Assessing The Origins and Development of Bullfighting Culture among the Abakakamega of Western Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study endeavoured to assess the origin of bullfighting culture among the Abakakamega people of Kakamega County in western part of Kenya. The study embraced qualitative research approach. This approach was applicable for use because it allowed the combination of various methods of collecting data conveniently. These methods included texts, use of videos and audios during oral interviews as a primary method of collecting data that largely informed this study. The study further traced the history and development of bullfighting in general and providing the comparisons over its state among the Abakakamega. The study provides an avenue of educating the community and the leadership of the Kenya on the importance of investing in bullfighting and how it has impact in the society in terms of social, political, and economic progress of the Abakakamega community. This study is significant since it clearly situates the place of bullfighting culture to the Abakakamega people and how it may improve their livelihoods in.

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INTRODUCTION

This study’s primary goal was to trace the history of bullfighting among the Abakakamega people in Western Kenya. Residents of the constituencies of Shinyalu (the Isukha community) and Ikolomani (the Idakho community) are referred to as Abakakamega. The aspect of bullfighting in Kenya is mirrored as masculine symbols par excellence, the bulls provide the Abakakamega language with raw materials for metaphoric postulations on the nature of life and how it should be lived. A man who is referred to as Ichilishi or a bull is perceived as virile, powerful, tough and a womanizer (a highly positive virtue) among the Abakakamega. Some women will be heard boasting: Nabahila khu Ichilishi, ‘I am married to a bull’. The Luhyas say one can only talk of ill of such a man out of his earshot. Politicians among the Abakakamega vying for positions of leadership struggle to get a bull or any other masculine icon as their symbol.

A politician recognized as a bull is accorded respect and is always given an opportunity to address people in any gathering. A sick man on the verge of death will be told “a bull dies with grass in its mouth”. Through this statement, the sick man is asked to have sex with his wife even if he is sick in order to prove that sickness has not feminized him. If the men want to establish if the sick man will die, they ask his wife: “does the bull ever taste porridge?” This is a euphemistic reference to sex. In this respect, masculinity is therefore a function of sexual activity. The term Abakakamega was gazetted through the Kenya gazette number 3943-1-7-1995 and no other document exist to this reference. From the archival notes, it confirms that bullfighting is practiced among the Abakakamega which is representing Isukha and Idakho people.1 Mwayuli in his work often uses the statement Abakakamega which denotes either Kakamega Township or Kakamega District then, to mean the people of Isukha and Idakho. The later usage was the old one especially at the time when Amaitisa Malenya with a nickname-Milimu was the chief from early 1930’s.2 Muchanga in his work uses the term Abakakamega by denoting that bulls play a greater role in the cultural life of the Abakakamega.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From the works of Vega, the first bullfights in history took place in the Roman Colosseum.3 The Romans brought animals of the Urus species4, a large bull with sharp horns that has since become extinct. The breed was commonly known by Spaniards as angry bulls, from the Iberian Peninsula. These bulls were brought to fight against Roman prisoners who were forced to fight for entertainment. Roman Circuses with bullfighting were intended to keep the people entertained with barbaric and bloody shows notably during the Fall of Rome. Initially in the Coliseum, prisoners did not have great success fighting against lions, as was commonplace. Roman leaders concerned that onlookers would be displeased, began to bring the “angry bulls” to Rome for use in the Coliseum. The bulls provided a more entertaining show because fighters generally remained alive longer and would have a chance to fight back. Bulls all but guaranteed a slow death show, giving the Romans the kind of entertainment that they were looking for. Roman Circuses disappeared with the fall of the Roman Empire.6 Therefore, based on the origin and historicity of bullfighting in Rome, this study focused on tracing the origin and culture of bullfighting among the Abakakamega of Western Kenya.

1KNA/DC/ KMG/2/1/165/1957; Isukha Location, Archival notes
4It is an extinct cattle species, considered to be the wild ancestor of modern domestic cattle. With a shoulder height of upto 180 centimetres in bulls and 155 centimetres in cows.
5An amphitheater, stadium, large theater, or other special building for public meetings, sporting events, exhibitions, etc.
6RIUS, Toros si, toreros no, (1st ed.) Editorial Grijalbo S.A. de C.V. México 1990
While bullfighting was done in Rome as a form of entertainment, in Spain, the Spaniards hunted bulls with the purpose of nourishment rather than for show.\textsuperscript{7} Around the year 1400 AD, the Spaniards began to create a show out of bull hunting, much like the Englishmen practiced with fox hunting and Germans and Italians did with deer and other animal hunting. In Spain, bulls after capture were placed in large corrals to be dramatically chased down and killed in a dramatic show.\textsuperscript{8} In the 18th century, the Spanish noble class embraced bullfighting when the Arabs were expelled from Spain. Soldiers practiced and prepared for war by killing the bull while skilfully manoeuvring on horseback. The noble class had servants to assist in practice by distracting bulls with a cape when the riders fell from their horses. These practice scenarios were very similar to the bullfights as we know them today.\textsuperscript{9} Therefore, it is important to record that, bullfighting is well welcomed in the mentioned countries. It is an aspect that the participants are the human beings versus animals (bulls). However, among the Abakakamega, it is a sport that involves bulls locking of horns. It is on the preceding argument that this study examined the relationship that exists between the bull and human beings in this matter among the Abakakamega of Western Kenya.

The practice became so popular in Spain that special enclosures were built by the nobility. In 1701 A.D, Felipe V, the new anointed King of Spain, prohibited the activity, believing that such sport did not meet standards of the nobility. King Felipe left this practice in the hands of servants who from then would partake in the sport. This was an important moment in the history of bullfighting. Bullfighting went from being considered a noble sport to becoming a vile plebeian spectacle to which the aristocracy attended for entertainment. Bullfighting evolved and gradually employed new weapons to kill the bull in a drawn-out fashion.\textsuperscript{10} Today, the torero\textsuperscript{11} or matador\textsuperscript{12} puts all his efforts into weakening the bull’s neck muscles. This action is conducted with the purpose of forcing the bull to lower his head to give the torero an opportunity for a final sword thrust between the shoulder blades.\textsuperscript{13} It is on this basis that this study was interested in unleashing the place of bullfighting as a sport among the Abakakamega.

According to Marvin, a bullfight that is generally lethal to the bull, has deep roots in Mediterranean antiquity, though attempts to link or compare its contemporary manifestations with ancient ones should take account of the huge socio-cultural differences between the ages.\textsuperscript{14} 15 Modern bullfighting is based on traditions that emerged during the last three or four centuries on the Iberian Peninsula. In Spain alone, Marvin in his works argues that Douglass (1997) distinguished 16 different traditions\textsuperscript{16} of “games with bulls”.\textsuperscript{17} The best known goes under the name running the bulls and includes two principal types: mounted bullfighting and bullfighting on foot.\textsuperscript{18} 19 Marvin further adds that on the Iberian Peninsula, mounted bullfighting by Spanish gentlemen or gallants-heroes has in the past been practiced by members of the nobility, and is presently found in a few regions of Spain, such as Andalusia and in

\textsuperscript{8}Ibid
\textsuperscript{9}Ibid
\textsuperscript{10}A. McAleer. (2014). Dueling: The cult of honor in fin-de-siecle Germany (Vol. 283). Princeton University Press, p.34
\textsuperscript{11}A bullfighter, especially a matador.
\textsuperscript{12}A bullfighter whose task is to kill the bull.
\textsuperscript{13}A. McAleer. (2014). Op. Cit., p.35
\textsuperscript{16}The Carnival, Feria de Valdemorillo, Feria del Milagro, Feria del Toro de Olivenza, Feria Taurina de San Jose, Feria de la Magdalena, Feria Internacional del Toro de Coria, among others.
Portugal. Moreover, Marvin further asserts that bullfighting on foot by toreros is a tradition that from the 17th Century on became increasingly dominant in Spain. Thompson supports Marvin by postulating that this tradition is presently practiced in most popular bullfighting events in Spain, and corresponds to the tourists’ idea of a “bullfight.” Thompson puts it clear that bullfighting was an activity practiced by the nobility in countries such as Spain and Portugal. This study therefore focused on the ordinary population of Abakakamega and how bullfighting emerged and practiced as a tradition.

Brandes asserts that Bullfighting, specifically the bullfight, plays a significant, multifaceted, and controversial role in tourism sector to Spain. It is controversial because of a range of concerns including animal welfare, funding, and religion. The bull is a symbol of Spain and a landmark of its countryside. Bullfighting is a big business, which expanded considerably due to tourist demand. Bullfights are important, though controversial, tourist attractions. However, the interface of tourism and bull-fighting has not been thoroughly studied; this article is intended to open this issue to a systematic examination. Brandes informs the audience on bullfighting in Spain as a tourism attraction. What he does not tell the audience is how it contributes to political developments. Therefore, this study unravelled this misery.

Douglass puts out that Bullfighting was in the past performed primarily at fiestas, but from the 18th century onward, as it was taken on by the rising urban classes, bullfighting came to be performed outside traditional fiestas, as an independent, commercialized activity, conducted by professional toreros, and oriented to a massive public, composed of all the social classes. While not attached to any particular fiesta, it was proclaimed as Spain’s fiesta nacional. Wealands and Robson support Douglass by observing that bullfighting was a national event Spain. They have not specified the communities behind the success of bullfighting in Spain that has made it a national event. In this case, this study discussed the place of Abakakamega in the success of Bullfighting in Western Kenya and how it has impacted the economic, social, and political lives of Abakakamega.

From the 17th century onward, special bullrings, named plazas de toros, were built in major Spanish cities. According to Marvin (1988), there were eight first-class plazas de toros in Spain, the most famous being those of Madrid and Sevilla, but presently the biggest worldwide is the plaza of Mexico City. Bullfighting was, and remains, also popular in many smaller Spanish towns, though they may lack a specially constructed bullring. In Spain, bullfighting is a “big business,” a large-scale commercial venture. Mitchell supports Marvin by arguing that the source of an important agribusiness, based on specialized bull-breeding ranches, which provide highly priced bulls for the bullfights. Does Marvin and Mitchell expression apply in western Kenya in relation to bullfighting? This study filled this gap by interrogating the benefits of bullfighting culture.

In Mexico, Cohen alludes that the object of bullfighting is for the bullfighter (matador) to “conquer and kill the bull with a swift clean kill

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20Ibid, p.525
23Ibid., p.781
25Ibid, p.115

27The enclosed area where a bullfight takes place (bullring).
29Ibid, p.90
30Ibid., p.80
by placing a sword in a coin-sized area between the bull’s shoulders”. Advocates of bullfighting argue that if the matador aims correctly, the animal dies in a matter of seconds. This type of quick, clean death, however, is not the norm. In most cases, the matador misses the target, injuring the bull’s lungs and bronchial tubes, causing blood to flow and bubble through the animal’s mouth and nose. According to ex-matador D. Alvaro Munera, bullfighting is a cruel tradition, where the victim first off is innocent and where it is savagely tortured and massacred, as a tradition it is ethically inconceivable. Zoologist Jordi Casamitjana agrees, stating that “all behavioural evidence shows that bulls and cows suffer in bullfights; yes, they do suffer in all types of bullfights, even in those that do not end with their deaths; and yes, all aspects of any bullfight, from the transport to the death, are in themselves causes of suffering.” In Mexico, children as young as six may begin training for a career in this bloody “sport”. Casamitjana, Schulz, Brook, B and Kocherga did not explained to the audience the narrative behind the involvement of children in training as bullfighters. Unlike Mexico, where the fight is between the bull and human being, among the Abakakamega, understanding the human role it was important. Furthermore, in Mexico, children of up to six years are allowed to begin training matadors. This study interrogated the right age that the Abakakamega begins to get engaged in bullfighting either as bull owners, participant such as caretakers for bulls or fans.

The bull wrestling in Bosnia & Herzegovina is an ancient tradition that has been ever since part of festivities in villages all over the country. In these fights, only bulls are competing between themselves, without matadors, and the duel does not result in the death of one of them. In the open field, bulls are trying to chase each other within the improvised ring. What happens here is a sort of an extension of fights for dominance that occur between many species in nature. Obviously, animals fight in their natural way, with no man’s interference. Finally, one of them turns and leaves the ring, so no life is lost. Even though very interesting, this topic is rarely caught on film. One of the exceptions is a movie called “Korida” (2016) that depicts Bosnian bull-on-bull fights in a very credible way. Until a couple of years ago, the fights between bulls in Bosnia & Herzegovina used to be bloodier, but still not even close to the Spanish counterpart. Their horns were sharpened, plus some steel extensions were added on it. And just before entering the arena, they were hit to so that they fight more forcefully.

Nowadays, since the new rules came into force, bull wrestling is more animal-friendly, and very much resembling the fights that take place in the wild. Predominantly associated with masculinity, in Bosnia some women are also successfully participating with their bulls. It is against this background that this study looked forward to analyse the situation of bullfighting as an event among the Abakakamega of Western Kenya. As per new rules in Bosnia, the bulls are checked by the veterinaries before they enter the ring, to make sure that their horns are not too sharp, but also that their anti-doping test is negative. In general, the fights are supposed to play out under the natural conditions such as a battle for male dominance in the wild. The bulls are fighting by their own rules, with no brutal clashes or injuries happening. When the beasts clash their heads, one of them has to give up eventually. Sometimes, the animal leaves the arena without even trying to fight. Just like in nature. During the summer months, many bullfights are organized all around Bosnia & Herzegovina. Every week there is an event somewhere in the villages, which attracts

References

33Ibid., p.547
34Ibid., p.548
36https://www.itinari.com/bosnian-bullfights-in-a-nutshell-cuip
37Ibid
38Ibid
39Ibid
thousands of visitors. The most famous are “Grmecka korida” and “Cevljancovi korida”\(^40\). Often even just the names of bulls are the attractions for themselves because some of them are called Ronaldo, Messi, or Putin. The bullfights are perfect occasions for locals, but also for tourists, to gather and have fun while eating, dancing, singing, etc. In a nutshell, the entertainment is what matters the most for people when it comes to Bosnian.\(^41\) With the new rules in Bosnia where bullfighting is unbloody, such as anti-doping, no use of steel in bulls’ horns, no sharpening of horns, this study assessed the nature of bulls that are set for fight among the Abakakamega and also the place of women in bullfighting.

In Nepal, bullfighting is an important component of the cultural heritage and has remained untarnished over the centuries. People bet small or large amounts of money on bulls based on how much cash they have in their wallets,” Sanju Thapa, a spectator told Xinhua.\(^42\) Every year, spectators flock to see the animals fight at the Maghe Sankranti festival which brings an end to the ill-omened month of Poush when all religious ceremonies are forbidden, and marks the coming of warmer weather.\(^43\) Nepali-style bullfighting is fairly different from the well-known Spanish version, as bulls and men work in tandem against other teams. In a match, bulls shove, butt, and grunt against each other until one of them gives up or turns its back. Around fourteen bulls took part in the competition this year in a ring overlooking the stunning terraced hillsides of Nuwakot in front of a crowd of more than 5,000 on Wednesday.\(^44\) The bulls are selected when they are calves and are trained to fight at the annual fiesta. Therefore, this study used the bullfighting knowledge in Nepal to examine the relationship bullfighting in Abakakamega to that of Nepal.

In Colombia, written records exist of at least six bullfights in the first half of the 16\(^{th}\) century. By the time of the colonization, bullfights took place to celebrate the arrival of the Crown and a royal audience. In the first half of the 16\(^{th}\) century, councils of cities and villages were in charge of organizing and promoting bullfights.\(^45\) Members of the councils selected townsfolk that were tasked to sponsor the construction of bullrings with balconies in the “Plaza Mayor”. At that time, permanent bullfighting stadiums did not exist.\(^46\) The wooden balconies were to provide safety and comfort for the wealthy. The craftsmen were tasked to build a bullring in the Main Square or “plaza principal”, putting up a wooden fence to protect the public. However, this enclosure was no guarantee of safety, as cattle would occasionally run over the fence and scare people away. The celebration would conclude at night, with the torched bull spectacle.\(^47\) This event entailed wrapping up a bull’s horns in oil-soaked rags that would be lit on fire. The pain would agitate the animal, which would chase down foolish drunken viewers that dared to enter the ring. This study interrogated the impacts of established stadia among the Abakakamega to bullfighting. Also, it examined the contributions of colonialism to the bullfighting in Western Kenya.

A sport in China mixes traditional martial arts with bullfighting and it is growing in popularity.\(^48\) Unlike Spain’s more famous sport, the Chinese variant of bullfighting involves no swords or gore but instead fuses the moves of wrestling with the skill and speed of kung fu to bring down beasts weighing up to 400 kg (882 lb).\(^49\) “Spanish bullfighting is more like a performance or a show,” said Hua Yang, a 41-year-old enthusiast.

\(^{40}\) A traditional bullfight that takes place each year, in the first week of August in the region of Grmec, far Western Bosnia and Herzegovina

\(^{41}\) Ibid

\(^{42}\) https://www.himalayanglacier.com/feature-nepalese-betting-on-bullfighting/

\(^{43}\) Ibid

\(^{44}\) Ibid


\(^{46}\) Available at http://www.bdigital.unal.edu.co/1328/8/06CA PI05.pdf

\(^{47}\) Ibid


\(^{49}\) Ibid., p.550
who watched a bullfight during a visit to Spain. "This (the Chinese variety) is truly a contest pitting a human's strength against a bull. There are a lot of skills involved and it can be dangerous." The physically demanding sport requires fighters to train intensively, and they typically have short careers, said Han Haihua, a former pro wrestler who coaches bullfighters at his Haihua Kung fu School in Jiaxing. In China, it is about measuring the strength of a human by use of bulls. In this case, the study assessed the role of bullfighting in proving the strength of one community over the other through fighting bull-bull.

In South Korea, Hanwoo fighting bulls live longer and are fed a nutritious diet to help them build endurance and muscles while going through regular physical exercise to become super athletes. Hanwoo fighting bulls can typically enter the arena to fight from around age 4. There are bulls who are more than 10 years old still competing in bullfights. The athleticism of the fighting bulls is evident in the circular arena, when the testosterone-rich bulls display dominant behaviours such as deep throbbing howls while kicking up sand before they charge at each other, butting heads with great force. A victorious bull often runs around the arena at great speed, just like a speedy bison at the Yellowstone National Park in the US which can run at a speed of up to 48 kilometres per hour. Hanwoo bulls lock horns during a bullfighting event at the Cheongdo Bullfighting Stadium in Cheongdo County, North Gyeongsang Province. In this study, the study examined the economic aspect of bullfighting to Abakakamega people.

In Africa, especially in South Africa, among the Zulu, bullfighting concept was born out of killing of the bull as a simple of power claimed by the King alone as early as 1574 B.C. The Kings power was symbolized by the strength of a young warrior in overcoming the bull. The strength was assumed by the King and was symbolic of the power he held over the Zulu nation. The concept grew into the so-called Zulu traditions called *Ukweshuama* an annual ceremony that celebrates a new harvest. It is a day of prayer when Zulu thank their creator and their ancestor. A young warrior is asked to confront a bull to prove his courage, inheriting the beast’s strength, power as it expires. It is believed that this power is then transferred to the Zulu King.

In Kenya, according to Egara Kabaji, Bullfighting among the Luhyia of Western Kenya can be a big event pitting a village, or a collection of friendly villages against a competing village or collection of villages that are related, either as communities, or as a geographical region. At a smaller scale, the duel could be between “my” bull and “your” bull. Unlike the festival in Spain which involves

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50 Ibid.


52 Ibid., p.1554

53 Ibid., p.1554

a fight between a bull and a matador (a human fighter), the Kenyan bullfighting festival is a meeting between bulls. Human beings in this context only play to catalyse the bulls, to cheer and to celebrate the winning animals. Characteristic of the often well publicized festival is that before, during and after the actual bullfight, there is extensive singing and verbal exchanges between the “bull drivers” from the opposing sides. The very fanfare that accompanies this fete leaves one wondering what is really in it. Therefore, this study unravelled the events that accompany the bullfighting activity during the event.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted a qualitative research method. It involved collecting and analysing non-numerical data through; texts, video, or audio collected from the field during the primary data collection. This was done in-order to understand concepts, opinions and also experiences from various respondents. It also used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for this research. The study used historical research design. Historical research design is a plan or strategy within which a researcher collects data systematically and evaluates them by relating them to the past occurrences in order to establish the causes, effects or trends of those occurrences with the aim of using the data to understand and explain the past or present and/or future anticipated events.

In the historical research design, the writings are basically descriptive, they begin with a narration of events in a time sequence, and their analysis addresses the questions of explanation, relationship, and consequences of events.

The study population of this study included the residents of Abakakamega. These were the people of Shinyalu, and Ikolomani constituency. This study adopted convenience and snowballing sampling method. This sampling procedure allowed available primary data source to be used in this research without any additional requirements. This method also involved getting participants wherever you can find them and typically wherever is convenient. The study used both the primary and secondary sources. In the primary sources, it used questionnaire, oral and key informant interviews, focus group discussions and finally observations. In the secondary sources, it utilized historical archives from the Kenya national archives. Also, various libraries were visited to access and gather secondary data. These Libraries included Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology library, Kenya National library-Kakamega and also virtual library from University of Nairobi. Journals, reports, books, theses that have been published or unpublished, and social networks (you tube videos), were also used.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Indeed, the origins and development of bullfighting among the Abakakamega has taken a huge milestone. By the time of this study, bullfighting among the Abakakamega is found to be part of their life. In every mega activity and festivals, bullfighting has to be conducted as an entertaining sport. In this case, it is usually organized in various ways in order to fit the event of the day. The concept of bullfighting in the Isukha and Idakho Communities, in Shinyalu and Ikolomani Sub Counties respectively in Kenya has a long history. This cultural sport dates back to pre-colonial period but it gained huge popularity in the late 1990’s. It has been practiced in various communities since time immemorial as it is traced from ancient communities like the Greek and the Romans. In Spain, ‘Toreros’ the bulls that are used during

57Ibid., p.190
58Ibid
bullfighting are likened to the football players that are sponsored and shown in media. In this country, the bulls fight with people but there is normally a lot of caution such that no person is injured during the fight. Kabaji (2008) explains that in France, during the 19th century, the community members began bullfighting as a game of their own. The game continued and evolved up to the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. In East Africa especially in Tanzania, bullfighting was propounded by the Portuguese. The people of the Islands of Pemba and Unguja are believed to have initiated bullfighting with the Portuguese.

During that time, the game was known as ‘mchezo wa ng’ombe’ that can be translated to ‘the game of cows’. In Western Kenya, this game involves a bull and another bullfighting using their sharp horns. In Mumias, for instance, the Wanga community call this game Eshiremba and it is done after burial where the bulls are brought on the grave and they fight and levelled the grave of a hero. The hero must be a man who has done a heroic deed like killing a wild animal, for instance, a lion, a cheetah, or a python. The Maragoli refer to bullfighting as Ekeremba while the Banyore call it Shilemba.

From the findings on how bullfighting culture originated among the Abakakamega, the study found out from Bonaventure Munanga, one of the informants that, bullfighting is a cultural sport based on the Abakakamega culture. Literary it is believed to be Isukha and Idakho culture because of the existing myth that they are the pioneers of the event. The bullfighting activity is commonly practiced among the inter-clans of Abakakamega. According to Munanga, it is done among the Isukha, the Idakho. From the archival sources, the Abakakamega people are known for farming where animal keeping is one of the activities that described them as early as 1850. Therefore, while the study was interested to trace the originality and development of bullfighting among the Abakakamega, a respondent, Boniface Munanga retorted that, animal keeping among the Abakakamega community is dated from the migration of the Bantu from Congo Forest.

Among the Abakakamega, animals especially cattle keeping was one of their agricultural activities as they started settling around this area in the 1850s. As their population expanded, there was also an increase in the number of cattle hence competition for grazing fields together with farming fields was seen. To enhance unity among them, there was a need to have separate fields for grazing. On the other hand, there were other fields which were left virgin as the owners were not ready to put them into cultivation. These locations were referred to as mubwayilu where people could take their animals-cattle, goats, sheep for grazing as a clan or as a village or as families. Animals from different families could meet here for grazing. Some of these grazing fields such as Mulwanugu in Shinyalu, Kimingini hills in Idakho grew a type of grass referred to as Ikhabuuse that could survive even during the dry season. Therefore, people could take their animals to mukhabuuse to eat such pasture. Among the Abakakamega during this time, people who had the responsibility of taking animals to grazing fields were men of medium age, young men, and mature men nearing old age. These were people who had undergone circumcision. Some of the grazing fields included; Munyenyi within Shinyalu constituency, Wambuni along river yala in Shinyalu-Museno sublocation, Mubilemo in Shirulu sublocation within Shinyalu, Kimingini hills in Sabane sublocation in Ikolomani, and Mukuhu which had a point for salty water called

60Ibid, p.171
61Ibid, p.171
62Ibid, p.172
63Ibid, p.172
64Ibid, p.172
65Boniface Munanga-oral interview, at his home- Khayega on 27th/11/2022
66KNA/DC/KMG/1/2/1: Associations, Societies and Other Public Bodies (Natives)
67Boniface Munanga- oral interview, at his home- Khayega on 27th/11/2022
68Ibid
"isukura" within Ikolomani among many others.69 These grazing fields were used by the Abakakamega as early as 1900. Muchanga also denotes that pasture was readily available for the livestock found along the forest, in the fields, along the rivers and the bushes. Some lands could be set aside for communal grazing.70

In the coming together of these cattle, some could start fighting, either a bull to a bull or a bull and a cow or a cow with another cow. This attracted the attention of the people around and it continued until it became something for fun to these people. Some could fight to an extent of stopping and frightening the rest of the animals and everything could come to a standstill. The owner of the winning animal could be celebrated.71 This became a common activity for these people and their animals at grazing fields. At some point they could separate some bulls from the rest of the herds to give them time to graze and when there was need to fight, they could bring them together.72 This continued until time was set for grazing, and time for setting some small bullfights just for fun and enjoyment. This also made them identify strong bulls for fighting and it also motivated them to start nurturing other young bulls to be used for fighting during the set time just for fun. By this, bullfighting had become a common activity which expanded among the Abakakamega and it started attracting not only those in the grazing fields but the rest of the community. This moved out of grazing fields to the community.73

Bullfighting started from wrestling, according to 40-year-old Cedric Shibuyanga from the town of Ilesi, who provided information for this study. His grandfather told him this story and said that his father was only a farmer who maintained animals for various purposes, not bullfighting. But the bullfighting he practices comes from his maternal home (where he is an uncle). His maternal grandpa, a wrestler who lived from 1900 until his death in the early 1980s, was born in 1900. The grandfather was born while wrestling was already popular, according to Cedric, who informed this investigation. It can be inferred from this evidence that wrestling may have begun in the late 1850s, when people began settling in the existing locations and establishing their agricultural there.74

Men from Abakakamega gathered in the evening and engage in combat in the neighbouring fields to determine who was the stronger of the two. This served as a demonstration that Abakakamega were excellent farmers and that individuals who were well-fed could triumph in battle. The winners could be referred to as the village or community soldier, someone who can be relied upon to defend the others from outside threats. Furthermore, as they gained respect, they might be granted the chance to lead others. This was yet another pastime, especially after a long day at work. The Lubao-Isukha area, Kaptek in Idakho, and the Malimili areas in Isukha are a few examples of locations where wrestling has occurred. This sport later became dangerous where injuries could be realized leading to a war between two groups or clans. He alluded that one was purposely hurt as a result of underlying animosity amongst some people. Due to these problems, colonial authorities intervened and banned this pastime, necessitating the search for an alternative to amuse the populace. It was possible to bring in two bulls to engage in bullfighting. To demonstrate which bull was more powerful, each farmer brought a bull to the competition. The winning bull stood in for the family or clan and was also a representation of strength, power, and a sign of a farmer’s capacity to raise livestock. It is thought that by 1905–1910, bullfighting had reached nearly all the communities and households thanks to these oral

69 Ibid
71 Boniface Munanga- oral interview, at his home- Khayega on 27th/11/2022
72 Ibid
73 Ibid
74 Cedrick Shibuyanga (40 years), Oral Interview, from Ilesi, on 22/11/2022
traditions. According to one of the other key informants, Meshack Luchendo, a politician and bull owner from Ibwitsende in Shinyalu, Wulukongo (local administrators during the colonial period) were well known for farming and more specifically, raising cattle was one way to demonstrate wealth (miandu), which was strongly associated with leaders. They kept a variety of animals, including bulls, cows, goats, and sheep. These leaders' daughters were greatly admired during their marriages because so many people desired to marry into royal households. The quantity of cows one owned was the sole criterion for winning Olugongo's daughter and membership in a royal family. This was yet another element contributing to the large number of animals that these local officials owned. They were affluent because of their herds and harvests. These leaders could organize for small and big bullfights as a sign of showing the community that they were great farmers and leaders or a confirmation that they were fit to be in such positions. The bullfighting practice by the nobility later moved to the ordinary population hence bullfighting had spread to many villages among the Abakakamega in early 1900. Examples of these leaders: Maliolo wa Akala from Sabane in Idakho, Abwanga Likala and Khayiya from Ibwitsende in Shinyalu, Ichibini from Ibukhombwa-Shinyalu among others. From Luchendo's point of view, it can be confirmed that Wulukongo leaders among the Abakakamega contributed to the growth of bullfighting as they had an opportunity of having so many animals hence paving way for bullfights.

Bullfighting as a sport, for entertaining people, moved into the villages and from there it became part of Abakakamega life. Each village could organize small sports more so after working for fun. To confirm the pioneers of bullfighting, among the Abakakamega, Munanga said that the issue is in crossroad. According to him, the Isukha and Idakho are not yet in agreement to conclude who pioneered it in Kakamega. From oral tradition, Munanga claims that the narrative places the Isukha people on upper hand to be the pioneers of bullfighting. This is due to the fact that by 1910, the Catholic Church in Mukumu under Fr. Arnold Witlox was using bullfighting to entice the community attending church. Kizito Muchanga alludes that Arnold Witlox visited Mukumu Mission in 1908 and researched the locals' circumstances. He saw that the Isukha people cherished their traditional celebrations, particularly the isukuti dance, shilembe (traditional ceremony to honour a slain hero among the Isukha and Idakho), the bullfighting sport, and the consumption of the regional local brew known as busaa. Bullfighting initially used to take place on Sunday. This was a strategy that was embraced by Fr. Arnold Witlox and the community embraced it.

According to Munanga, it reached a point that the event made people not to concentrate with the teachings of the church. Most of them could come with the Bull and solo to it. They ended up abandoning church service and instead wait for the priest outside, in Mukumu primary school field. Seeing this, the day was changed to Saturday. This was decided so that, the serious Christians can attend service on Sunday without obstructions. It has remained so to date. This was accelerated by the fact that, on Sundays after church, the bulls could injure a person accidently, it affected the population of the church and also people could come to church when they are drunk or have taken some drugs in order to facilitate the event. Also, the first Bullfighting arenas-fields which are ordinarily occupied by the Isukha people make them be named as pioneers. They included Lubao Muranda, Shibuye and Khayega in early 1900. Also, most of the renowned elders who anciently advanced bullfighting is of the Isukha subtribe. These are: Ikhuilo wi Ilabonga from Museno who had a bull called Yaasuli. Khabochi wa Shikalama who participated in the

75 M. Luchenso, oral interview, at his home- Imwilita in Shinyalu on 27th/11/2022
76 Ibid
first world war of 1814-1818 and had his first bull
called Shinyosi (barber shop) as early as 1900
and, Likhanga wa Muchesia from Munyenyi
village who had a bull called Libalu (army ant).
Ndande from Matioli whose second name could
not be remembered and owned a bull called
Inyanza (centipede). From this, one can conclude
that indeed Isukha people have an upper hand in
bullfighting who also had an insight in bull
naming.78

Clement Shibutse from Museno informed this
study that, among the Idakho, the Idakho, the only
people who kept bulls for bullfighting were:
Maliolo wa Akala from Sabane and Mwinamo
Shivachi within Masiyenzi-Kimingini area in
1920s. These are said to be the first pioneers of
Bullfighting in Idakho which later spread to other
villages.

The investigation discovered that the elderly men
might gather in the evening at busaa (local brew)
spots to plot when, where, and whose bulls could
meet up for a fight. This is how bullfighting was
planned and organized throughout the colonial
period. Following this arrangement, the
knowledge could be disseminated across the
village even by the head men who were also in
charge of maintaining law and order. The bull
owners could bring their bulls to the specified
place on the relevant day and let them fight while
the spectators enjoyed the game. Together with
the owner and the bull's other associates, such as
village residents, the winning bull may be
congratulated. This demonstrates that the bull was
not merely a tool for sparring, but rather a chance
for the bull's owners, village residents, to gain
notoriety as excellent farmers who could display
their farming prowess. Today's event was more
akin to an agricultural display.

Clement Shibutse also provided information for
this study about the involvement of colonial
masters in bullfighting. He revealed that a
colonialist with a bull lived at Kaimosi Farm in
the early 1920s. The first owner of a crossbreed
bull employed in bullfighting back then was a
white man, whose name he couldn't recall. To go
to the Ikolomani area, where bullfighting used to
take place, the white guy would transport his bull
on a truck. In those days, Ikolomani served as the
Abakakamega's administrative and central hub.79
This is where the first court was situated for
Isukha and Idakho people. The white man’s bull
was huge, muscled and weighed so over 900
kilograms. Furthermore, Meshack Luchendo
added that the colonial masters could come to
Kakamega forest at Rondo guest house and
request to have bullfighting sport done before
them for entertainment. In addition, some could
come to Muranda area, in Shinyalu where a
bullfighting arena was situated called Bendera
stadium (just a field set aside by the community
for this sport), the fighting field were at Khayega
and Shibutse market where these white
colonialists could come to enjoy the sport. In
return, they could appreciate bull owners with
tokens such as capes, clothes among others.

The study was also interested to find out how
culture emerged in bullfighting among the
Abakakamega. First bullfighting was believed to
be a sport and a practice for only men of above 18
years as alluded by Meshack Luchendo from
Mwilista. Women and children were not permitted
to enter areas where men were organizing this
activity or where bullfighting was taking place, as
noted by Meshack Luchendo. It was thought that
by bringing Abakakamega men together at a
bullfight, they would have a chance to discuss
concerns specific to their community and wouldn't
be as afraid to approach ladies and kids.
Additionally, it was seen as a chance to promote
peace since bullfighting could not take place
between parties involved in disputes or
disagreements. Before the game could start, old
men had a responsibility to ensure that the two
people or groups that owned the bulls to battle
shook hands. They also used tsiseshe to drink
busaa from the same port to seal their deals. This

78 Boniface Munanga- oral interview, at his home- Khayega
on 27th/11/2022

79 Clement Shibutse- oral interview, at his home- Museno on
27th/11/2022

91 | This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License
symbolized that, whatever they had agreed upon was to be respected and honoured.

After Bullfighting had moved to the community as a sport, it was embraced by the majority of this population. Initially, it was being done almost on every day in the evening based on how it was organized. After changing this to Saturday, more so during the time of Fr. Arnold Witlox, there was need to use bullfighting in their celebrations. People who died with a history of leadership at the age of sixty years and above were given a befitting send-off in order to appease their spirits. Furthermore, great warriors and soldiers who came in to protect the community against external aggressions and died during or afterwards were given such befitting send-off. Such honourable send-off is what was referred to as *shilembe*. Under *Shilembe*, there were three types of celebration:

First is “*Shilembe Shia Selebutswa*”. In this case *selebutswa* means no payment is needed. This was just for free as it was done just to mourn or celebrate the hero. The family members were not needed to pay for it. However, for cultural purpose in those early years before the introduction of currency, the family could give a hen just to please the people or bull owners for accepting to bring their bulls and again just to please the dead. For *‘selebutswa’* to happen, one needed to have been a great leader such as a chief or one who had respect in the community during his life here on earth. It is also important to note that all the types of *Shilembe* are only done to men and not women. *Selebutswa* is done to reward and appreciate his great leadership.

The second type of *Shilembe* is called ‘*Sio*’. *Sio* means warrior. This was done to celebrate warriors who participated in the first and second world wars. It was also done to people who fought and killed in the protection of the community against the invaders e.g., the Luyia and the Kalenjins along the Chepsonoi borderer-Kakamega and Nandi counties. In this, people are called from far ends within the Isukha and Idakho just to come together for this celebration.

The third and final type of shilembe is ‘*Imaiyo*’ which means done not in perfection or not met the needed criteria. In this case someone who dies among the Abakakamega while participating in community activities, worked to bring people together, one who was a leader or a bull owner, or a serious participant of bullfighting but whose age was not above 60 years is accorded befitting sendoff. In another word it is done for die-harders of bullfighting. It is done the same day of the burial, immediately after the burial, then *imaiyo* comes in. In all the three types of shilembe, there must be bulls to fight around the grave, celebrations through eating and drinking busaa and chang’aa then cultural practices such as speaking to the dead’s spirit on grave in the praising the dead for his accomplishments while still living.

To understand what shilembe shia *Sio for warriors* is, Richard Amisi (AK-Chief) a name that is well known on the ground explained that One day before shilembe is done, that is on the burial day, a young man, circumcised is asked to come with a small cooking pot that was being used referred to as *yamboko*. The young man was to be uncled to the family and someone below 18 years but above 12 years. He comes from the gate crying for the loss of the grandfather and throws the pot at the entrance of the late’s house. The pot was to break into pieces (*khubunzuluka*) completely for the ceremony to be successful. It was believed that if it did not break completely then, the young man could even die. Furthermore, the ceremony could not end well as the spirit could haunt the family, leading to some misunderstanding to an extent of war between family members and invited groups. After throwing the pot, the boy was to leave without

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80Ibid  
81Ibid  
82Ibid  
83Ibid  
84Ibid
turning back and was to go forever and never to come back there in his entire life.\textsuperscript{85}

On the material day, before bullfighting started, other heroes who also participated and killed enemies, could come in the order of the one with the lowest to the highest number of spears. One came pierced his spear in front of the grave uttering the following words full of praises;

\begin{quote}
I participated in the tribal or world war of (year) I killed (number of people killed). I am the strongest warrior. If there is anyone more than me, let him step forward .... \textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

He then goes away as another one comes in. When the other one comes, he removes the former's spears, throws them away and pierces his uttering the same words. At the end, the one with the highest spears is named, celebrated and is known to be the one with the highest spears around. The heroes were given spears based on the number of people killed. The number of spears one had represented the number of people he killed. These spears were given to the soldiers by the old men in the community. The old men perform rituals to him before giving him the spears. This means one could not cheat because end results could be death.

Richard further informed this study that after piercing of spears, the heroes are done with their ritual, the turn for bullfighters comes. If the late had a bull, it was the first one to be brought on the grave -red soil and if the late had no bull, then a bull was to come from the extended family and not outside. It is believed that if a bull comes from outside then the family may be harmed to an extend of death. It was also believed that the family bull could get possessed by the family spirits and could fight for long without being overthrown. The spirits stand to bring victory to the family. The bull could be small but could fight and overthrow huge and muscled bulls. The amazing history is, when the family bull gets away from the grave, cannot fight as done while on the grave.

The invited clans came in accompanied by songs and isukuti praising the dead hero. The bulls fought over the grave, overturning the soil and levelling the grave.\textsuperscript{87} The different clans were invited by the family and at the end could be appreciated by being given busaa, chang'aa or hen as a form of appreciation or appeasing the dead. Later on, after 1967 with the introduction of Kenyan currency, these people could then be given some cents or coins as an appreciation.

Example of the song sung by clans on arrival at shilembe:

\begin{quote}
Bamusali bene naboo tsingoi...haaa nukhutsi tsingoi. Bayokha bene naboo tsingoi...haaa nukhutsi tsingoi" Bamusali, Bayokha are some of the clans among the Abakakamega. Bamusali are the leopard.... yeees we are the leopards. \textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

What do leopards symbolize? Among the Abakakamega cultures, leopards are a sign of royalty. They are considered to be bringers of death and destruction. In most cases, however, leopards symbolize strength, power, courage, and determination. In this case, the dead hero is being praised for destroying the enemies.\textsuperscript{89} They are said to have strength, power, courage, and determination. Another community comes in and the same continues. As this was being done, the timekeeper was present controlling time for every clan. When one clan was done, they were guided to go to a central place or a junction away from the function to give way to another clan. The going clan was to wait at the said place until the function came to an end. At this waiting point, these clans coming together either for the first

\textsuperscript{85} R. Abugwi-oral interview, at his home- Khayega on 27\textsuperscript{th}/11/2022
\textsuperscript{86}Ibid
\textsuperscript{87}Ibid
\textsuperscript{88}Ibid
\textsuperscript{89}Joyce Minyikha, Oral Interview, at her home in Malinya on 4\textsuperscript{th}/12/2022

93 | This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License
time or for the second time could start some other bullfights with the coming together of the bulls. This was done to keep them busy and for fun as they waited for the function to come to an end. At the end of day, owners with the strongest bulls could connect for a better organized bullfight at another time. Friendship was strengthened and culture could move from one generation to another.

By 1914, Shilembe ceremonies expanded with the involvement of Kenyan soldiers in the First World War.\(^9^0\) Moreover, Despite Shilembe being reinforced by the 1st world war worries of 1914-1918, it expanded more during the involvement of another batch of warriors in the Second World War of 1939-1945. These warriors who were using guns as compared to others who were using traditional weapons recorded a higher number of killed people in the war. There coming increased Shilembe celebrations as they impacted it greatly. From this information, it can be concluded that bullfighting culture originated from burial ceremonies where heroes and great men in the community were given befitting sendoff through shilembe making it a sport and a cultural practice among the Abakakamega of Western Kenya.

Thomas Abukwi from Musingu informed this study that at his age of 58 years, has owned around six bulls in his life. He asserted that his father was also a bull owner who kept bulls since 1950’s when Thomas was still very young. Furthermore, Thomas at his young age confirmed that he saw his grandfather at his old age with bulls at around 1970’s who had a long history of bull raring. Thomas informed this study that he cannot do without a bull. He says this is a family culture. Bull rearing and bullfighting is part of his life. He got attracted to bulls at the age of 5 years. He also stated that he has 4 sons where each has a role in bullfighting (two are diehards in bullfighting, has a bull and the last one is supporting in taking care of his bull). From his explanation he asserted that this is something in their blood. In fact, he says that it is inherited. He further informed the study that, he cannot miss bullfighting activity.\(^9^1\) In fact, when he misses the bullfighting, he becomes sick. Based on this information, the study found out that bullfighting culture among the Abakakamega is inherited and is part of their lives.

Richard Amisi, a Key Informant Interview to this study, who is 52 years old from Malimili has a butcher at Khayega and is also a bull owner. Furthermore, he informed this study that he is a circumciser. He alluded that, just the way circumcisers practice is something in the blood, so is the bullfighting culture. He explained that for one to be a circumciser, it is not something given, or trained. One wakes up on one morning with this musambwa-(culture) where his hand turns red like "blood". For this Musambwa to happen in one's life, it means there must have been a circumciser in the family at the maternal side. In the same way, he associated bullfighting with this circumcision culture that is inherited. He confirmed that bullfighting among the Abakakamega is in their blood. It is something in them. For one to be a bull owner that can bring several victories there must have existed a bull in the family. To confirm this, he explained that he inherited bullfighting from his forefathers. In fact, he was left with Lirimu (sword) a symbol to show that it is a culture that he has inherited. He confirmed that with this lirimu he can stand before people and be recognized as someone bestowed with or blessed by the great-grandparents. He further confirmed that to prove that bullfighting is inherited, some current death witnessed during bullfighting where bulls turn violet against the owner of diehards involves those who never owned a bull before or do not have any history of bull raring in their lineage, yet they force themselves to be around the bull. There were beliefs that for one to be around the bull, take care and command victory, one should have had a bull in the family.\(^9^2\) Furthermore, he alluded that for any bull owner, caretakers or those in charge of the bull to

\(^{90}\)Ibid

\(^{91}\) C. Shibuya - oral interview, at his home- Malimili on 06/05/2023

\(^{92}\) R. Amisi- oral interview, at his home- Malimili on 06/05/2023
fight, or to be able to talk to the bull, they refer to their fore-fathers when talking to this bull. They say “Khwilaha” which involves mentioning spirits of the dead in one’s lineage asking them to bless the bull or asking for victory among others. He clarified that this can only happen if there is history of bull raring and bullfighting his family for him to talk to the dead spirits. From these arguments, it can be confirmed that bullfighting culture and Abakakamega are inseparable.93

Cedrick Shibuya informed the study that he started rearing a bull just after his Standard eight (8) at the age of Seventeen years but because of his age and lack of finance at that time, he could not manage. However, his first bull came in after form four in 1982 and after participation in the electoral process during President Moi’s time. The money he got was used to buy another bull. For bullfighting, he informed this study that his father only kept cattle for other reasons such as for wealth, milk, meat just to mention a few. However, his urge or desire to have a bull for bullfighting was inherited from the maternal sides. His grandfather had several bulls used for bullfighting. He confirmed that, through this inherited power of bullfighting, helped him have the strongest and toughest bull in Isukha called BBI that gave him a number of victories. He asserted that bullfighting culture is an inborn practice that is inherited.94

From the preceding arguments posted by the respondents, this study found out that bullfighting is undisputable practice among the Abakakamega of Western Kenya. It is an ‘inborn’ practice since it is an inherited or passed to the next generation to specific individuals (sons) in a family. It is a practice that is meant to situate the royalty of the forefathers and maintain the strength of certain clans that began the bullfighting among the Abakakamega. Moreover, from the respondents, bullfighting has made them unique amidst those communities that own animals. For instance, the Maasai are known to own large herd of cattle but they do not embrace bullfighting as a practice. The same is the case in other sub-luyia groups, such as the Bukusu and Teso among others who rear bulls but they do not have a bullfighting history as compared to the Abakakamega.

As bullfighting continued developing roots among the Abakakamega, competition on who had the strongest bull emerged. This is where the use of inzaka(bhang) and some herbs from the forest increased to help bring victory. Competition from village level to highest level (different clans) among the Abakakamega was realized. Andrea Isalambo informed this study that by 1970s, bullfighting culture and a sport was much different from the one experienced in 1910 during Fr. Arnold Witlox.

Bullfighting became an attraction not only for the ordinary people, but also politicians who used this sport to attract multitudes of people in order to sell their agendas and get votes. A good example of political leaders to embrace bullfighting as a strategy in people mobilization in late 20th century was Boniface Khalwalwe, from Ikolomani.95 He went ahead to mobilize for funds to build a stadium at Malinya which one of the modern bullfighting arenas in Kenya.

With its development and interesting nature, some other Luyia sub-tribes have also been drawn to this great sporting activity.96 Munanga informed this study that, in the recent past, especially from 2004, the people of Kabras, Batsotso, Wanga, Bunyore and Maragoli have also joined the traditional sub-tribes in the activity. They also own bulls, and they participate in the competitions. As the communities intermingle, they are adopting this culture but just as a sport just because of its entertainment to the community. They are not embracing the cultural part of it especially the shilembe. This has become another unifying factor among these communities.

On comparing the modern bullfighting to the ancient, Munanga retorted that:

The ancient bullfighting was purely friendship. Unfortunately, today it is fully a commercialized event.97

This action has been turned into a commercial venture. The bull owners ultimately profit from the sport, which enables them to amass fortune. Additionally, there has been a significant change in the kind of Bullocks utilized today. Traditional bulls known as Zebus and Borana were employed in earlier times. Their upkeep was relatively simple. They were able to eat properly, and whenever they fell ill, they were given traditional herbal remedies like Mwarubaine (Neem tree). In the modern era, due to inbreeding, the bulls used are Jersey, Fresian among others. They are very strong and heavy compared to the traditional Zebus and Borana.98 Their maintenance cost is high since they are mostly put on zero grazing. They are also prone to diseases; hence they are administered to modern drugs for boosting immunity. For them to be effective in the next action, they require modern feeds. In this instance, it's also important to keep in mind that the native bulls could walk to the arena of combat and yet manage to arrive there with a lot of vigor. They must be brought to the battle arena in order for them to be effective, unlike modern bulls. Due to this, it is more expensive than the native one. Additionally, the use of technology today has sped up and simplified processes, such as the mobilization of weapons to the bullring by phone calls and text messages, the updating of members via Facebook and WhatsApp, and the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another via video and audio recordings.

Furthermore, shilembe culture is being weakened due to religion. Shilembe involves cultural practices such as appeasing of the spirits, beliefs, taboos which are against the biblical teachings hence a clash between the church and those that believe in cultural practice. Richard Amisi alluded that, there has been so many heroes and prominent men who die but because of their salvation, they are not allowed to perform shilembe as traditions demand. At some places, due to pressure from fan forcing them to perform shilembe, there have been incidences of conflicts with the church or the affected family who are against such culture.

Current bulls are given names for identity among the Abakakamega. According to Vincent Mujeyia, bulls were initially named after prominent people or heroes globally.99 It is not only limited to the heroes of the Abakakamega. It is important to note that, in modern days, bulls are named after society’s leaders. For instance, among the bulls that are found in Kakamega today include; Mandela, Raila, Ruto, Moi, Kenyatta among others. On top of this, naming of these bulls is symbolic. They are named after various natural happenings. They can be called Corona, Covid etc. this makes the bullfighting as an event be part of the society and its activities.100 In this case, naming of bulls cannot be detached with the society’s events and happenings. Apart from naming of the bulls, during the fight, there are some key things that are observed. For instance, the arena should be totally safe. No holes, trenches and stones that can easily harm the Bullock during the fight. Moreover, the size of the bull, age and weight is considered to the two bulls to fight. This is done to ensure competition ethics is observed. Also, the distance travelled by the bull to the arena and its history is another big consideration that is put in place.101

From Francis Mwavishi, there is a unique way in which bulls are communicated to. First, when the bull is young, it is taken to a fighting arena and tethered where away from the main fighting bulls.102 This makes it hear the songs sung during the event. This makes it slowly absorb it, get used to and witness what is going on. Then, when it is at its feeding place, it is introduced to the nature of bullfighting by beating drums and other relevant gadgets where necessary.103 This arouses

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97Ibid
98Andrew Salambo-KII, at his home in Museno, on 27th/11/2022
99Vincent Mujeyia, Oral Interview, 31st/11/2022
100Ibid
101Ibid
102Francis Mwavishi, Oral Interview, 1st/12/2022
103Ibid
it whenever it comes across this kind of songs/music hence accelerating its spirit to fight. This is because it is often trained to understand the songs. Also, the common songs are sung to enhance a condition reflex action whenever the bull hears it. When it is ripe, it is then trained to fight slowly by slowly with the bulls of its equal.\textsuperscript{104}

To understand more about the rituals performed in bullfighting, Cedrick Shibuyanga informed this study that, a week before bullfighting, a bull is fed well on maseshe (residues from a local brew called busaa), by the caretaker who does this while speaking some cultural words to the bull. Example of words spoken:


\textit{English: (bull name) we are going for a fight on (date & place). Please do not embarrass us. I am giving you this busaa residue and these pasture you eat to get energized. Bring us victory.}

The bull owner gets to the forest or to old men to get herbs which are given to the bull to make it strong to win. Two days before the bullfighting day, the horns are sharpened with words spoken to the bull. During this week, before bullfight, bull owner and anyone who may be around the bull do not eat murele (jute mallow) an African type of vegetable known for its unusual appearance and texture, it is believed things may behave the same on the bullfighting ground hence losing the battle. They also do not touch or use any soaps as it is believed the soap may wash off the herbs. The persons who kill the bull should frequently be in close proximity to it. Due to their frequent interactions with the bull, it senses when they arrive on the material day. Some people constantly wear a uniform so the bull can recognize them. Some people approach the bull while speaking or making noise in order to let it know they have arrived and that it is time to fight. The bull gets ready for the activities ahead of them upon their entrance in a particular uniform, when they speak or use a whistle, or both. The bull begins to kick, butt, walk the fence, and adopt different body positions. They get close to the bull, talk to it.


(Bull name) we have arrived (diehards) and we want to go to war. Put energy together. This war was for our grandparents. This was our culture. Our grandparents if you are hearing us, we are leaving please make (bull name) strong with enough energy to fight to bring victory....

These devotees actually visit the bull’s residence and spend the night there with the bull owner helping the caretaker to speak to the bull while giving it some herbs and bhang. They also eat throughout the night and consume busaa and chang’aa. These diehards often number at least five people. Particularly before and during the battle, they are the ones who are closest to the bull. One is in front, one on each side, and one or two are behind. To demonstrate to the bull that it is safe and can be powerful. Once more, this is to make sure that nobody else with a terrible omen approaches the bull. Furthermore, they make sure that no one hurts the bull, especially when there is a conflict between two groups.. There are three sticks used during bullfighting:

African transitional sticks such as \textit{lusui}, \textit{lusibwa}, and \textit{lutar} are thought to have cultural reasons. People around the bull utilized the \textit{Lusui} and \textit{Lusibwa} languages. They are covered in herbs to ward off evil omens, protect the bull, and bring

\textsuperscript{104}Ibid

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victory. *Lutari*, which is utilized by the general populace. *Lusui* is just used to guide the bull; it is not used to beat or damage it. It is thought that using it to touch a bull will bring triumph and remove negative omens. It’s a medium. *Lusiba* is large to shield the adversaries. In the event that the bull becomes aggressive, it can also be utilized to control it. A week prior to the fight, these sticks are placed in the same location where herbs are administered by an elderly man or a man who is single (*Musumbaa*). Some of the sticks may be the same color to make it easier for the bull to recognize them and understand what to do next. When the *Lusiba* is raised, the bull recognizes that it is being requested to calm down or change course after becoming ready to fight when it first saw them and realizing it was protected. On the day of the bullfight, the bull owner has two: *lusiba* and *lusui*.

According to Donald Ambeyi, from Shinyalu, he informed this study that:

*Bullfighting among the Abakakamega of Western Kenya can be a big event pitting a village, or a collection of friendly villages against a competing village or collection of villages that are related, either as communities, or as a geographical region. He further alluded that, at a smaller scale, the duel could be between “my” bull and “your” bull.*

Therefore, from Donald Ambeyi’s argument, this study finds out that, unlike the festival in Spain which involves a fight between a bull and a matador (a human fighter), the Kenyan bullfighting festival is a meeting between bulls. Human beings in this context only play to catalyse the bulls, to cheer and to celebrate the winning animal. Furthermore, it is not about two bulls coming to fight but rather two different villages or clans or even communities coming measure their strength, bravery, and skills. Additionally, Ambeyi adds that, the characteristic of the often well publicized festival is that before, during and after the actual bullfight, there is extensive singing and verbal exchanges between the “bull drivers” from the opposing sides. The very fanfare that accompanies this fete leaves one wondering what is really in it.

On how bullfighting is organized, Munanga informed this study that, first the owners of the bulls to fight must become friends. It is necessary for a friendship to be created. This is believed that it will make bulls not injure each other, and also it will not injure or harm those who are attending to witness the event. This is an observation that is maintained to date. Secondly, documentation is done through the officials of the bullfighting association. Initially, before the sporadic use of technology, it was handwritten upon verbally agreeing. Today, a brochure is made even a month before the set date. On this brochure, the photo of the bulls to fight is put, also the venue, date, names of bulls and the prize of the winner is captured. Finally, a rubber stamp is put to seal the agreement of the parties involved. This makes it official then the chairman announces it to the public.

Occasionally, the organization maybe interrupted. This maybe culminated by the death of one of the owners before the set fighting date. It thus makes the event be postponed to pave way for the mourning (**kwikhula**) by the people close. Instead, the event is rescheduled to honour him immediately after burial. Friends and diehards of the sport organizes for this even free of charge. They bring their bulls to honour and mourn their colleague. These friends are those who may have fought their bulls with the one who is dead or those who know you in depth. Currently, the family may opt out of their will to acknowledge these friends by rewarding them with Ksh. 100, 200 or by a word of mouth.

The study intended to be informed on issues that sparked bullfighting today and even in the past. They include death, betting, politics and

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105 Donald Ambeyi, Oral Interview, at his home in Shinyalu-Shibuye, on 30th/11/2022
106 Ibid
107 Boniface Munanga-KII, at his home- Khayega on 27th/11/2022
108 Ibid

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marketing of goods and events. In Kakamega, bullfighting as a sporting activity has been converted into a betting entity. The owners and even the diehards have been witnessed in the recent past betting in favour of bull A to bull B. Unknown to many is that the betting on bulls is different from the football betting. In football, one can comfortably predict the outcome in reference to the form and strength of the team. Bulls can be affected by weather on the fighting day, can tense or even get an accident on the fight by falling into a ditch. Therefore, the betting is not reliable in a greater percentage. Despite all these risks on the bulls, it has not prevented the bulls’ diehards to organize a match.

Another avenue that makes bullfighting to take place is politics. This is very sound in Kakamega during campaign periods. For instance, the western politics finds it easy to get a large multitude of people and thereafter, sell your agenda. The most renowned politicians who use bullfighting to campaign is Hon. Boniface Khalwalwe. He is even branded ‘Bullfighter’. To him, politics goes hand in hand with bullfighting. This makes the community benefit twice. One, they get entertained. Two, they get paid especially the bull owners. Third, they get to preserve their culture. Lastly, they through it, it paves way for interaction with their leaders hence an opportunity to air their grievances. In the year 2022 campaigns, Munanga informed this study that even the current Governor of Kakamega, Dr. Fernandes Barasa had to ask the Bullfighting association in Kakamega to organize a competition that he personally funded in Malinya. He used this opportunity to address those who attended hence selling his agenda to the people. This later convinced the residents hence electing him as the Governor. The Kakamega politics has really advanced bullfighting in Kakamega. The politicians have made it more famous, nationally, and internationally.

Another thing is marketing. Various companies including entertainment industry, Kenya power, Unga Ajab in the recent past on 1st Jan, 2022. This creates awareness to the community on the quality of goods/products. It explains how good they are and when to use. Thus, bullfighting is an event that creates masses and enables the product owners sell their goods to the people. From Munanga, bullfighting was initially an affair practiced by the Isukha and Idakho. Currently, as early stated in this study is that, bullfighting has expanded in the region. The people of Vihiga County, the maragoli embrace it, the Bunyora and Wanga people are also part of it fully. Therefore, this has really made bullfighting to almost being declared a western region affair/event/sport or as a cultural activity. On this note, currently, the main suppliers of Bullocks are the Kabras sub-community. This is because they have animals and enough space that has allowed to rear animals due to availability of pasture.

CONCLUSION

First, bullfighting reached Kenya through the East Coast of Africa. This is because, East Coast of Africa has in the past seen the comings and goings of many sea-faring nations - some just came to trade while others came to rule. The Portuguese made their claim in the 16th and 17th Centuries and it is thought that bull fighting emerged from this period, due to the inter-mingling of cultures over decades. However, there are no traces to connect bullfighting at East Coast and bullfighting being practiced among the Abakakamega. From record, the bullfighting at the East Coast may only have influenced bullfighting in Tanzania and not Kenya. Among the Abakakamega, bullfighting originated from different points which later spread to the entire villages.

109 Amukanga Michael-KII, at his home in Lirhanda-Shinyalu, on 29th/11/2022
110 Ibid
111 Ibid
112 Boniface Munanga-KII, at his home- Khayega on 27th/11/2022
113 Ibid
114 Ibid
115 Ibid
First, it originated from grazing fields. The herders started fighting small bulls just for fun. It spread to the community as a form of entertainment and as a sport. Secondly, it started from wrestling as a sport which was later banned due to injuries involved hence need to bring in bullfighting to replace it as a sport. Thirdly, colonial leaders such as Wulukongo (chiefs) provided an avenue for bullfighting. They had large herds of animals which were a sign of richness and another way to prove their superiority. They organized bullfighting in their homes to entertain people which later moved to villages. Bullfighting among the Abakakamega is said to be a practice from within. It is inherited hence moved from one generation to another.

Later on, bullfighting was used to entertain mourners and appease the dead during burials of prominent persons in the community. Continually, this grew and was embraced as a tradition which culminated fully into a cultural activity to date. This cultural sport developed through the exchange of culture along the EAC into the mainland that led to the development of culture, such as breeding, modern treatment, and care of these animals, and need to have stadiums. Secondly, bullfighting is one of the most popular cultural sports among the forty-two tribes of Kenya. It is practiced by the Abakakamega of Western Kenya and has spread to other communities such as Kabras, Batsotso, Maragoli among others that are yet to adopt this sport fully.

This study also found out that, unlike the festival in Spain which involves a fight between a bull and a matador (a human fighter), the Kenyan bullfighting festival is a meeting between bulls. Human beings in this context only play to catalyse the bulls, to cheer and to celebrate the winning animal. Fourthly, to confirm the pioneers of bullfighting, among the Abakakamega, the Isukha and Idakho are not yet in agreement to conclude who pioneered it in Kakamega. From oral tradition, the study found that the narrative places the Isukha people on upper hand to be the pioneers of bullfighting. This is due to the fact that by 1910, the Catholic Church in Mukumu under Fr. Ploksian Witlox was using bullfighting to entice the community attending church. Also, the development of markets in Lubao and Shinyalu, which is ordinarily occupied by the Isukha is another reason that convinces an individual of the Isukha people as the pioneers of the Bullfighting. Also most of the renowned elders who anciently advanced Bullfighting are of the Isukha sub tribe.

On how bullfighting is organized, first the owners of the bulls to fight must become friends. It is a must for a friendship to be created. This is believed that it will make bulls not injure each other, and also it will not injure or harm those who are attending to witness the event. Sixth, should a bull gore a spectator to death, it is slaughtered right there in the arena and the meat shared among the spectators. This was an action that could not be entertained by both the bull owner and the spectators in the fighting arena. Seventhly, bulls were initially named after prominent people or heroes globally. It is not only limited to the heroes of the Abakakamega. It is important to note that, in modern days, bulls are named after society’s leaders. For instance, among the bulls that are found in Kakamega today include; Mandela, Raila, Ruto, Moi, Kenyatta among others. On top of this, naming of these bulls is symbolic. Lastly, there is a unique way in which bulls are communicated to. First, when the bull is young, it is taken to a fighting arena and tethered where away from the main fighting bulls. This makes it hear the songs sung during the event. This makes it slowly absorb it, get used to and witness what is going on. Then, when it is at its feeding place, it is introduced to the nature of bullfighting by beating drums and other relevant gadgets where necessary.