

**‘The dead are not far’:**

**Luyia paremiology with special reference to gender, sexuality, death and God**

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**ABSTRACT**

The primary aim of this research is to study Luyia proverbs. Taking proverbs from four Luyia ethnic groups (Tsotso, Kisa, Marama and Wanga) this research explores their form, meaning and uses in various discourses. The twin object of the study is to portray the structural characteristics of Luyia proverbs and obtain insights on their culture, specifically constructions of perceptions on gender, sexuality, death and God.

This exploratory study employs mainly a qualitative process of research. Methods used include unstructured interviews and participant observation. The study is based on a corpus of 865 proverbs, gathered in discussion cells, focus groups, speaking forums as well as from 14 published and unpublished sources. The study incorporates thick descriptions and details of participant observations from 115 sessions during the researcher’s numerous visits to western Kenya spanning six years. It uses inductive reasoning to derive theory from observations.

This research finds that Luyia proverbs are not fixed or rigid but ever changing. In this regard the form of Luyia proverbs embraces lexical elements, syntactic arrangements of these elements, the framework in which they are couched as well as structural features which emerge from ordering the lexical elements. Proverbs reveal the uncharacteristic heroic treatment of women upon their death, the centrality of death in Luyia culture, muted incidence of homosexuality and absence of God in Luyia religious belief. This emerging information has implications for relating to gender equity, sexual education, pastoral care and mission issues.

This research contributes towards filling a gap in knowledge on Luyia paremiology and African orature in general. It significantly improves the state of Luyia paremiography by upgrading work last done twenty four years ago. The primary corpus of 339 proverbs is enlarged over twofold to nearly 900 proverbs by adding 255 newly derived and 271 previously unrecorded proverbs, a fact contributing to the originality of this research.