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- The entire paper should not be longer than 15 pages inclusive of Tables, Figures and References.
- The article should be typed in Times New Roman font (size 12) and double spaced
- The referencing style to be adopted is APA 6th Edition. All works cited must be listed in the References
- The paper should have an abstract of not more than 200 words.
- Five key words should be provided immediately below the abstract.
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Of Big Brother and Little Brothers: Evaluating the Patterns of Programme Adaptations in Cable Television Industry in Nigeria TONY ONYIMA & CHINELO E. UDE-AKPEH	143-155
Sexploitation and Body Politics in Bolé Butake's The Survivors MBU DORA NYUYKIGHAN	156-167
Booze Images in Nigerian Films: A Content Analysis of The Nature and Hazards of its Screening in Nollywood Videos AKINKOYA, OMONIYI FELIX & ODUNLAMI, DELE (PhD),	168-177
Use of "odenigbo" Programme in The Promotion of Igbo Cultural Values: A Study of Purity FM Listeners in Awka Metropolis EZEBUENYI, EPHRAIM (PhD), AGBO, RACHEL NGOZI & OKOYE LOVETH	178- 187
External Influences on Traditional Burial Practices in Idoma ABDULMALIK ADAKOLE AMALI	188-193
Newspaper framing of President Jonathan's congratulatory Message to Buhari and its Influence on Readers' Perception of the message EZEBUENYI, EPHRAIM E. & AGBO, RACHEL NGOZI	194-205
Assessing the use of Antimalarial Drug Leaflets among Civil Servants in Anambra State, Nigeria CHINEDU RICHARD ONONIWU, HENRY CHIGOZIE DURU & CHIKANNE JOANNES EZEIGBO	206-213
Selectional Restriction in Tense and Aspect in Ibibio NNEOMA FYNE UGORJI (PhD),	214-227
Sequencing Patterns: Impact and Implication on Cognitive aspect of Visual Storytelling AONDOFA AKORGA & ALBERT AWUA UZA'ATSA	228-235
Prospects and Challenges of the Social Media in the Restructuring Debate in Nigeria EMMAN OWUAMALAM (PhD), FRANK NNAEMEKA (PhD), & NJIDEKA EZEONYEJIAKU	236-250
Ideology, Language, identity and Negotiation in the Presidential Debate by Donald Trump OCHOGE, ANE CYNTHIA & JULDE-ADURA, MARYAM	251-258
The Use of Celebrities as Endorsement Icons in Political Campaign: A Study of Davido in Osun 2018 Gubernatorial Election IFEANYI E. ONYIKE, OKWUDIRI EKWE & GIDEON AFOLABI	259-270
Nigerian Television Series Jenifa's Diary and Proper English communication among Youths in Yola THLIZA, EMMANUEL BEST & BOMAN, KAZAH JAMES	271-278
Appraising the Role of Theatre for Development in Unpacking Africa's Political Challenges in a Globalised World ERIC JAMO DUNG, OLADAYO OLUKOSI & AMIN, MOHAMMED BASHIR	279-285
Roles of Mass Media in Promoting Sports Betting among Nigerians: A Study of Bet9ja & NAIRABET MUHAMMED MOSHOOD, KAZEEM OYEDEJI & LEKAN TOGUNWA	286-296
Twitter usage in news gathering and Reporting by Journalists in Enugu State EKIYOKERE EKIYE & BETTY UNUKPO	297-306
Communication and Social Reconstruction of Indigenous Culture: A Study of Nollywood AMANNAH PEACE IREJU(PhD), & ORIKOHA, UGOCHUKWU	307-315

External Influences on Traditional Burial Practices in Idoma

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Abstract

The Idoma people believe that death is inevitable but not a final end; rather, it is the beginning of a journey to a final resting place. Burials are performed with culturally guided rules and procedures. The preparation and burial rituals of a deceased person is regarded as a right for the dead and it is a collaborative responsibility of the family, relatives, friends and the community as the case may be. This paper adapted the descriptive and analytical research methods complemented with data obtained from relevant articles, published works, books and internet sources. Findings in this paper are that the burial practices contribute to give the Idoma people their essence and value, and also contribute to the appreciation and meaning of the afterlife of the dead. This study concludes that apart from helping to create an understanding of afterlife of the dead, burial practices give an interpretation of the life of people in relation to handling the remains of the deceased. It is recommended that there should be a check on the intrusions of foreign influences by looking at what brought them into being, their effect and the way to merge the two without bringing any form of ignominy to the people.

Keywords: Afterlife, Foreign, Practices, Intrusions and Dead.

Introduction

Life and death is a continuous process. The two check each other to bring balance to nature. The belief that death is a transit to another life or a transformation from the physical to the spirit is practised and believed in almost all cultures and religion worldwide. In the Igbo culture according to Ikwuemesi and Onwuegbuna (2017, p.2) death and funerals "provide a platform on which the end of one life is commemorated and a new beginning in the otherworld is proclaimed". This is in line with the Idoma society, most societies, and religions that also believe that human death does not mean an end to life because man has an activity awaiting him, which must be brought to being through death. The fear of death is common among all humans but it is a well-known certainty that, once alive, death is an inevitable experience. Death is regarded as the only path way to the great journey to a final resting place of all humans. From the realistic perspective, to

be alive is a privilege while to die is a natural phenomenon. Life must be given up to get the final satisfaction of comfort or punishment depending for the activities of the individual while alive. The reward of a human, it is believed, is crowned after death. Death is perceived as a ticket to another life.

Furthermore, it is a common belief among various religions, cultures and traditions that when a person dies, he/she can reincarnate, become a spirit, go straight to hell or heaven or stay in purgatory before going to hell or heaven, depending on the system of belief. Whichever way, he/she does not die, he/she only transits and it is this transition that is celebrated in different ways and styles depending on the culture and religious belief which are direct symbioses of each other.

Burial culture is cherished worldwide and practised in various ways that are considered appropriate either according to laid down dogmatic traditions or religious principles.

Okpalaeké (2018, p.75) agrees that:

burial and funeral practices, the world all over, remains an age long phenomenon, cutting across various societies irrespective of race or geographical location. Funeral practices, as a matter of fact, constitute itself a fundamental element of cultural heritage practiced by all and sundry from ancient to contemporary times.

These principles are also very prominent amongst the Idoma people. In Idoma culture like in most parts of the world, burial is made to serve as the proper channel to guide the dead soul to the right place of abode where he will get the desired comfort in the world of the dead as imagined by his living relatives, community and all human race. More importance is attached to death than when a child is born in Idoma society. It is believed that the family that a child has come to is already known, but where the dead are going is unknown to all and therefore necessitates a duty to ensure that all is put in proper perspective for a better life in the hereafter of the deceased.

The burial rituals are performed according to the cultural perception and beliefs of the people. In Idoma culture, the corpse is prepared to allow the spirit free from the body for the transitional journey. These are done with rules with consideration for age, sex or type of death. All the rules are carefully followed as the living relatives of the dead make sure that everything is properly done in accordance with the laid down rules and laws. This is believed will ease the power over the living and can influence positively or negatively the happenings in the human world. In Idoma society, more respect is given to the death of the elderly because of the belief in their immortality, that is, their having the ability to reincarnate as masquerades.

The Concept of Death in Idoma Culture

The Idoma people believe that death empowers a man to a higher realm between the living and the dead where he assumes the spirit being and becomes all-seeing and all-knowing with powers and the possibilities to do both evil and good in the human world. This power, however, is not equated to that of the Almighty God. When someone dies in Idoma society, he is said to have gone home to rest (ole tole) or he has gone to the hand of his father to be with him (oi itabo ka danu). Though there is wailing and mourning at the death of someone, it is believed that the spirit has gone to a place full of peace and love where all things work well. In Idoma culture, it is believed that someone does not just die on his free will; hence, there is usually an inquest (Ikpelokwu) on the death of any Idoma to ascertain the cause.

Idoma people believe that the dead have the powers to come back to life in form of reincarnation in human form with the power to choose a family of their choice or as a masquerade. When a man dies in Idoma tradition, he is not buried immediately. The body is preserved to be laid in state and proper rites are performed. There are exceptions: where the deceased is a small child or a young adult, they are buried immediately. In a circumstance where the person dies of a disease considered to be bad like leprosy or an ailment that is strange to the people, such burials take place at night. An Idoma who has killed his fellow Idoma man is also not entitled to be given a befitting burial. It is an unforgiving taboo for an Idoma to kill a fellow Idoma no matter the degree of hatred between them.

Idoma Traditional Burial Rites

When an Idoma dies, it is a must and the right of the dead to be accorded a specific treatment as a passage rite to enhance his eternal journey. This rite, as Iyeh (2010, p. 14) states in sitting Huet et al., "marks the passage from one state of

existence to another". Death in Idoma culture is classified into three major categories and the type of laws guiding the burial proceeding for proper clarification and understanding of the subject matter.

1. Type of death
2. Age of the diseased
3. Position and status of the diseased
4. Sex of the disease

The first thing put into consideration when there is death in Idoma society is the cause of the death. This is the determinant factor on how, when, and where the body is buried just like the Igbo culture where:

death is an important threshold in the journey towards one's ancestors, how one gets to that threshold is very important. This brings up the issues of 'good life' and 'good death'. The quality of life and death is important because existence in the other world is but a continuation of this one. Death is only a bridge between the two worlds, marking the transition from anammadu (land of the living) to anammoo (land of the spirits) (Ikwuemesi & Onwuegbuna, 2017, p4).

This type of culture is also predominant among the Urhobo people just like their Idoma, Igbo and other:

counterparts in other parts of Africa thus believe in different types of death such as mature, premature and abominable death. For them death does not occur without a particular cause, some of the causes of death according to the Urhobo are old age, witchcraft, accident or sickness and abomination (Idogho, 2015, p.70).

In Idoma culture it is only when a death is considered to be good by society that the deceased can then be given a befitting burial. If the diseased is confirmed to have died a bad death, s/he is usually buried at night without any form of burial rite. It is forbidden for people to cry for such death as it is regarded as a relief to the family and the community at large. The properties are thrown far away or buried to prevent contamination. It is considered as an ill wind to the community and sacrifices are made to prevent a reoccurrence. If it is a child, he is buried immediately after the confirmation of death. No special material is required for the burial.

In Idoma culture, unlike their Tiv neighbours who have a contrary cultural practice, when someone dies, he is not buried with his properties or materials that are associated with him while alive. Ademiluka (2009, p.14) attests to this thus: "The Tiv do not have this practice. They do not bury people with goods for they believe, among other reasons, that it may cause another death in the family". In Idoma culture as well as Igbo, Yoruba, Igala and a host of other cultures in Nigeria, Egypt and the rest of Africa; when a man dies he is buried with his valuable properties such as clothing, and jewelry and in situations where the deceased is a warrior or a hunter he is buried with weapons such as gun, bows and arrows or any material deemed useful to accompany him to the next life to make things pleasurable for him.

Furthermore, if the deceased is an adult, the way he is to be buried is determined by his activity in the community and the status he has attained. If it is a woman, she is taken to her father's compound for all the rites to be performed and buried. It is important to note that in Idoma culture all corpses are buried in their father's compound including married women who have died in their husband's houses. The case where the body of the deceased is not found his Afaya (belongings) is brought to

her father's compound for burial. The Idoma culture does not believe in burying an Idoma away from home.

Women do not take part in core burial activities. When a woman dies, the only role women play is to bath the corpse, dress her and stay with her while she lies in state. After this, the men take control of all other activities till she is buried. It is forbidden for women in Idoma land to see a corpse lifted into the ground or be at the burial site. As earlier mentioned, when a man dies in Idoma society, his activity in the society contributes to a large extent to how he is buried, sometimes his financial status, but this does not have as much impact as the societies or cult he belongs to and the heroic achievement to the society.

In the circumstance when a king or a warrior dies, the death is announced with the (Agidigbe) the stilt drum or the (Opo) horn and there is a potpourri of entertainment and performance of masquerades. If an elderly man, he automatically qualifies to be buried by the Achukwu cult exclusively for men and the Ichicha society which are only for elderly people. The Ichicha society comprises male and female, who perform at the wake and take part in the burial rites. An elderly dead man also qualifies to be reincarnated into the Alekwu masquerade if he has living male and female children. The body is prepared and dressed up in the best clothing he has or the one that can be bought. He is placed in a sitting position in the Itakpa in his compound while his living wife or wives, and female relatives sit around him chanting praises of his past achievements and good wishes on his transitional journey. The Alekwu masquerade comes to bid him a final welfare from the land of the living and welcome him to the land of the dead. His body is taken straight from the Itakpa and buried. In Idoma land an elderly person is never buried in a coffin. He is wrapped with an Opa a blue black hand-woven cotton cloth which he reincarnates with

as the Alekwu costume. Male and female are buried with the Opa cloth but it is only the male that can reincarnate as an Alekwu masquerade or be buried by the Achukwu masquerade cult as it is forbidden for women to be part of Alekwu or Achukwu.

New Burial Trends and Influencing Factors on Idoma Culture

When it comes to death, the Idoma people are strongly rooted in their beliefs, the culture of life after death, and the need to give the dead a befitting burial which will be an honour to the living relatives and making life easier for the dead in the new world. "Their belief in an unending existence in the next life . . . to ensure an honourable place for the dead in the spirit world", is core (Izunwa, 2016, p.128). However, this tradition and cultural practices have been seriously influenced and adulterated to a very significant level. The influx of new practices has reduced the traditional value and meaning the Idoma society and culture attaches to burial tradition practices. The Idoma people are a minority tribe in the lower river basin in the present-day middle belt region of Benue State Nigeria bordered by large ethnic groups such as the Igbos, Tivs and the Igala. The proximity of these large groups has resulted in the importation of new religious beliefs, ideas and culture which are contrary to the Idoma ideology, beliefs and practices.

The traditional practices are being replaced by these influences as it is not uncommon to find in any part of Idoma that the traditional wake of various cultural troupes have by now been replaced with young men and women playing modern party music. The performance of the Ichicha at the wake of the elderly is almost none existent and if found at all is a mockery of itself with young people whose ages were once regarded as a taboo to be members. The death of an elderly person has become a venue to show affluence as the family members display the

most expensive coffin for him to be buried in. The traditional final farewell/welcome ritual by Alekwu which was a rite for every adult male or female who has a living male and female child has almost been abolished as it is being seen as fetish and instead replaced by prayers in the various faith of the diseased family's choice. The reincarnation of the dead inform of Alekwu is almost none existent as it is now regarded as idolatry. The elderly are buried at anytime that suits the relatives and the necessary rite to enable them reincarnate as Alekwu is scantily practised. The traditional aura and respect accorded to the diseased is gone as bodies are carried in all kinds of manners by rented undertakers. They carry the casket with the dead, dancing and tossing the corpse around from seat to seat and in some instances demanding for money to be thrown on the casket. The burial ceremony has become a mockery of itself without having an identity. It contains every other culture with Idoma culture being a mirage.

Conclusion

The typical African life is communal and all activities are done with the sole aim of consideration for the comfort of one another in terms of happiness and grief. The Idoma society, as is typical of an African communal habitation, has structured its burials to take care and comfort both the living and the dead. The community needs to be enlightened that a people without culture and tradition are a people without an identity as Ezeajugh (2004, p.120) agrees that culture is "the basis of the structure, stability and security that both individuals and a society must possess if they are to maintain themselves in a social setting. Culture provides this foundation because it is dynamic and develops along the line of self-society survival".

There is need to understand that as change is constant so also is the need to maintain the past so that the people are not lost in the wind of

change. The need to understand the 'complex diverse societies in which people have come from across the many different parts and 'adaptation of culture containing ideas and techniques for responding to changes of day-to-day human experience (Akong'a, 2003, p. 26) is of great importance to understand that culture can be modernized but still retain its originality and identity. Etuk (1999, p. 168) perfectly sums it that it is a banality to state that every culture of the world has its own tradition. He further emphasized that even those we look up to, like the British, as a people are steeped in their imperial traditions while the Americans will always cling to their pragmatic roots. He concludes that it is also a truism to say that there can be no present which is not informed by the past.

The burial culture, like other aspects of African culture, is dying away. The African Christians due to Western civilization and the attitude of Christianity towards African Culture which greatly discourages "mourning is based on the belief in the resurrection of the body (1 Thess. 4: 13-18) and the fact that many African funeral rites are inseparable from African Traditional Religion, (Ademiluka, 2009, p. 18)" have greatly affected the belief in the traditional burial practices.

Whichever culture we adopt, we should always bear it in mind that it is still patent to where it is borrowed from and the ability to maintain ours will give us our uniqueness in the test of time. A creative blend of what is good from others to strengthen ours and having the final output still toned with our ideas and ideology will be significant to our culture, tradition, and existence as a people.

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