.

Katie did not belong to any burial group, but her observations about burial groups reveal how burial groups are fraught with tensions and conflicts. People who were critical of burial groups emphasised individual active participation. When Katie lost her brother and mother, 'people came in big numbers because I am active person even when I am not a group member' she noted. For some community members, such conflicts between group and non-group members signal the diminishing solidarity.

Do conflicts and tensions signal increased or diminished solidarity obligations?

The older generation always talked about the past as the 'good old' days when the community did not rely on groups to support each other. Although no one would specify a particular time frame for

the 'good old days', in an interview with Betty, a 69-year-old female, she recollected how individuals helped each other without any form of group arrangement. Betty, also a member of a burial group, noted that things have changed:

> In the past, whenever a person died, all community members were concerned; they would get food from their gardens, firewood and carry to the bereaved family. We all used to provide labour: cook food, dig up the grave, and serve food to everyone. All these are dying out because people now grow and sell food. Today, we have other tribes who have come in but do not know our cultural practices as Baganda; they do not care.

In her candid assessment, Betty portrayed the role of burial groups as (re)shaping solidarity. Although she believed that groups enable community members to cope with diminishing solidarity, the change was a point of concern for her.

Joan, who at the time of the study did not belong to any burial group, equally expressed concerns about limited support for non-group members. In one of the interviews, she mentioned how the burial groups have affected the 'good old' days (*enkola ey'edda)*, which embraced togetherness as the best way of sustaining solidary relations during death:

> If one gets a problem, they say that 'after all, that person is in a group, let his/her group members help'. The groups came in but they spoiled and changed the old ways of doing things. They really spoiled it because if you are not a member of the group, they do not help you [. . .]. For instance, if I lose a relative or die, you may come and fail to have a cup of porridge because I am not in a burial group. Those who belong to groups may come and only say, 'It's a pity and immediately leave'.

Similar sentiments were echoed during one of the FGDs with men.

Participant 5: When you get a problem and you are not a group member, then you only get assistance from very few households.

Participant 1: Yes, that is true. What he is trying to say is that, for example, if you needed UShs200,000 (US$68.14) to be able to feed people at the funeral, the support from fellow group members may cut down your personal costs to about USh50,000 (US$17.03) or even zero. But if you are not a member, you may even fail to get a person to prepare porridge for mourners.

Yet, as noted during Betty's discussion, some community members hold the view that it is for such perceived diminishing communal solidarity that burial groups have been formed to fill the gap:

> For us, before we formed this group, a fellow community member lost a relative, but there was nobody food to cook. We decided to form a group so that if I encounter such circumstances, I would be helped. It would be my obligation to extend the same support if my colleagues also happen to be in the similar circumstances. (Interview with a member of a burial group)

While some community members hold the view that burial groups have diminished obligations regarding support, others believe that groups have come to fill the gap. However, the actual impact remains ambiguous. In some cases, it would appear as though group members support each other and exclude non-group members. However, social pressure for public display of solidarity and the level of community interconnectedness means that total exclusion is difficult.

Although it was noted that the support by group members to non-members does not go beyond the perfunctory phrase 'it's a pity', public display of solidarity with the bereaved remained culturally important as a form of funeral insurance because 'if you don't [render help], people will take note'.

On 26 May 2013, news of James' death circulated in the community. James, in his early 30s, was born and raised in the community. By the time of his death, he was living about 60 km away in Kampala city where he had businesses. Immediately when it was confirmed that his burial would be on 27 May, at his ancestral home, which was located about 50 km from the community, everybody expressed desire to attend his burial. On the day of the burial, community members contributed UShs4000 (US$1.38) each towards hiring a truck to transport the mourners and had their names written in an exercise book by the vice-chairperson of the village. Buleli, in her 50s, called me to where they were seated with a group of other women, and said:

> You know, I have been sick, but I have to go and burry James. If it was not that people would wonder why I have not gone to bury him I would not have gone.

Like several other people who ordinarily would not have gone for burial, Buleli had to be there because she was concerned about what people would think of her action. It was important that the public should see her. When the truck finally arrived, everybody who had paid boarded. About 60 people travelled. We arrived late at the burial site and burial had already taken place. Each one of us who travelled made sure we personally greeted the bereaved family members, which I later learnt was for 'recognition' and proof that we attended. As we were eating, one of the people with whom we travelled said to me, 'These are the things you always ask us about Laban . . . see for yourself. People have traveled in big numbers to burry James'. On the way back, people kept talking about those who had not gone to the burial, mentioning name by name. I did not hear anyone talk about any burial group.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate ambiguity about the role of burial groups and their emergency in the community. To a section of the community, burial groups were introduced in response to the challenge of diminishing communal solidarity (De Coninck and Drani, 2009; Lewis, 2001; Nobelius et al., 2012). This way, burial groups reflect a form of adaptation of social solidarity practices of the 'past'. Historical accounts of solidarity among the Baganda show how people always exhibited solidary behaviours during death (Nzita and Mbaaga, 1995; Roscoe, 1911) to the extent that obligations for communal solidarity became an institutionalised part of *kiganda* culture forming a strong component of reciprocal relations, or what Shipton (2007) referred to as 'networks of indebtedness'. Therefore, perceived this way, burial groups depict an attempt to sustain these solidarity obligations and/or a reinvention of old principles of reciprocity and civility that predate burial groups' existence (Ngwenya, 2004). For example, as Betty recounted, it was a shame that someone died and there was no one to help. It is this shame that instigated the formation of some of the burial groups. The formation of burial groups therefore can be seen as the first trope to hold onto that has solidified belonging and mutual aid as well as increasing a sense of shared responsibility towards one another. In some way, the introduction of burial groups also shows that communities have not surrendered when it comes to helping their lot, and that the burial groups are central to building community resilience (Twesigye et al., 2019). Such narratives support Ngwenya's (2003) argument that burial societies have simply redefined kin and social relations. Our results, however, show that this has become a romanticised view of burial

groups, as evidence also shows that burial groups have not only eroded solidarity but are also fraught with tensions and conflicts.

Results also show that some sections of the community depict burial groups as a source of division, conflicts, exclusion and in 'contravention' of the practices of the past. People often talked about *enkola ey'edda* (old practices) as 'good' with a sense of nostalgia that has been replaced by groups. At best the burial groups can be seen as a 'new' face of innovative forms of solidarity. As a 'new face' of innovative forms of solidarity, our results suggest a high sense of internalised solidarity, which 'restricts' obligations for helping within group membership. In social capital literature (Häuberer, 2014; Putnam, 2000), internalised solidarity is critical for bonding social capital to thrive. It is driven by the moral obligations members have for each other, a sense of identity and belonging (Smith, 2004). Internal solidarity thrives on the normative expectations that some sanctions will be imposed for not acting out solidarity as we have seen with the case of the death of Ouma's mother and James. Sanctions are usually in the form of withholding reciprocal solidary acts in the event that a non-active person gets a problem. Therefore, whereas solidarity behaviour is enhanced by what appears as obligatory contributions within the group, solidary acts outside the group or between members and non-members are fraught with tensions and conflicts. The case of Ouma's mother showed that conflicts usually emerge between members and non-group members. While conflicts during funerals have been documented in various parts of Africa (Bähre, 2007; De Witte, 2003; Geschiere, 2005; Ngwenya, 2003), conflicts between members of burial groups and non-members appear to be emerging in rural Uganda. One outcome of these conflicts is that they redefine belonging. Whyte's (2005) study of belonging and burial in Uganda suggests that belonging can be seen as a struggle between cultural obligations that carry a jural relationship on the one hand, and affectionate obligations based on a sense of identification and connectedness for the members on the other hand. The jural relationship regulates the potential binary between 'us' and 'them', or to borrow Putnam's (1995) discussion of civic engagement, in relation to 'I' and 'WE', as was constantly used during funerals to differentiate between belonging to a group (*ab'ekibiina*) and non-group members (*ab'ekyalo)*. Solidarity tends to disappear even for people in the same community belonging to different burial groups. Consequently, tensions were eminent at most burials. However, 'pressure' to be publicly seen as participating in funerals, as has been documented in funeral practices elsewhere (De Witte, 2003; Durham and Klaits, 2002), is critical in regulating emergent conflicts between members and non-group members.

Contrary to studies that portray burial societies as unifying local institutions (Jones, 2009; Ngwenya, 2002, 2003; Shale, 2014; Teshome et al., 2012), our results challenge this *romanticised* view of burial groups. Burial groups generate conflicts and tensions (Durham and Klaits, 2002) that can be understood by drawing from Karlstrom's (1996) work, which argues that conflicts create a necessary form of ambivalence enabling a 'local model of social solidarity and unity in diversity' (p. 492).

Our conclusion therefore is that by no measure does the proliferation of burial groups in Uganda suggest an increase in solidarity relations and neither does it suggest erosion of the same. With increasing modernization, commercialization of goods, limited social protection services from the state and a host of other socio-economic challenges, the proliferation of burial groups in rural Uganda is expected to continue. Burial groups ought to be studied as a model of solidarity in diversity.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: We acknowledge financial support from the Dutch government under the WOTRO-funded research programme, Developing Sustainable Community Health Resources in Resource-Poor Settings (CoHeRe).

ORCID iD

Laban Kashaija Musinguzi https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6710-3133

References

Bähre, E. (2007) 'Reluctant Solidarity: Death, Urban Poverty and Neighbourly Assistance in South Africa', *Ethnography* 8(1): 33–59.

Braun, V. and V. Clarke (2006) 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3: 77–101.

Brown, C. (1982) 'Kgatleng Burial Societies', *Botswana Notes and Records* 14: 80–84.

Dafuleya, G. (2012) 'Enterprising in the Face of Death: Social Entrepreneurship in African Burial Societies', *Journal of Enterprising Culture* 20(3): 357–78.

Dafuleya, G. (2018) '(Non)state and (In)formal Social Protection in Africa: Focusing on Burial Societies', *International Social Work* 61(1): 156–68.

De Coninck, J. and E. Drani (2009) 'Social Protection Is Centuries-Old! Culture and Social Protection for the Very Poor in Uganda: Evidence and Policy Implications', Chronic Poverty Research Center, Working Paper No. 140. Kampala: The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda.

De Witte, M. (2003) 'Money and Death: Funeral Business in Asante, Ghana', *Africa* 73(4): 531–59.

Dercon, S., J. de Weerdt, T. Bold and A. Pankhurst (2006) 'Group-Based Funeral Insurance in Ethiopia and Tanzania', *World Development* 34(4): 685–703.

Dercon, S., J. Hoddinott, P. Krishnan and T. Woldehanna (2008) 'Collective Action and Vulnerability: Burial Societies in Rural Ethiopia', Collective Action and Property Rights (CAPRi), Working Paper No. 83. Available online at: http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/44356/2/capriwp83.pdf (accessed 2 October 2015).

Durham, D. (2002) 'Love and Jealousy in the Space of Death', *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 67(2): 155–79.

Durham, D. and F. Klaits (2002) 'Funerals and the Public Space of Sentiment in Botswana', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28(4): 777–95.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1949) 'Burial and Mortuary Rites of the Nuer', *African Affairs* 48(190): 56–63.

Geschiere, P. (2005) 'Funerals and Belonging: Different Patterns in South Cameroon', *African Studies Review* 48(2): 45–64.

Glaser, B.G. (1978) *Theoretical Sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Grant, S. (1987) 'Death and Burial in Mochudi: A Study of Changing Traditions', *Botswana Notes and Records* 19: 137–49.

Hall, N.P. (1987) 'Self-Reliance in Practice: A Study of Burial Societies in Harare, Zimbabwe', *Journal of Social Development in Africa* 2(1): 49–71.

Häuberer, J. (2014) 'Social Capital in Voluntary Associations: Localizing Social Resources', *European Societies* 16(4): 570–93.

Jindra, M. and J. Noret (2013) 'African Funerals and Sociocultural Change: A Review of Momentous Transformations across a Continent', in M. Jindra and J. Noret (eds) *Funerals in Africa: Explorations of a Social Phenomenon*. New York: Berghahn Books, 16–40.

Jones, B. (2007) 'The Teso Insurgency Remembered: Churches, Burials and Propriety', *Africa* 77(4): 500516.

Jones, B. (2009) *Beyond the State in Rural Uganda*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Karlstrom, M. (1996) 'Imagining Democracy: Political Culture and Democratization in Buganda', *Africa* 66(4): 485–505.
Kasente, D., N. Asingwire, F. Banugire and S. Kyomuhendo (2002) 'Social Security Systems in Uganda', *Journal of Social Development in Africa* 17(2): 157–83.
Lewis, D. (2001) *The Management of Non-Governmental Development Organizations: An Introduction*, 1st edn. Abingdon: Routledge.
Little, K. (1953) 'The Study of "Social Change" in British West Africa', *Africa* 23(4): 274–84.
Mariam, D. (2003) 'Indigenous Social Insurance as an Alternative Financing Mechanism for Health Care in Ethiopia (the Case of Eders)', *Social Science & Medicine* 56(8): 1719–26.
Musinguzi, L.K. (2016) 'The Role of Social Networks in Savings Groups: Insights from Village Savings and Loan Associations in Luwero, Uganda', *Community Development Journal* 51(4): 499–516.
Ngwenya, N.B. (2002) 'Gender, Dress and Self-Empowerment: Women and Burial Societies in Botswana', *African Sociological Review* 6(2): 1–27.
Ngwenya, N.B. (2003) 'Redefining Kin and Family Social Relations: Burial Societies and Emergency Relief in Botswana', *Journal of Social Development in Africa* 18(1): 85–110.
Ngwenya, N.B. (2004) 'Evading Household Indebtedness through Participation in Group Solidarity Coping Strategies in Contemporary Botswana', *Eastern Africa Social Science Review* 20(2): 1–30.
Nobelius, A., B. Kalina, R. Pool, J. Whitworth, J. Chesters and R. Power (2012) '"The Young Ones Are the Condom Generation": Condom Use Amongst Out-of-School Adolescents in Rural Southwest Uganda', *The Journal of Sex Research* 49(1): 88–102.
Nzita, R. and N. Mbaaga (1996) *The Peoples and Cultures of Uganda*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
Oosthuizen, G.C. (1990) 'Ecumenical Burial Societies in South Africa: Mutual Caring and Support that Transcends Ecclesiastical and Religious Differences', *An International Review* 18(4): 463–72.
Putnam, R.D. (1995) 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy* 6(1): 65–78.
Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
Ranger, T. (2004) 'Dignifying Death: The Politics of Burial in Bulawayo', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34(1/2): 110–44.
Roscoe, J. (1911) *The Baganda: An Account of Their Customs and Beliefs*. New York: Barnes & Noble.
Sachikonye, L.M. (2004) 'Solidarity & Africa in the New Century', *Review of African Political Economy* 31(102): 649–56.
Shale, M.T. (2014) 'Can Burial Societies Be Used to Overcome Flooding? Insurance and Resilience in Poor, Urban South Africa', *Climate and Development* 6(3): 256–65.
Shipton, P. (2007) *The Nature of Entrustment: Intimacy, Exchange, and the Sacred in Africa*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Smith, D.J. (2004) 'Burials and Belonging in Nigeria: Rural-Urban Relations and Social Inequality in a Contemporary African Ritual', *American Anthropologist* 106(3): 569–79.
Spradley, J.P. (1980) *Participant Observation*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.
Teshome, E., M. Zenebe, H. Metaferia and S. Biadgilign (2012) 'The Role of Self-Help Voluntary Associations for Women Empowerment and Social Capital: The Experiences of Women's Iddirs (Burial Societies) in Ethiopia', *Journal of Community Health* 37(3): 706–14.
Twesigye, J., J.M. Twikirize, R. Luwangula and S. Kitimbo (2019) 'Building Resilience through Indigenous Mechanisms: The Case of Bataka Groups in Western Uganda', in J.M. Twikirize and H. Spitzer (eds) *Social Work Practice in Africa: Indigenous and Innovative Approaches.* Kampala: Fountain Publishers, p. 145–160.
Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2016) *The National Population and Housing Census 2014—Main Report*. Kampala: Uganda Bureau of Statistics.
Whyte, S.R. (2005) 'Going Home? Belonging and Burial in the Era of AIDS', *Africa* 75(2): 154–72.

Author biographies

Laban Kashaija Musinguzi holds a Doctoral Degree from the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands and currently teaches in the Department of Social Work and Social Administration, School of Social Sciences Makerere University, Uganda.

Jude T. Rwemisisi works as a Research Fellow at the Uganda Management Institute, (UMI), Kampala, Uganda.

Emmanueil Benon Turinawe teaches in the Department of Development Studies at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

Danny De Vries is an Assistant Professor at the University of Amsterdam. He teaches in the Anthropology Department.

Marije De Groot At the time of drafting this manuscript, she worked as a researcher in the Anthropology Department at University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Denis Muhangi teaches in the Department of Social Work and Social Administration, at Makerere University Kampala.

David Kaawa Mafigiri is a Senior Lecturer and teaches in the Department of Social Work and Social Administration, Makerere University, Kampala.

Achilles Katamba teaches in the School of Medicine, Makerere University, Uganda.

Robert C Pool is a Professor of Global Health at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.