

EXTRAVAGANT BURIAL AMONG THE IGBO-AFRICANS AND THE NECESSITY FOR COSMOLOGICAL REORIENTATION

Stephen Chijioke Nwinya

Abstract

Burial of relatives especially one's parents is the most demanding of all cultural responsibilities tradition places on the shoulders of typical Africans and the Igbo in particular. This responsibility is such that the fate of the dead and their offspring is believed to be dependent on how well or otherwise it is carried out. The problem is that the burial makes alarming material demands irrespective of whether the one performing it can afford such material demands or not. This places huge liability on the bereaved and sometimes causes postponement of several burials resulting in accumulation of relatives yet to be buried. A critical analysis of the issue exposes a link between the expensive burial with a cosmology that does not demarcate the physical world from the spiritual, in which the dead in the spiritual world still possess physical attributes and perform bodily functions. This portrays material expenditures at burial as amassing of wealth for the dead in the spiritual world. The difficulties people pass through to meet this obligation and the belief in misfortune visiting those unable to meet up with it motivated this exposition. There is need for cosmological reorientation of the Igbo to fine-tune their worldview in line with contemporary knowledge and practices. Achieving this is a bold step to the amelioration of the burden people carry in the burial of their loved ones in Igbo land.

Keywords: Worldview, Cosmology, Culture, Extravagance, Burial.

Introduction

Everywhere in the world, discarding the remains of the dead is a duty placed on the living for several reasons ranging from health, environment to culture and others. The dignity of the human person also demands that there must be respect in discarding the remains of the dead especially one's loved ones, whether by cremation or burial or other means.

However, paying the last respect to the deceased in the form of befitting burial has been transformed into a scary event because of the daunting demands it makes of people. Though the rising cost of burial is a global issue, Africa and Igbo land in particular is notorious for converting

funerals which are supposed to be mourning moments into fanfare with the concomitant economic wastage. The problem is that people no longer perform the rituals of burial out of choice but with secret grudges to fulfil the demands of traditional social trend. Most people complain openly of the high cost of funeral and the extravagance it has become. It is only within the spectrum of African cosmology that extols wealth and makes burial the condition for peaceful transition to ancestral world that the sense of this extravagance in funerals can be sought. African cosmology in which there is no death but transition (a situation where the dead are not really dead) makes it difficult to grasp in a word what is done to dead bodies. Even laying to rest does not really capture what happens. Let it be said that in Africa, the dead are celebrated rather than mourned or buried. Giving one a befitting burial means celebrating the exit of the person with pumps and pageants. To carry this out, demands a lot depending on the social status of the dead being buried and the one performing the burial. While it is acknowledged that funerals all over Africa are extravagant, that of the Igbo people has assumed astronomical dimension. It is an investigation of this that this exercise is poised to carry. It will try to establish that Igbo-African funerals are extravagant. Secondly, if they are, what problems are associated with that? Thirdly, it will try to establish, if possible, the link between African cosmology as a totality of African beliefs about man and the universe which inform people's values and practices and profligate funerals. Finally, it will seek ways to change the situation since people are palpably uncomfortable with it. This investigation will serve as a guide to a society uncomfortable with its own practice and yet does not know why it is doing it or how to abandon it. It will expose deviations that have made burial more complex and expensive. The research relied heavily on oral interviews in gathering data and information and the text is mainly expository and analytical.

Extravagant Funerals in Igbo Land and their associated Problems

The demands of expensive burial are taking tolls on the people and causing a lot of problems. An ordinary thing assumes new significance and cost once it has to do with corpse or burial. For instance, common journey back home cost more than ten times the normal price once one is dead. Even one hitherto abandoned to their perils start getting serious attention once pronounced dead. In most cases, special arrangements are made to convey the remains to the morgue in special motorcade. A day is fixed to discuss funeral arrangements and the expenditure of the day can comfortably foot normal funeral elsewhere.

The date for the actual funeral ceremonies has many determining factors such as whether the deceased has a befitting house or new one is to be built; the social status of the deceased; the availability of customary requirements for the burial and whether there is another deceased relative not properly buried which customs demand must be given appropriate burial if the current funeral is to go on. Sometimes, preparation for burial takes up to a year or more with the attendant economic wastage of preservation cost. One will need to procure all the traditional requirements for funeral rites depending on the social status or the will of deceased or even that of the survivors. In 2014 when Ogbuinya Nwibo Nwinya of Igbeagu Izzi Ebonyi State died, nine cows were required for his proper traditional burial rites as a title holder. This was in addition to the food and drinks served the whole community for a week long funeral with an average of three sets of fifty rounds of canon shot per a day. Recently, Simon Odo, a popular native doctor from Aji in Igbo-Eze North of Enugu State was buried in a car. People had it that the car was worth eight million naira. The car engine was said to be on with the native doctor's favourite song playing in the vehicle which served as coffin. This was said to signify his smooth transit to the spiritual world¹. Similarly, Late Anthony Obiagoso Erukeme, CEO Tonimas Oil and Gas, was buried in a casket worth thirty-four million naira in August 2020². If casket could gulp such a whooping sum, one wonders what the total cost of the entire funeral could be. Yet someone sees this as a height to be reached or even surpassed. In July 2021, the whole SouthEast Nigeria was shut for the burial of Innyom Ezinne Uche Iyiegbu, mother of Obinna Iyiegbu (Obi Cubana), at Oba Anambra State. Nigeria and the entire world were amazed at the culture of profligacy and wastage orchestrated at the event that lasted more than a week. Reacting to this, Onyeka Onwenu opines: "The burial of Obi Cubana's mother was not only lavish, it was obscene and insensitive. It sent all the wrong signals at a time when Nigeria is wracked with widespread poverty and lack."³ She however adds that his people did not see the event in the same light.

It may be a defensive reflex but some people see nothing wrong with the opulent burial in the Oba Kingdom of Anambra State, the famed land of Igbo billionaires. In fact, Obinna Iyiegbu did them proud by showing what a young man from the 'Dot' nation could

¹Sahara Reporters, Dec. 15 2021, <http://saharareporters.com/2021/12/15/>

²<https://lailasnews.com/late-ceo-of-tonimas-oil-and-gas-casket-reportedly-cost-n34-million>.

³O. Onwenu, "Obi Cubana's lavish burial of his mother", www.premiumtimesng.com>opinion.

do, himself and his crop of young Igbo billionaires. Obi Cubana is a testimony of what hard work and a charitable heart can do, they say.⁴

The few examples given here are just the showcase of the culture of profligacy and wastage that characterizes Igbo burial at all levels. Scholars readily affirm the extravagance in Igbo burials and point out the concomitant problems but insist that it is largely African issue.

For Okwesili Nkwede, extravagance in Igbo funerals is conspicuous and has a lot of implications. He avers:

For all intent and purposes, Igbo burial is increasingly and incredibly extravagant. In recent times, Igbo people spend millions of naira including selling landed properties to ensure that a burial is prosecuted. In some cases, the dead body is cushioned in the mogue for the period of one to two years in pretence that arrangement is being made to give the dead a befitting burial. Neighbourhood and close camaraderie are taxed heavily in the name of committee of friends on weekly basis. All in an attempt to give the dead the best burial on earth. The implication of this elaborate funeral is that it is an economic leakage, it mortgages the future of the younger ones, it leads to school dropout, it encourages poverty and leads to crime and social vices.⁵

Nkwede's take on the issue is corroborated by other scholars. For instance, Agbakoba agrees that Igbo funerals are extravagant, but points out that it extends to a larger spectrum of Africa. For him,

Igbo burials like that of many West African burials are very expensive. Some of them are extravagant. I cannot say the average cost for the Igbo, but in Ghana the average cost is 20,000 us dollars, twenty thousand dollars in a poor country like Ghana. This is like ten million naira. This is the average between the most extravagant and least expensive. I suppose. It would be the same among the Igbo. But this does not speak of the mode, that is, what most people spend for a burial. If I should make a rough estimate, I will say something between 1 to 3 million naira. The problem then is that

⁴Onwenu, "Obi Cubana's lavish burial" para 7.

⁵J. O. Nkwede, Oral interview, Abakaliki, 20 April 2022.

our system is open, allowing the possibility of limitless expenditure on burials, allowing, indeed, encouraging extravagance.⁶

He draws the implications of this to include “Waste of resources and family wealth and capital. Some people go into debt because of this and thus into poverty. It also encourages corruption, a spendthrift culture and indiscipline.”⁷

Temi Iwalaiye adds that high cost of Igbo burials causes a lot of delays in laying the dead to rest.⁸ This is so even among the Ghanaians.⁹ Philip Idachaba summarizes problems of elaborate burial to include stigmatization of those unable to meet demands, desperations of the bereaved and avenue for extortion of the bereaved.¹⁰ This is why people are clamouring for a shift away from the extant paradigm. However, the change is not possible without first identifying the impetus for such circumstance.

African Cosmology as the Root of extravagant funerals in Igbo land

There is no gainsaying that extravagance in funerals needs to be curbed. Most people do not indulge it because they like or can afford it. They understand it not only as societal demand but also as necessity for peaceful transition of the dead. Most often the burden of fulfilment of the burial processes becomes so crushing that even the rich complain. There is palpable fear of prosecuting burials in the land. However, any solution given to this situation is bound to fail until the source of inspiration to the profligacy is exposed and comprehended.

Jude Eze avers that extravagance in Igbo funerals is the effect of modernization, that, prior to this, burials in Igbo were simple and within the reach of average Igbo people. However, he lamented that the incursion of modernity in Igbo funerals has placed burial beyond the reach of ordinary man.

It is getting to a stage that even the sons of an apparently poor man, would sell their late father’s landed property to stage an elaborate

⁶J. C. A. Agbakoba, Answer to Questionnaires, 23 April, 2022.

⁷Agbakoba, Answer to Questions.

⁸T. Iwalaiye, “Why are Igbo Burials always Expensive”, 2021, <https://www.pulse.ng/lifestyle/food-travel/why-are-igbo-burials-always-expensive/rfh9f91>, Retrieved: 3/5/22.

⁹E. Ohene, “Why Ghanaians are so slow to bury their dead”, 31 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-44303067>, Retrieved: 12/2/22.

¹⁰P. A. Idachaba, Response to Questionnaires, 8th March, 2022.

funeral ceremony. And in that case, sadly enough, their father who lived his life struggling in penury will lie in-state, in a well refurbished family house adorned with the proceeds from the sales of his hard-earned assets.¹¹

This view is corroborated by Uche Akam who submits that “Cultural requirements for funeral in Igboland is not truly extravagant but might have become costly because of the modern influence in Igbo socio-economic organization.”¹² For him, modernity achieved this by making cultural requirements, which were readily available, scarce and by adding new requirements. Elaborating on this he avers:

Modernity has eroded traditional occupations and those things that were readily available are now scarce. The land which was the raw materials of Igbo industry has been badly encroached into by industrialisation and urbanisation. Sadly, the industrialisation is not strong enough to absorb the masses. Few people got carried away by promises of modernity which has failed to fulfil its promises. Others have no land to grow, produce or rear those things which culture wanted to sustain their ever presence in the society by incorporating them as requirements for funerals. Few people into the occupation cannot satisfy the demand of buyers and the more demand, the greater the prices logic set in.¹³

Khadija Magardie agrees with Akam when she maintains that burial in traditional African culture was very simple before the incursion of modernity.¹⁴ To accept this position, there are certain issues that have to be addressed. In the first place, modernity brought changes in other spheres of African life which people simply ignore once they cannot afford them. Why do people feel pressurized to pursue what modernity brought into funerals? Secondly, even in traditional African setting, was it that easy for everybody to prosecute burial? If it was, why were those who properly fulfilled burial

¹¹J. O. Eze, Ostentatious funerals: A degeneration of Igbo culture, July 20, 2021 <https://www.blueprint.ng/ostentatious-funerals-a-degeneration-of-igbo-culture/> Retrieved: 3/5/22

¹²F. U. Akam, Answer to Questionnaires, 8 April, 2022.

¹³Akam, Answer to Questionnaires.

¹⁴K. Maggardie, “A South African burial, alien style”, <https://m.dw.com/en/a-south-african-burial-alien-style/a-42652739>

requirements given social status with rights and privileges?¹⁵ Inasmuch as it is admissible that modernity has amplified burial expenditure, it must also be admitted that there are other hidden factors since it is not all cultures that are undergoing modernization are involved in the imbroglio of extravagant funerals. For instance, Muslim burials and proper Christian burials such as the burial of Catholic clergymen are relatively simple.

The palpable differences in burial processes and requirements among people of divergent cosmological orientations necessitate the search for *raison d'être* of Igbo extravagant funerals in African cosmology, as such is still found among other typical African societies. People's cosmology embraces their basic beliefs about the universe and their place in it, which in turns inform their norms, values and attitude towards life. Consequently, Matthew Muriuki Karangi describes African cosmology as "the way Africans perceive, conceive and contemplate their universe; the lens through which they see reality, which affects their value systems and attitudinal orientations. It is the African's search for the meaning of life."¹⁶ He goes further to affirm the unwavering influence of African cosmology in every sphere of the African life, including the burial system. Lending credence to power of cosmology over people's consciousness and practices, Nicholas Campion writes:

The influence of cosmology on culture then becomes a matter of exploring its impact on political and religious ideas, and its use in the arts, perhaps mainly in literature, painting and film. ... the intellectual horizon of the human race at any time has always been inextricably bound up with the scale of the universe... there can be little doubt that a people's perceived scale of the universe must play a fundamental role in its culture and consciousness ... culture and consciousness are bound up with conceptions of the universe as a whole.¹⁷

In line with the above, scholars readily agree that the Igbo extravagant funeral, just as other traditional practices of African societies, is strongly rooted in

¹⁵ Among Izhi people of South-eastern Nigeria, those who fulfilled burial requirements for the parents are given special privileges in community gathering, sharing of communal land, participation in burial processes. You cannot even take traditional title if any or both of one's parents are dead and have not been properly buried. See Samuel Nwibo Iyioku, "The Izzi Man", in *Izzi People and Culture*, a Publication of Izzi Civil Club, 2006, 53-69.

¹⁶ M. M. Karangi, "African cosmology", 2019, DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.35377.74082 Accessed on 29/5/22

¹⁷ N. Campion, "The Importance of Cosmology in Culture: Contexts and Consequences" in Abraao Capistrano, *Trends in Modern Cosmology*, 2017, DOI: 10.5772/67976

African cosmology. They argue that Western influences on Africa have not been as sweeping as many think. It is believed that African cosmology, the inspiration of African values, norms, attitudes and practices, has remained largely untouched and is wielding much influence over the practices of imported cultures such as Christianity with impetus gained from inculturation processes.¹⁸ Consequently, the marks differentiating traditional burial from what is Christian burial are markedly insignificant.

Agbakoba exposes the interconnectivity of African worldview and Igbo extravagant burial. He locates the root and cause of Igbo elaborate burial in the African metaphysics which preaches spiritualized material afterlife. He explains:

We believed in a spiritualized materiality in which the present world is duplicated in the spiritual world, the material status of a person here is carried over to the spiritual world. If you are a chief here, you will be and live like a chief there. So, you have to take your chieftaincy things over there. The way to do this is an elaborate burial to tell the gatekeepers that a chief is coming. In the past, such a person would be buried with many valuables including servants and slaves who will attend to his needs. So, the more elaborate the burial, the more the acquired status in the spirit world. This explains the necessity for expensive burials.¹⁹

This submission is not peculiar to the Igbo but is rather a shared belief of most Africans even those thought to have been converted to Christianity. The Igala people of Kogi have similar approach to burial as Idachaba x-rays:

Among the Igala people of Kogi State, burials a quite extravagant. This extravagance is not from the Christian or Islamic angles; it is more from the traditional dimension. There are certain traditional demands before burial can be said to have been complete. In my village, for instance, burials must always be accompanied with a traditional black cow. This is mandatory. There are also certain requests for goats to be directed to various groups in the village. All these are aside what will be expended to feed the village and guests at the burial ceremony. In fact, the moment a person dies in my village, you begin to feed mourners from that day till the day of

¹⁸ I. Oraegbunam, “A Decade after the African Synod: The Survival of Christianity in Africa and the Necessity of Church-ATR Dialogue and Inculturation”, *Bigard Theological Studies*, a Journal of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu – Nigeria, 2004, Vol. 24, No.1, 42-60.

¹⁹J. C. A. Agbakoba, Answer to Questionnaires.

burial. It doesn't matter whether the person died in the village or not. Those who will gather in the family house will be fed. The black cow is killed after the burial and only persons who have lost someone and have also killed the black cow can partake in the consumption of the meat. If you partake when you are not qualified to, there are consequences.²⁰

Iniobong Achibong summarizes the rootedness of elaborate burial in African cosmology thus:

The African cosmology clearly captures the living dead or ancestors in its second hierarchy of Force. This prominence given to the ancestors has made it such that everyone who dies must be given a good burial for ease of entry into that realm as believed by many African communities. It is believed that elaborate celebration with the killing of cows will fast track speedy acceptance and entrance.²¹

Consequently, for proper appreciation of Igbo extravagant burial system, having adequate knowledge of African cosmology in which the Igbo participate is indispensable. One needs to first comprehend their concept of human person, life, world, death and the afterlife and therein discover the factors breeding profligacy in funerals which modernity and indecent display of affluence exacerbate.

The African person though a composite is an integral whole which strictly speaking is indissoluble even at death. It is a being destined for eternal existence though he momentarily changes his mode of being. This conception of the African person sways attitude towards him and practices around him even at death. The African conceives human person as composed of many elements, not just body and soul. However, his being and existence transcend those elements which do not actually define his personality and destiny. That is to say the personal identity of the African is far beyond his constituents.

In Akan (Ghana) traditional thought, a person is composed of three basic elements – the *Okra* (soul), *Sunsun* (spirit) and *Honhom* or *Nipadua* (body).²² However, authors still have variations of this general outline and the interpretations given to various constituents of human person. For instance, KwasiWiredu maintains that the Akan Human person has five different rudiments – *Okra* (soul), *Sunsun* (character), *Nipadua* (body), *Ntoro* (paternal

²⁰ P. Idachaba, Response to Questionnaires, 8th March, 2022.

²¹ E. I. Achibong. Response to Questionnaires, 8th March, 2022.

²² Iroegbu, *Metaphysic*, 300.

genes) and *Mogya* (maternal blood).²³ Among the Bantu, *Muntu*, the living person, according to Kagame, is related to *bugingo* – duration of life, *buzima* – biological life, *magara* – spiritual life and *Nommo* – the life force, “the genuine Muntu”.²⁴ Similarly, the Yoruba conceive human person (*eniyán*) as composed of *Ara* – body, *emi* – life/spirit, *Ori* – personality self, *A-kunle-yan* – acquired destiny, *A-kunle-gba* – received destiny and *Ayan-mo* – affixed destiny. A variant of this shows *eniyán* as made up of *ara* (body), *èmí*, (spirit/life), *okàn*, (mind/heart) or soul and *Orí*, (the personality self).²⁵ All this can be simplified into the inner self – *Ori-inu* and the outer person – the body. *Ori* is the essence of one's personality which controls and guides one's life in line with the destiny one received prior to birth.²⁶

For the Igbo of Nigeria, *mmadu* (the human person) is a composite of *ahu* – body, *muo* – spirit/soul and *uche/echiche/ako-na-uche* – intellect/mind/reasoning. Uche as a faculty may exist potentially as in children, attenuated as in the senile or be lost as in the insane. Iroegbu argues vehemently that *ahu* (body) is the *mmaduness* of *mmadu* (the humanness of the human) since without it man becomes a pure spirit.²⁷ In Igbo cosmology, *ahu* (body) is so much important component of man such that even the dead are embodied spirit, not pure spirit. Corroborating this stance Nwigwe writes: “[...] the concept of ‘*ahu*’ – ‘body’ does not stand merely as physical body, because bodily organs are believed to exercise mental function. ‘*Ahu*’ – ‘body’ is applied to stand for a living human being”.²⁸

The importance of the body is not limited to the living human person. The living-dead have bodies too. The only difference is that the bodies of the latter are so rarefied, meta-materials that can act contrary to physical laws. Body serves as the basis for individuation and recognition of both the living human person and the living-dead. This conception of the body pervades most

²³K. Wiredu, “The Concept of Mind with Particular Reference to the Language and Thought of the Akans” in G. Floistad (ed.), *Contemporary Philosophy*, Vol. 5, *African Philosophy*, (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff Publ. 1987), 161.

²⁴J. Jahn, *Mutu*, (New York: Grove Press Inc. 1961), 107.

²⁵T. M. Hinga, “Afterlife: African Concepts”, *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2005), <https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/afterlife-african-concepts>, Accessed: 20/05/2020.

²⁶B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, (London: Longmans, 1962), 170.

²⁷P. Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*, (Owerri: International Universities Press Ltd, 1995), 352.

²⁸B. E. Nwigwe, “The Concept of Immortality of the Soul in Western Philosophy and Igbo Culture – An Essay in Conceptual Analysis” *West African Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 4, December, 2001, 19.

African cultures and can be observed in the rituals of burial. Thus the idea of separation of body and spirit at death and the decaying of body is foreign to African conception. In principle, African body does not decay and that it is not discarded anyhow; it is laid to rest rather than buried. This can be seen in the Igbo concept of burial 'ikwaozu'. This concept is often wrongly translated to 'mourning the dead'. 'Ikwa' here does not mean to cry or mourn. It rather connotes to design or decorate. In Africa, the dead are not mourned in the actual sense but are rather decked for transition into the spiritual world. This transition is a great celebration because it is not merited by all.

Another aspect of human person in African conception which impacts a lot on burial process is the socio-communal aspect. There are three inseparable fundamental aspects that constitute the human person in African sense – the transcendental, the communal, and the individual.²⁹ Being transcendental, he is not confined to ephemeral life. He is an individual, yet his individuality is meaningless outside the community that defines, recognizes and perfects such individuality. He is per se a communitarian individual – an individual comprehensive only in a community of both the living and the living dead. To be an individual in a community is to belong to a social stratum which determines the form of burial and its requirements. This results the African world, both physical and spiritual being stratified such that one can only join the social stratum he occupied while in physical world in the spiritual world, and only burial according to one's status can facilitate this. Socrates Ebo links this communitarian conception of the African person to immortality which is the major prospect of burial.³⁰

This African conception of human person as a relational self in communion with the living and the living dead calls for African conception of death; for the death of a person so defined cannot be the separation of body and soul. To achieve this, African notion of the universe is necessary. For the African, the universe is two dimensional – the physical world (the realm of the living) and the spiritual world (the realm of the living-dead and the spirit). One spectacular thing is that the realms are not separable or distant as the heaven from the earth in Christian conception. The living-dead and the spirits are very much involved in the daily events of the physical world and so are the living who are spiritual enough privy to the activities in the spiritual world. The events of the spiritual world are not so distinct from the activities of the

²⁹Iroegbu, *Metaphysics*, 80.

³⁰S. Ebo, "Death in Igbo African Ontology" in *Онтологія, СХІД* No 3 (161) травень-червень 2019, 23.

physical world. Expressing this with regards to the Yoruba's hereafter, Bolaji Idowu avers that life in the "good orun" is but a larger and freer copy of this worldly life, in the absence of earthly vicissitudes.³¹

From the above view of the universe, death in Africa is a mere transition from the physical realm to the spiritual realm. It is "a change of status, an entrance into a new and deeper relationship with the clan, tribe and family",³² all before one and after. Thus, death is mere departure from physical life and not a complete annihilation of man nor does it alter the personality of the individual. Interestingly, African spiritual world is a replica of the physical world as the dead are believed to have material possessions. This informs egalitarianism and industriousness in the African because what one is here one continues to be hereafter. However, the form of burial given to one at death can change one's social status in the spiritual world. While improper burial can make a rich person poor, lavished burial can make poor person rich in the spiritual world as it is believed that all spent at one's burial aggregate to one's wealth in the spiritual world.

The above explain the goal of life from African perspective. The primary goal of an African is to beget children that will give him befitting burial and maintain his personal immortality by constant invocation, libation and sacrifices. Secondly, the African has a mission to amass wealth that will enable him get proper and befitting burial to facilitate his joining the ancestors and occupy rightful social stratum among the dead. So, ordinarily, death in African conception is not bad. Africans can mourn the momentary separation of their loved ones but the dead must be sent forth to the spiritual world with great celebration. The only dead actually mourned are those that died bad which is dying without children or proper burial. In a nutshell,

proper burial is the requirement for admission into the communion of the ancestors. People who are not properly buried revolve around. But when the deceased are buried properly, both the living and the dead live in peace. This burial goes beyond the physical realm; it has eschatological implication for the people also.³³

³¹B.Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, (N. Y.: Wazobia, 1994), 177.

³²L. Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Tradition of AbundantLife*, (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), 145.

³³N. U. Ukwamedua, "The Ontological Status of 'The Living Dead' in Post Modern African: A Discourse in Existential Metaphysics" in *UJAH* Volume 19 No.1, 2018, 29-30,

“[...] to die without possibility of receiving proper burial rites is not to complete well the race of life.”³⁴ All this points to the relation between African cosmology and burial and how the worldview is precipitating conspicuous profligacy in burial among the Igbo.

Addressing the problem of Extravagant Burial among the Igbo

The intent of this write up has been to get to the root of extravagant funerals among the Igbo perceived as wasteful and causing discomfort. Analysis of some burials exposed that they were extravagantly prosecuted. The situation is said to have brought a lot of hardship among those who strain themselves to meet the standard, stigmatization of those who could not meet, and provided avenue for extortion of bereaved families.

Scholars differ on the cause of the palpable profligacy. While some blame it on modernization, claiming that traditional burial in Africa was simple and easy to execute, others, while admitting that modernity has escalated the circumstance, hold that African cosmology supplies the impetus of the burial mode as it does to other practices. The claim is that modernity and westernization have not brought significant change to African worldview, making Africans to continue to act under the influence of their primordial conception of the universe. Consequently, what is seen as wasteful burial among the Igbo is a product of the conception of the world, human person, death, afterlife and the process of acquiring it.

Now, the problem is how to let go the practice since the performers are no longer comfortable with the performance. To this effect, some bold and commendable steps have been taken to downsize burial expenditures and ameliorate the economic burden on the shoulders of the bereaved. For instance, some Catholic Dioceses in Igboland have made laws limiting the length of preservation of corpses. Also, Anambra State has enacted law prescribing how burials should be carried out in the state. It is in praise of these steps that Agbakoba recommends that both traditional rulers and church leadership should effectively weigh into the matter in order to bring down the costs of burial in Igboland. He writes:

³⁴I. O. O. Igwegbe, *The Meaning of the Beginning Our World, Our Vision: Relevance of African Identity in Popular Religious Philosophy*, (Enugu: Snaap Press Nig. Ltd., 2002), 5.

Anambra state has enacted laws against this. The problem however is implementation. The solution lies in the concerted efforts of the churches, governments and traditional institutions to bring down the costs. For example, the demand for cows or any animal as custom by relatives should be banned, so also the distribution of souvenirs, which is not even a part of Igbo customs but something imported in the late 1980s or 1990s.³⁵

As Agbakoba rightly pointed out, enactment of law that will be difficult if not impossible to implement will not bring solution to burial extravagance. Onyekelu Olisa expresses this fear regarding Anambra Burial Law.³⁶ Laws only work optimally when they are accorded legitimacy by the people. Issues concerning burial bother on the people's fundamental beliefs as expounded above and change can only be effective through internalized change in those beliefs. This is why even those already converted from traditionalism into say Christianity are still enmeshed in effort to fulfil traditional requirements of burial irrespective of discrepancies in the cosmology underlying traditionalism and Christianity.

Solution to the problem lies in reorientation. There are some basic changes that must be effected in the worldview through proper enlightenment of the people. For instance, there must be de-emphasis of the dependence of the wellbeing of the dead on the form of burial given to them. Modernization seems not to have impacted positively on African cosmology. It seems Africa has absolved more negative than positive aspects of modernization and concomitant westernization. Africa is still stocked in primordial comprehension of the universe. This is evidenced in the tenacious grip on the belief in the materialistic spiritual world full of spirits ready to fight the living for not giving them all they deserved at burial. The innuendo everywhere includes: If you do this, that will happen to you. Do not do that since you did not do it to your deceased parents, and so on. What this implies is that all done at burial is to ward off calamitous consequences of noncompliance. It has never been argued that a form of burial brings blessing to the living. It is this fear of

³⁵J. C. A. Agbakoba, Answer to Questionnaires.

³⁶O. Olisa, "Anambra State Burial Law: A stringent and Unenforceable Law", July 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353258926_Anambra_State_Burial_Law_A_stringent_and_Unenforceable_Law

calamity that makes people who claim to have abandoned traditionalism to still fulfil traditional requirement for burial.

Is it not better we care for the living with the resources with which we would have used for their funerals? So many people suffer throughout their life without assistance but receive elaborate burial at death. Those who do not have no time and money to assist relatives suddenly acquire them once the person is dead.

To change this worldview, scholars must brace up to the function of philosophy on training in rationality through writing and teaching. People must be taught to place more emphasis on the living than the dead. A burial that impoverishes the living, leaving them in economic quagmire is nothing befitting. The fear of what the dead will do if this or that is not done at their burial must be dispelled. African world is different from others only because Africans conceive it to be so. And until African conception of the world is changed and Africa depopulated of her spirits which are mostly evil, all actions and practices in Africa will remain defensive.

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