

## **An Overview of the Trend of Befitting Burial among the Present-Day Igbo Speaking People-Societies of Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This study x-rayed the trend of befitting burial among the Igbo-speaking people or societies of Nigeria. Death is an inevitable part of every biotic component of God's creation which man is invariably part of. As man journeys through life, death has become part of his regrettable realities which can never be wished away no matter how hard he tries to avert it and no matter his wealth, intelligence, academic status, influence, connections, religious positions and so on. After death, the obligation of the living to the deceased; is burial. In most African traditional religions or societies and in particular, in Igbo worldview or cosmology, it is believed that burial facilitates an easy transition of the dead to the great beyond and ensures that the departed gains entry into the spirit world. Burial also ensures that the spirit of the dead person does not hover around to torment the living. This by implication explains some of the pertinent reasons for burial. However, in the present-day Igbo societies of Nigeria, burial has assumed another worrisome dimension. The befitting burial has taken a center stage. It has become a concern to well-meaning Igbo people. The development has reached an alarming stage and something drastic has to be done to address the issue. Investigation from this study as well as personal experiences and eye-witness accounts of the authors, reveal that many families had gone the extra mile and out of their way to organize befitting burial for their departed loved ones. While many bereaved families out there are still looking forward to organizing the same for their departed ones. Given this, this study examined the causes of befitting burial, factors to be taken into consideration while preparing for such burial as well as its consequences. In general, the paper at the introductory part looked at death in man's earthly journey of life, the concept of burial and that of befitting burial as well as perspectives on burial across the world. Using the qualitative historical methodology, the study, analyzed and assembled the content of the secondary sources obtained from peer-reviewed books, online and journal publications, and so on as well as oral interviews, eye witness accounts and personal experiences of the authors on which the study relied heavily on. Among many other suggestions, the study concludes by noting that families of the deceased should conduct the burials of their deceased based on their financial capacities because the essence of burial is to bid farewell to the deceased and not to please the world or the crowd of invited and uninvited mourners by extravagant spending on things which are only enjoyed by the living.

**Key Words:** Death, Burial, Befitting-Burial, Funeral, Deceased-departed, Family and Igbo Societies-People

### **Introduction**

The Christian Holy Bible has it that "man was made from the dust and to the same dust he shall return". The fact of this statement stares everyone in the face when the inevitability of death is considered. Undoubtedly, there is no day that passes without people dying or without the ugly news of death in every corner of the globe. Death is the most unfortunate and tragic thing to happen to mankind and perhaps the worst punishment given to man by God.

Since the time of Adam and Eve (the first man and woman) on earth, death has become part and parcel of humanity. According to the adherents of African Tradition religion (ATR), death is the last phase of life which man must pass through to move into the world beyond called after life. Similarly, Akpata (2023:21) stated that death and eternity have been a controversial issue in the history of man. To him some believe that life ends at death while Christians on the other hand, believes in life after death. He therefore noted that:

*Catechism of the Catholic Church states that, "by death, the soul is separated from the body but in the resurrection God will give incorruptible life to our body, transformed by reunion with our soul". This hope of eternal life strengthens the dying and comforts the suffering, making them live happily in Christ. The depressed also takes consolation in his faith*

In its view of death, an online dictionary defined death as the cessation of life and all associated process; the end of an organism's existence as an entity independent from its environment and its return to an inert, non-living state. Heinemann International Student

Dictionary (1991:164) see it as the end of life; an act or way of dying or being killed. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary 8<sup>th</sup> edition (2010:375), similarly describe it as end of life; the state of being dead.

Igwe (2025:35) observed that our world has been graced with finest of minds; leaders, artists, philosophers and scientists like Albert Einstein, Michael Faraday, St. Augustine of Hippo, Abraham Lincoln, Michael Angelo, William Shakespeare and many more whose worth, achievement and progressive views had helped to shape and transform the world into what it is today and regrettably these men are no longer alive, as they are all dead and long buried. It is based on this that it is always said that "the graveyard is the richest place on earth. This statement arises from the fact that the graveyard remains the only place where many talents, knowledge, skills, aspirations as well as dreams both fulfilled and unfulfilled are forever buried. Igwe (2015:35), noted that it is the inevitability of death that made the Great English philosopher Thomas Hobbes during his dying moment on earth to say "If the world belongs to me I would rather give it all to live just a day longer. I am now departing on my last journey. It was my turn to take the rightful leap into the dark world."

In another related departing lamentation, Igwe (2015:35) also captured the words of Queen Elizabeth 1 often called The Virgin Queen while on her death bed and how she grasped her physician by the sleeve and pulled him down over her bed and whispered "half of the British empire for six months of life". Unfortunately, the doctor could not even give her 6 minutes of life and she died.

Death is sorrowful and regrettable and nobody ever wish for it even when it is unavoidable and will surely come knocking someday. According to Ojielo (2018:25), "the living person has the innate wish to exist forever but unfortunately, death is inevitable" ... It is thus, a misfortune that man must accept, cope and deal with as part of life. Rephrasing the words of Okafor (2015:37), death is a respecter of no one as men, women, boys and girls and even children all dies. Similarly, he observes that:

*Papa, mama, young and old, rich and poor cry in sorrow asking God's mercy to replace the horrible pains of death which is always too late and impossible. Drawing from the Holy Bible, Okafor is however concerned about where the soul will go-heaven or hell after death or after someone dies.*

Writing about death, Ezeokafor (2021:46), on his part stated as thus:

*Death is inescapable human phenomenon. It is the separation of the soul from the body. Consequently, at the moment of death, this soul is taken away from the body. And when this occurs, friends and relatives of the deceased gather to perform its corporal work of mercy of burying the dead. Such therefore, is the manifestation of the human desire to demonstrate respect for the dead.*

It is in recognition of the religious (Bible) commandment about the inescapable of death and the consequence return of the body to dust that, some Orthodox churches such as the Catholic, the Anglican, the Methodist, the Apostolic among others usually places or makes a sign of the cross using "ashes" on the foreheads of their lay-faithful or parishioners in obedience and observation to the annual ritual that marks the beginning of each Lenten and fasting period and which eventually culminate into celebration of the Christian religious function otherwise called Easter. Easter is a religious festival which commemorates the suffering and death of Jesus Christ which is believed by Christians grants them salvation and saves them from sin and give them hope of eternal life. It is a solemn celebration that takes place between March - April every year. During the kick-off of this all important religious obligation known as lent, the officiating priest (s) or minister (s) usually mutter the words "ashes to ashes" as he or they place the sign of the cross on the foreheads of the parishioners.

The implications of this event or ritual just as noted earlier is that "man came from the dust or ashes and to dust or ashes he shall go back or return when he dies.

Death is therefore not selective in its strikes. It strikes or kills whomever it wants or chooses without warning or notice. It does not take permission from anyone neither does it accepts kick-back from those who wishes not to die or who are afraid to die. It kills both the have and they have not, the old and young, the good and the bad, the ugly and the beautiful, the sick and the healthy, the weak and the strong, the normal and abnormal and so on. The story in the Christian Holy Bible has it that death was not originally in God's plan or design for mankind but started occurring as part of the consequences of Man, (Adam and Eve) disobedience to God's commandment or instruction when they ate the forbidden fruit (fruit of Good and evil).

This the Bible made it clear when it stated as thus:

*You will have to work very hard and sweat to make the soil produce anything food until you go back to the soil from which you were formed. You were made from the soil, and you will become the same soil again (Genesis 3:19).*

Death remains an ugly and saddening reality before man. It is something that triggers fears, or boggles the mind when it is remembered, thought of or mentioned. It breeds sorrow, loneliness, psychological trauma, depression, health challenges and even sober reflections to those affected or who have lost their loved ones. Death kills our loved ones, people around us, those we know and those we don't know or people in faraway places. Dons Eze (2021:17), sees death as:

*Something that concerns everybody because it brings loss and sorrow to the family, friends and well-wishers. He observed that in Oghe as until recently, as in many traditional African societies and Igbo land by extension, death was never envisaged, until one attains a very ripe age. And this to him, is the reason every premature death is viewed as an anathema and why such death is believed to have been as a result of one malevolent spirit or the other.*

In view of the above assertion, the Igbo cosmology or worldview as rightly observed by Madu (2003:45) have both good and bad death. A good death implies death after a ripe, old, matured age and other accompanied parameters while a bad death on the other hand implies death below this ripe, old age, a premature death all that detestable by diseases. According to him, a premature corpse is immediately disposed of and no funeral rite are performed until elaborate purification ceremony or rituals are conducted.

This passage as put forward by Madu (2003:45), in other words implies that in as much as death is unavoidable, that it is traditionally considered more glorious when one dies at an old, matured age while on this other hand, it is disheartening, regrettable and sorrowful when one dies at a young age. Thus, the summary of the whole thing is, death will certainly strike or come whether at a ripe age, matured old age or at a premature age. However, when it does strike, it is the obligation of the living or those alive to bury the dead.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Conceptual Meaning of Burial and Funeral**

The concept "burial" is also known as interment, inhumation, entombment, sepulcher, obsequy, and so on (www.american-webstar.com>dictionary). According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 6th Edition, burial comes from the word "bury". While burial means to place a dead body in a grave. It is the disposal of human remains by depositing it in the earth, a grave or a tomb by consigning to the water, or by exposing to the elements or to carrion-consuming animals. Burial therefore involve the ceremony or act of burying a dead body or person. It is a method of final disposition whereby a dead body is placed into the ground sometimes with objects. This is usually accomplished by excavating a pit or trench, placing the deceased and object(s) in it, and covering it over.

Burial is also seeing as the last journey of man on this mother earth. It is both religious and social concept, a mark of final respect to a deceased by the relatives, family members, friends and well-wishers. We bury people so that the spirit of the dead can rest in peace or gains its rightful place or entry into the land of the spirit. Ojielo (2018:25) observe that the Igbo cosmology does not view death as "finished" or as the end of human existence. Rather, it views the dead as existing in the other world, though in a diminished condition of life, as lessened life forces. Thus, Mbiti (1969) as cited in Dons Eze (2016) and Ojielo (2018:25) refers to the departed as the "living dead", whose personal immortality is expressed or externalized by the living through sacrifices, the pouring libation and rituals. As an ancient age-long tradition, burial is another way of bidding farewell to the deceased for the time spent on earth. It consists of long and complex rites. Thus, Parrinder (1976:95) noted that:

*The great aim of much time and expense is to ensure a proper funeral for the departed, so that his spirit may be contented in the world beyond and will not return as a dissatisfied ghost to plague his family. Funerals are therefore, the last transitional rites introducing a man into the world of spirit.*

It is in view of the above that Metuh (1991:136), averred that when one dies, the Igbo say "Ohapugo" meaning he/she has left, and that all efforts must be made to make sure that one reaches home (the spirit land of the ancestors). This according to him is achieved, as the Igbo believe, through elaborate funeral burial rites (ritual washing of corpse and decoration, lying in state, wailing by relatives and laying of the body into the grave and absolution).

Funeral on the other hand, is seen by Ezeokafor (2021:46) as a ceremony for honoring, praying and bidding farewell to the dead. Funeral custom according to him therefore comprises of beliefs and practices used by a culture to remember the dead, from interment or burial to other activities that may include prayers and rituals undertaking in their honour. Funerals as observed by Ezeokafor above often have religious aspects which are intended to help the soul of the deceased reach the eternal home of the saints. A funeral is also a ceremony that accompanies the final disposition.

### **The Concept of Befitting Burial**

Befitting burial is a term which has become synonymous to every household in Igbo societies of Nigeria today. It is not uncommon to hear the word among the bereaved families as they engage in preparation to bury their loved ones. Thus, one may want to ask, what then is befitting burial all about? Just as the name implies befitting burial in the words of Chigbo (2021) can be seen as an excessively elaborate burial which takes into consideration so many items that gulps large amount of financial resources from the bereaved family and which are thought to make the burial occasion entertaining, memorable, pleasurable and worthwhile. In this, efforts are usually made to ensure that the would be guests are properly taking care of with respect to food, drinks and comfort even as they mourn with the deceased family. While organizing a befitting burial, immediate family members of the deceased and sometimes friends and well-wishers contribute and pull enormous resources be it financial or material together in a bid to make the expected attendees comfortable during the burial period. This kind of burial often attracts friends, business associates, colleagues, top government functionaries, business magnates, senior religious leaders as well as people from all walks of life as they are invited by the family of the deceased who most times want to show off their political and social status, as well as connections and contacts.

In preparation for befitting burial, Ibekwe (2021), informed us that building are sometimes renovated or new one is built, expensive caskets are bought, corpse are most times kept longer than necessary in the morgue in a bid to prepare well, foods and drinks are provided in excess, large colorful posters and banners are produced which announces the passing unto glory of a rare gem, an icon, a legend and the likes. Top musical (either religious or secular) artist including live bands and traditional music like folklore musicians are invited and heavily paid to perform, quality and beautiful souvenirs, brochures and invitation cards are produced, buses and other vehicles are chartered and paid for to convey guests to the venue of the burial, variety of expensive burial uniforms (ashebis) are bought and many more. At times, guests are fed for several days or weeks as the case may be.

Oluwabamisi (2014), in an online articles titled "*what is benefiting burial*" published in Business Day Newspaper on April of the same year corroborated the above observations. Befitting burial is also thought by some has not only to facilitate an easy transition of the dead to the great world beyond but also to ensure that the spirit of the dead ones not hover around to torment the living members of the family or relatives. It equally involved laying the body in state in an elaborately decorated chamber while direct descendants or relatives of the deceased are dressed in expensive ceremonial garments all in a bid to say farewell to the departed. ([www.memorialplanning.com](http://www.memorialplanning.com) >burial-types).

In the cosmology of the traditional Igbo society, Madu (2003:46-47) noted that:

*the burial associated with a good death include ritual washing of the deceased with water and anointing with cam wood dye to prepare it for the journey to the world beyond, killing of animals like goats and fowl and their blood smeared on the corpse and stuck all over with feathers, the rite of lying in state in his Obi which was normally built at the entrance of the compound, the laying of his working tools, his bags, his gun, some clothes, some coins, some animals and some food stuffs beside him, these were meant to be taken along to the spirit land, the rite of wailing by his wives and relatives and the rite of laying the body into grave and the rite of absolution which is performed by an old man if it is a man but this is done by two young virgins if the deceased is a woman.*

The ritual according to him consists in pronouncements over the deceased body to cleanse the deceased of his transgressions and rid him or her of all obstacles which may impede his or her reincarnation and to bring greater blessings to the family. This is followed by some pronouncement by the old man or the virgins, as case maybe, to the deceased before he is interred.

### **Perspectives on Burial across the World**

Burial takes different forms with respect to diverse cultural practices as seen all over the world. However, geography, religion, and the social system all influence burial practices. Climate and topography determines whether the body is buried under the ground, placed in water, burned/cremated, or exposed to the air. Religious and social attitudes determine how elaborate the burial should be; rank, for example, may determine whether the body is placed in the shallow trench of a simple burial or an underground chamber of impressive dimension and construction

#### **1. Inhumation Burial (Natural, Earth, Green or Grave Burial).**

This is a type of burial in the ground by hollowing out a trench in the earth for the body or covering it with rocks or dirt. This practice dates back to the middle Paleolithic period. It involves the use of containers for the dead, such as shrouds, coffins, grave liners and vaults, all of which can retard decomposition of the body. In ancient Egypt especially during the reigns of pharaohs, the remains of the dead were mummified or embalmed. Thus, Afrocentric historians believe that the origin of modern mortuary is attributed to this practice. However, the position of the body is significant in some cultures. For instance, the Buddhists – laid the dead body with head to the north, in ancient Egypt, this body was placed towards the west, Muslims are laid on the right side facing Mecca while many Native Americans buried their dead in a fetal position, sometimes in a basket or clay urn, with knees under the chin and the body neatly into a death bundle. Upright burial has been favoured by other people

particularly for warriors. Customarily, the body is placed in an extended position, in or out of a coffin, as if in sleep. The above views on the burial practices or positions of the dead were also shared by Dons Eze (2021:78) when he stated as follows:

*In Oghe, it is...the diviner who will say where the dead person will be buried. According to him, normally, a person is buried with the head lying west-ward or south-ward. Each of these directions leads to spirit word. While a man is usually buried in front of his house; a married woman is buried inside her kitchen. This reflects their different roles, either as a shepherd, or as one in charge of the home front. A little child is however buried in the bush, to sojourn with other unidentified spirits hovering around the area, while a young man is made to appear in a masquerade before burial, as a way of recommendation to the ancestor for acceptance in the spirit world.*

Similarly, Dons Eze observed as thus:

*A war hero, in particular, one who had killed people during many of those inter-communal wars, will have an Ikpa music played for him to celebrate his valour. While a criminal, on the other hand, who had committed some heinous crimes, or who had sworn falsely before a shrine or an idol, and later died as a result, will have his corpse taken outside the community and thrown into the bush for the vultures to feast upon. All his personal belongings will be deposited with the shrine. In the case of a criminal, his entire property is thrown into Ajo Ofhia (Evil forest).*

Grave burial, or inhumation, may be simple or elaborate. Some Eskimo people cover the corpse with a pile of stones or, where the stones are not readily available they use a small ice Igloo. The old Norse people-built barrows that sometimes-reached enormous heights. In Eastern North America, large burial mounds were characteristics of Indian cultures from 1000 BCE to 700 CE. Graves may be shallow pits, or they may be intricate and beautifully fashioned subterranean palaces sunk deep into the earth and may be spacious enough to accommodate vast number of persons. For example, the excavations of the royal graves of Ur dating back to about 300 BCE revealed in an inner chamber of one, the body of a ruler with a few intimate attendants, and in surrounding chambers, servants, ministers, dancing girls, charioteers with vehicles and animals and other persons who had been slain to provide service in death. ([www.Britannica.com/spirituality](http://www.Britannica.com/spirituality))

## **2. Cave Burial**

Caves, a natural refuge of humans, have also been used for the dead. The ancient Hebrews used natural single chamber caves and hewed oblong recesses lengthwise into the wall to accommodate the dead, a custom that encourage the building of mausoleums. This was later to be called sepulchral caves which is regarded as sacred and eventually became places of worship. Among them are thousands of rock temples in Western India and in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), some of which received elaborate architectural and sculptural treatment or design. Both caves and earth graves encouraged the development of other burial practices. The use of coffins and rich grave clothes and burial goods

## **3. Water Burial**

The association between water and immortality is reflected in the myths of many cultures, myths that often center on a god-hero who sails away from his people in death with the promise to return again. The bodies of chiefs and heroes, therefore, have often been set adrift on rivers and oceans in death ships. Among the Norse, even those who were interred were sometimes given such a bier- a custom that was wide spread from Iceland to England during the 7th and 8th centuries CE. Perhaps the most famous of such ship burials that have been excavated was that at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk, England. Archaeologists found the remains of a wooden boat for 38 rowers, 85 feet (26 meters) long that had been dragged a half mile (about 1km) from the river and lowered into the ground. Water burial has been common in other cultures. In the pacific Islands, it was customary to place the dead in a canoe and launch that on the water. However, not all water burial involves a ship or raft. In the Solomon Islands, bodies have simply been laid on a reef to be eaten by sharks, in other places they have been wrapped and weighted with stones. In western cultures, water burial is still employed on occasion when people die during a sea voyage. There is also a bone throwing ceremony that concludes death observances among the Hindu in India. Within a year after death, the remains of the dead are taken to the Ganges River or other rivers or streams that finally make their way to the Ganges.

## **4. Exposure Burial**

This is placing the body of the dead where it may be eaten by scavenging birds and animals or weathered to its essential elements. The Zoroastrians have been perhaps the most widely known practitioners of this type of burial, which developed out of the belief that the corpse is unclean that to inter or cremate it, would contaminate the “pure elements” of earth, fire and water”. In other words, the tradition believes that a dead body defile everything it touches- including the ground and fire – and raising a corpse to the sky for vultures/birds to devour was historically the only option. This practice has been since 6th Century BCE. The Parsis of Mumbai, the Indian descendants of Persian refugees maintain “towers of silence”. The dead are carried to them, and funeral servants place them on stone beds surrounding a central pit. After the hovering vultures have stripped

the flesh from the bones – usually within a few hours—the bones are gathered and dropped into the central pit(www.britamica.com...> Spirituality).

## **5. Cremation Burial**

In some culture like parts of India, when someone dies, the remains are cremated. The ashes or remains are sometimes kept in an urn or scattered in cemetery, garden, or at sea, river, stream or certain places with special meaning. An urn can also be placed in a spot with special meaning, such as over a mantle in a home, or in an urn garden, community/public mausoleum niche, urn mausoleum called a columbarium, or even bury in a gravesite space. A mausoleum is an above ground building memorializing multiple individuals. It provides you with a secure enclosure that will remain clean and completely dry without ever letting the casket or vault come in contact with the earth. Meanwhile, cremation can occur immediately the person is dead and the remains are returned to the family without any type of service. On the other hand, cremation can also take place few days after death and after a typical funeral service in which the body is displayed (www.memorialplanning.Com >burial-types).

### **Causes of the Trend of Befitting Burial in the Present-Day Igbo Society in Nigeria**

The Igbos are known for their industry and competitive nature. They are also a very proud people who use every available avenue to showcase what they have achieved in life. Their flamboyant lifestyles are evidenced in occasions like Christmas, New Year, Easter, weddings and many other societal and personal celebrations. It is unfortunate, however, that this ostentatious display of lifetime achievement has been carried over to the burial ceremonies, as we are witnessing in many parts of Igbo land today. Today, a befitting burial is the trending thing for most deceased families. There are therefore a number of factors that have led to the ugly development. This according to Eziechi (2023) include the following:

#### **1. Economic Status**

As noted earlier, Igbos are hard-working people and at the same time a very proud race. Apart from the families who inherited our affluence, many others who have worked themselves up the ladder of economic status and social recognition will always want to show off the wealth they have acquired in the course of time at any slightest opportunity like burial occasions Eziechi (2023). In preparation for a befitting burial, special attentions are therefore paid to a number of things or items by deceased family in order to impress the would be invited and uninvited guests and to show them how God has blessed the family.

#### **2. Connections and Contact of the Family**

Another very important factor that has prompted families in Igbo land to engage in this trending burial is that they want to use that avenues to advertise their social, political, economic, educational and religious contacts and connections. It is no doubt that many wealthy families in the course of their life struggles and in the bid to climb up the economic and social ladder, have made important contacts and connections. Thus, during the burial of a deceased member of the family, these friends, colleagues, business associates, and wellwishers are usually invited. They are mostly people from all walks of Life; members of the religious bodies, academia, business magnets, political class among others. The level of the family sophistication is usually brought to bear during such burial occasions.

#### **3. Undue Competitions**

Undue competitions are another reason many families in Igbo land embarks on befitting burial. Competition is what the Igbos are known for. It is this competition that however made the Igbos what they are. They compete virtually in everything. In business, academic and what have you. This competition according to (Chiakwa 2023) is presently witnesses even in burial as befitting burial has taken a center-stage. To her, in many of Igbo villages and towns, families tries to outdo and outshine one another in their burial ceremony. Families goes extra miles in the bid to show that there are wealthier, more affluent and are more socially and politically connected to others. Thus, whooping amount of money is spent carelessly on many irrelevant and frivolous items just to impress the crowd of mourners and to prove superiority of wealth over other families

#### **4. Social Recognition**

It is also believed that most families in Igbo land who engages or had engaged in befitting burial does so to gain societal recognition. Having struggled through life and having succeeded and achieved the desired success, burial of the loved one therefore is always one of those numerous occasions which the bereaved families uses to show the world; the expected mourners, family members, friends and well-wishers that they have achieved wealth as well as social contacts and connections they have equally established in the course of time. The evidence of this is seen with the presence of personalities both invited and uninvited that are always in attendance.

## **5. To Maintain and Sustain Family Prestige:**

Aniebonam (2013) is of the opinion that the deceased family are involved in this trend of befitting burial not only because they have the needed resources-wherewithal nor because it is really their intentions but because they are conscious of what their friends, colleagues, political and business associates, academic friends as well as their potential or would be mourners would say at the end of the burial ceremony or after departing the burial venue. In view of this, families are ready and prefer to spend their last Kobo to impress the public and to maintain, sustain and preserve their prestige, pride and bogus lifestyle.

### **Factors that are put into Consideration in Organizing a Befitting Burial**

Number of items are listed and considered while organizing a befitting burial in today's Igbo land-societies. So, according to Anikwe (2022), Uzodiagu (2022) and Ezeudu (2022), these items include but may not be limited to the following: 1. **Electronic and Print Media Announcements / Jingles**

In a bid to publicize a would-be or an expected befitting burial in today's Igbo societies, a staggering amount of money is usually spent on radio and television announcements or jingles and on print media. These announcements are usually carried out before and even after the burial is said to be over. This publicity attracts various charges depending on the popularity of the media outfit in question, the name and the level of patronage enjoyed from the public and the agreement reached between the bereaved family and the media. For instance, if a very important program is on air, and has to be interrupted or paused for the burial announcement to be made, this in the words of Ogbonna, (2021) attract a higher or extra charge or fee. Reason being that there are expected to be much audience listening to the program as at the particular time the announcement is made or expected to be made and to which the program is or has to be interrupted.

On the other hand, the print Media also attracts huge charge for their services. Media outfits like newspaper, magazine and other sources of hard copy publications are avenue to which announcement or information about the obituary of the deceased are made. As at 2016 when the idea of this paper was conceived investigation revealed that a full page of advertisement in any of the national dailies attract a service fee of about #750,000, half a page goes for #350,000 while quarter and one quarter pages goes for #350,000 and #150,000 respectively. However, with the present day economic condition and inflation in the country, I am pretty sure that the charges must have gone astronomically high by now.

## **2. Burial Uniforms (Ashebis):**

Burial uniform or the so-called "*burial Ashebi*" is another trend that has added to high cost of organizing a befitting burial in Igbo land-societies as at today. To Eluke (2021), Ashebi as it is fondly referred to, is a culture which the Igbo allegedly borrowed from their Yoruba brothers. It is a set of uniform (s) worn by family members, friends and well wishes during importance occasions. Today, these clothes have turned into clothes (sackcloth) that are used in the South East Igbo-land in mourning a departed loved one. Apart from burial ceremonies, the ashabis also features prominently in other social functions like traditional marriage, wedding ceremonies, to mention but a few. It is believed by some that burials are supposedly made colourful, rich and sophisticated by multifarious uniforms adorn by family member's relations and well-wishers of the deceased. In most cases, this clothing materials really cost a fortune to acquire by the bereaved family and individuals of various groups billed to grace the burial occasion.

## **3. Burial Musical Performance:**

In burial occasion such as those of befitting burial, the hosting of high performing musicians of various musical types has become the norms in today's Igbo societies. Musicians such as Afro or Pop Stars, Gospel artists, life bands, folklore or traditional musicians among the rest are usually invited to perform. These musicians charge exorbitant fees to grace such burial occasion. However, the charges also vary depending on the popularity and caliber of the artist invited, hired or contracted to perform.

## **4. Burial Souvenirs:**

Souvenirs are also not left out in the list of budget preparation for the burial of a deceased family member. Gift items are usually budgeted for and bought by the family or by individual or firm as the case may be contracted to organize the burial for the family. During this period, gift materials that would be shared or given to the invited guests, sympathizers or mourners at the end of the burial or as they are departing are usually bought and shared. The quality, type or the cost of the items are dependent on the financial strength / muscles of the bereaved family as well as the caliber and number of associates, colleagues, friends and so on expected to be at the burial. Among many of the varieties of the gift items that are usually bought and gifted to people are umbrella, towel, trays, jotters, shirts, Polo, caps, buckets, teacups, waste packers/bins and so on. Other very expensive items such as laptop, palmtop, wrist watches, hand fans, wrappers, to mention but a few are sometimes bought and are given

out too. This practice of gifting the mourners is however observed by Olisaemeka (2023) as a contradiction to Igbo ancient tradition whereby the sympathizers (friends/relatives) were the ones expected to present such items like food, drinks or even physical cash to the deceased family as their own little way of assisting the bereaved family to cushion part of the cost incurred during the burial occasion.

### **5. Burial Brochure an Invitation Cards**

Burial brochure and invitation cards is another aspect of befitting burial which gulps a huge chunk of fund. The brochure usually contains the life history or autobiography of the deceased as well as his or her photo collections (galleries or album). It also includes the family pictures, their tributes and those of friends, colleagues and well-wishers. The more the tribute, the more the number of the pages are expected to be, and the higher the cost or charge or fee by the publisher/printer. The price also varies depending on the background (black and white or coloured) of the picture. In the same applies to the texture or quality of the paper. Just like the pages, the better the texture, the higher the price and vice-versa. The same vein, burial invitation cards are also found in the same category like that of the brochure (Olisaemeka, 2023).

### **6. Burial Casket**

When it comes to the issue of casket, there are variety of them with different quality, sizes, shapes and built. In most of the so-called befitting burial today in Igbo societies of Nigeria, exorbitant casket are being purchased and are used for burials as articles of ostentation by rich families of the bereaved. In many instances, the undertakers are contracted to convey the corpse home, and in the process add colour to the burial occasion. The series of scintillating, well-rehearsed performances and physical and energetic displays while retrieving the corpse right from the mortuary and down to the point of the burial home of the deceased is something that many believes that keeps crowd of mourners or guests spellbound and somewhat entertained even in the midst of mourning. However, this service of the undertakers does not come cheap but at a varying costly prices. For instance, contracting or hiring the services of a renowned burial entertainment firm like APAMS FUNERAL SERVICES is really not for every deceased family, but for those who have the financial muscle.

### **7. Burial Venue**

This is a major factor that is considered while organizing and arranging for befitting burial in Igbo societies today. The size and the nature of venues are dependent on the number and caliber of invited and expected sympathizers or mourners. Those who have bigger and befitting compounds sometimes uses the same for the purpose of the burial while those whose compound are small or not decent enough most times goes for something spacious, bigger and better for the hosting of the guests. Large sums of money are usually spent in hosting such befitting venues.

### **8. Mortuary Fees/Charges**

Mortuary fees or charges sometimes blows up the cost of befitting burial. This is especially when a corpse is left in the morgue for a very long time. Ordinarily, the essence of putting the dead in the mortuary is to give the deceased family adequate time to prepare for the burial. It is also to enable those of the family member's residence abroad or in faraway places to get themselves prepared for the home trip with respect to the burial. Unfortunately, many wellto-do families in today's Igbo societies are annoyingly taking advantage of this by keeping their deceased loved ones longer than necessary in the mortuaries. At times, this may be as a result of unresolved lingering family disputes. But be that as it may, the longer the dead body stays up in the morgue, the more the charges pile up. This kind of situation observed by Chibor (2023) has prompted some religious denomination/community like the Catholic Churches in most parts of Igbo land to insist that no burial of her departed layfaithful/member shall exceed a month from the date the death announcement was pronounced in the church. Unfortunately, this law is usually not obeyed by most bereaved families in Igbo land today. According to the information further provided by Chibor (2023), one of the major cause of prolong keeping of the deceased in the mortuary is most times not for lack of money or financial constraints but for wanton reason of buying enough time to prepare adequately for the burial in order to impress the expected mourners coming to bid the deceased farewell. It is also good to know that the charges equally depend on the name, integrity and popularity of the mortuary in question. For instance, the chargers at Eastern Medical Centre mortuary in Enugu state and the likes are far more expensive to many other mortuaries in the state. The reason for this to Ubenyi (2023), is that the mortuary and others in the same category are adjudged to provide adequate security to the remains of the deceased and ensures that all the body parts are intact until the day the body would be retrieved for interment. There have been ugly stories whereby many mortuaries allegedly involve in the abominable acts of tempering or mutilating of the body part of the deceased for monetary gains. Such body parts according to the news sources are sold to ritualists for various purposes.



## 9. Burial Tents, Chairs, Tables and other Decoration Materials

The above items work hand in glove with the burial venue. You cannot talk about burial venue without putting all these items into consideration. After securing the burial venue, the next plan is on how to fill the venue with chairs, tables, and burial tents especially when it is an open space. The chairs and tables and the tent are equally beautifully decorated to make the place rich, colourful and attractive in order to meet the taste and appeal of the would-be mourners particularly the invited dignitaries. The number of expected guests and the size of the venue also determines the number of the chairs, tables, tents and canopies to be hired or contracted. At times, within a venue, a portion of it is specially decorated for the important guests invited/expected for the ceremony. In that portion, such guests are also specially entertained with unique music and varieties of local delicacies. Sometimes, foreign meals are also provided depending on the kind of guests expected at the occasion.

## 10. Burial Foods and Drinks Entertainment

So much money is also spent on food and drinks. In befitting burial, varieties of local delicacies are usually provided. Sometimes, foreign meals are usually served but this depends on the type or nature of the invited guests. Unfortunately, many of the foods are sometimes wasted at the end of the occasion. Apart from the wastage that comes from some of the already saturated or filled sympathizers or guests who out of greediness continue to request for more food only to later dump them after eating just a little fraction of it. It is also good to note that a large quantity of food is sometimes left unconsumed which eventually spoiled and are later discarded immediately after the burial.

The same scenario also applies with drinks as some of the so-called sympathizers sometimes demand for more drinks only to open them up to sip a little and later abandoned them. Some of the sympathizers also drinks themselves to stupor in the name of "AWUF" alias "free drinks". Besides, there are always these set of people who will steal drinks and wines meant to serve the guests given any slightest opportunity especially in a porous security environment. It is in view of the above that a paraphrased version of Ubaka (2024) in an online Facebook post queried as thus:

*Why must there be food, drinks, wines and all manner of unnecessary entertainments at burials-funerals most especially those that involve untimely deaths of people below 70 years of age? And to make matter worst, he noted that some people usually get angry if they don't eat or where not served food and drinks at burials. While at the same time, some others shamelessly struggle for food even at the burials of 40 to 50 years old persons and every other deceased person below 70 years of age*

## Consequences of Befitting Burial in Igbo Land- Societies Today

The trend of befitting burial in the Present-Igbo societies- land has come with a number of consequences or implications. Eziechi (2023), noted that these are socio-economic and psychological in nature. To him, the present subculture-norm of befitting burial has obviously led to wastage of economic resources. In other words, money which the bereaved families could have been used to empower other jobless and not-doing-well members of the family are extravagantly lavished in the said burial. In a similar vein, the resources which could have been channeled into other productive and profitable ventures of the economy like the establishment of factories or industries that could have provided employment opportunities for the teeming jobless youth of the societies are blatantly mismanaged and wasted at the altar of wanting to impress and satisfy the burial guests in the name of befitting burial.

Sometimes, after hosting a successful befitting burial, life becomes hard, difficult and unbearable to some families as they struggle to survive having spent their entire life savings during the burial occasion. While some returns to square one or zero level, others according to the information provided by this research almost feed from hand-to-mouth because the burial has gulped the larger part of their resources. All these are the obvious realities especially for families who are not financially balanced but who choose to join the bandwagon or who choose to do befitting burial because others are doing it.

Again, family members or children of the deceased are compelled to go through harrowing emotional, psychological and financial stress or hurdles in a bid to meet up with all the so-called necessary burial arrangements and expenses typical of a befitting burial.

Most at times, deceased families are concerned or bothered with what people, friends, colleagues, associate, well-wishers and others would say if they fail to measure up with the needed expectations. So, in order to avoid gossips or perhaps embarrassment or what people would say befitting burial becomes inevitable option.

In addition, the quest to conduct a befitting burial has made some careless families perpetual and longtime debtors. Ibekwe (2021) revealed that long after a successful befitting burial, some families still battle to offset the loans they collected during the burial occasion. Moreover, there have been cases of families who had sold their valuable possessions like landed properties or other inheritance to settle debts or to have a befitting burial.

In the worlds of Ejiofor (2023), some members of the deceased families in Igbo land had gone out of the conventional ways or ethical norms of the society to raise funds to meet up with the task of conducting and organizing a befitting burial for their lost ones. This to him, had led some individuals into various forms of

criminalities such as theft, fraud, duping their employers, relatives, trusted friends and other members of the societies. In worst cases, some had taken to armed robbery and other abhorred social vices for this very purpose.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

In traditional Igbo societies, just like in many places-societies in Africa, burial used to be a very solemn occasion that mourns a departed loved one. It was a period of reflections on the meaning and existence of life. Back in those days, death was feared by both the young and the adults. Unlike what is obtainable today, those days children were not allowed to come close to the burial place talk more of seeing the dead body. The news of the death of a relative kept the kids trembling and scared of moving about especially at night long after the burial.

Except in the death involving a titled man like Nze, Ozor, Ndi Ichie and so on or that which involved a man of ripe old and matured age as seen or witnessed in the burial of Ichie Ezeudu in Chinua Achebe "Things Fall Apart" (1995:2), burial was however done with little or no fun fair and without elaborate activities as we have it today in most Igbo societies. People did not bother themselves so much on a number of frivolous, irrelevant and money consuming long list of burial items that could be used for something better. Mourners were only interested in bidding the deceased farewell and not necessarily in what they would eat and drink as the norm in the contemporary Igbo land.

The point of departure today is that there is a craze or better still a more or less competitions among families in the south east region to outshine one another as they strive to organize befitting burial for their departed loved ones. This is even when some families do not have the needed finance for such elaborate burial. Burial in Igbo land has assumed a dramatic turn to something worrisome and inexplicable. The development has taken an unimaginable magnitude that it has become a bandwagon which every bereaved family in Igbo society wants to be associated with. According to Olijia-Eze (2006:54), another area of materialistic inclination in our present age is the craze for burials, funerals and remembrances. He therefore averred that:

*In africa and especially among diverse cultures, particularly among the Igbo speaking people-societies in Nigeria, that most people spend too much moneys for burials and funerals and even remembrances, and all these have raised much alarm as they have impacted negatively on the lives and wellbeing of the people in the region.*

A Facebook group/page known as *Weird, Wonder and Strange* also acknowledged this craze for burial in the present Igbo societies of Nigeria in an online post (2024) shared on the 20<sup>th</sup> March when it opined that "we live in a world where funerals are more important than the deceased..." This cankerworm has eaten deep into the fabric of the Igbo societies that something has to be done to address this ugly trend.

However, this paper is not advocating for the idea that the deceased should be buried like a chicken or like an ordinary animal, no, not at all. It is rather condemning the unnecessary clamor for befitting burial and the need to check the ugly trend. In the words of Ezeji (2023), in an online post shared on the Facebook on the 11<sup>th</sup> November, he stated that:

*Burials do not befit the dead, that the dead are dead and are unaware of what befit them or not. He further noted that "befitting burials" are bragging point for the living, and not for the dead, for the dead do not care what happens to their remains immediately after they are gone.*

The authors of this paper are therefore of the opinion that the whooping sum of money that is used in hosting befitting burial occasions in the South-Eastern Igbo society can be used to grow and stimulate the economy of the region positively if channeled into productive and profitable ventures. Again, the money could be used to establish factories/companies that can generate employment for the army of unemployed youth of the region. Thus, this paper is calling for a massive sensitization programme to educate the people against this ugly development through relevant platforms or stakeholders; youth bodies, town Unions and many others within the various communities across the Igbo land.

Religious bodies should also use every available avenue of their sermon on the pulpit to condemn this ugly development. The traditional rulers are believed to be closer to the people and as well the custodians of the culture, customs and traditions of the people. They should therefore use their offices to educate the individual members of their communities on the need to play down on this unwholesome practice that contributes nothing to the economy of the region. This paper is also of the suggestion that this trend of befitting burial should be done with moderation if at all it must continue to be condoned. It condemns the clamor or competitions for the befitting burial among the people of the region especially when consider the stress and financial difficulties that the people passes through in hosting it.

Lastly, bereaved families should also learn to conduct burials based on their financial muscles or the resources at their disposal. The competition with other families that are well-to-do should stop. Thus, befitting burial should be planned in line with the families' available income or financial strength. The act of borrowing or incurring debt

to execute a benefiting burial should be stopped since the dead is gone and elaborate burial is simply to impress the living or the crowd of mourners and not the dead who knows nothing of the world anymore.

This paper will therefore conclude by drawing from the opinion of Ezeji (2023) in his online Facebook post shared on the 11<sup>th</sup> November when he noted as thus

*Love your loved ones while they are here and alive, and sacrifices for them. Give them gifts. Speak words of affirmation to them. Do act of services for them. Touch them, hug them, kiss them and spend time with them. Laugh and smile with them, enjoy them. Do not save your accolades for the pages of their burial programs. The dead won't read them. Say what you need to say now, to the ones you love who are alive.*

To Ezeji (2023), it is better to care for your loved ones while they are alive and healthy or when they are sick as the dead does not eat cows, goats, fowls, and cannon shots (egbe ala). He maintained that when somebody dies, that what matters is the spiritual benefits. Thus, he is of the opinion that if funeral loses its spiritual value, and become materialistic, then they are no more funerals. The concern here, according to him, is what can benefit the dead in the next world as well as his soul. This to him is the reason the church lays more emphasis not on food and drinks but prayers, Eucharistic celebration (or Holy Mass). He observed that the dead cannot help themselves, that all they need is our prayers. Therefore, any celebration or ceremony that loses touch of this spiritual value cannot longer be considered Christian. That is why these material celebration consisting of buying of goats, cows, uniforms, expensive caskets, burial brochures and invitation cards, burial venue, mortuary charges among others as superfluous practices and sheer exploitation of both the dead and the living

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