

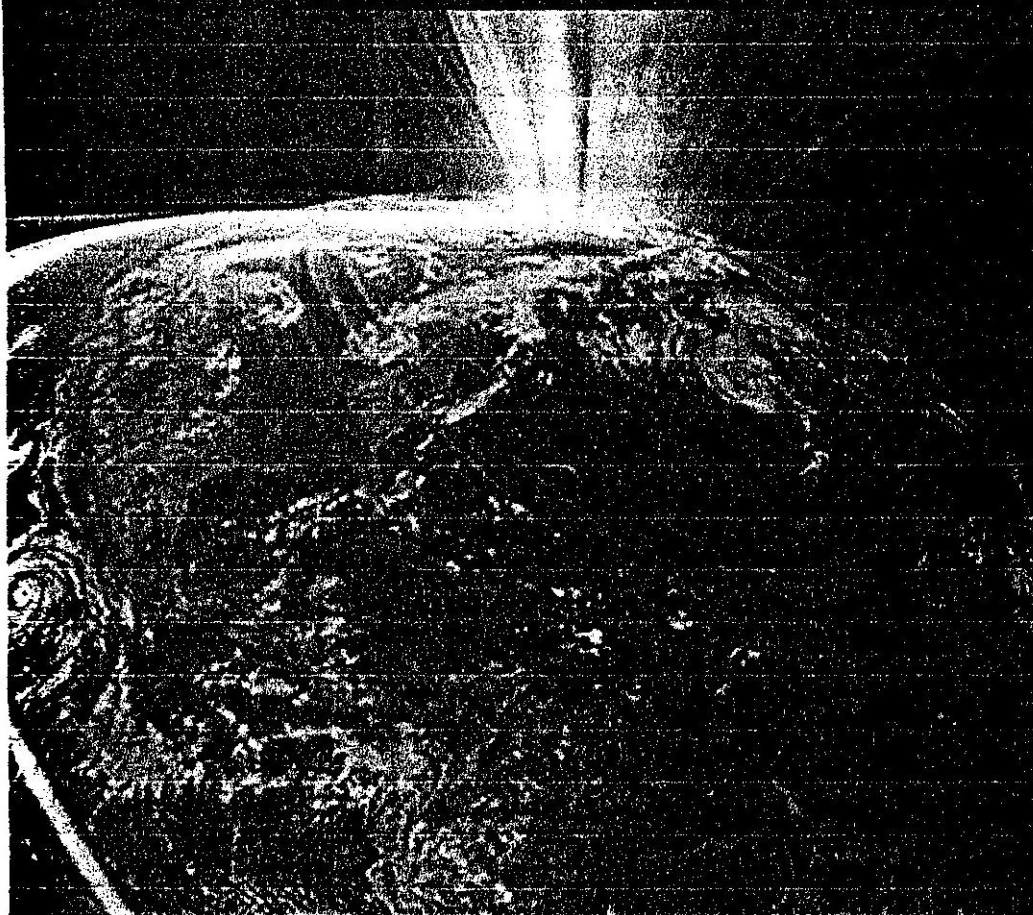
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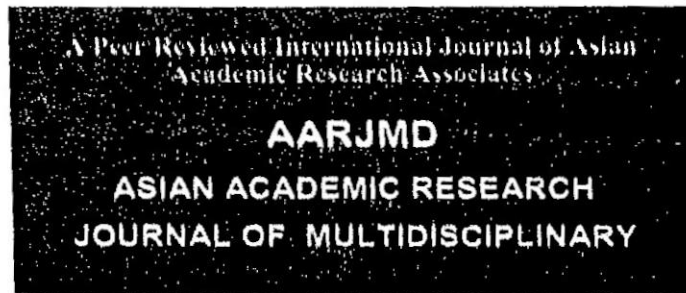
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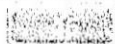
CHANGING FUNERAL PRACTICES IN THE SOUTHERN NIGERIAN
TOWN OF CALABAR
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Abstract

The practice of burying the dead varies from one society to another. Even within the same society, there are temporal variations. This paper examines the funeral patterns of the Calabar people of Southern Nigeria across three periods: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. It situates the spatial and temporal changes that have underpinned funeral practices in Calabar in a scholarly manner. Archival materials, the works of early anthropologists like Robert Hertz (1907) and A. L. Kroeber (1927) and personal observation are the sources of the information used in this study. The research findings suggest that, as Calabar metamorphosed from a simple society to a complex one, the tastes of its people became more sophisticated and so did the funeral practices which became an avenue for ostentatious display. It agrees with Kroeber's study that material and economic considerations have a greater effect on burial practices than emotions.

Keywords : funeral, practices, calabar, culture, burial



Introduction:

Robert Hertz (1907) and A. L. Kroeber's (1927) contributions to funeral practices among various groups of people across continents, have provided us with useful paradigms for studying the changing funeral rites and customs in Calabar. In his research, "A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representatives of Death", Hertz asserts that death is experienced and dealt with by various cultures in various ways and that there is no universally accepted way of treating the dead. He further maintains that it is important to understand the local customs of a society, the process that occurs from death to burial and how the living reacts to this. Hertz sees death as "a complex mass of beliefs, emotions and activities".

Kroeber's study on the other hand, similar to Hertz, argues that there are no generalized theories regarding patterns of funeral practices and that, it is likely that material and economic consideration have a greater effect on burials than emotions- a point that will be illustrated in the funeral rites and customs of the Calabar people. Having studied various cultures, Kroeber agrees with Hertz that cultures vary in the treatment of their dead and that there is lack of uniformity in burial methods, location and rituals. Indeed, the observations of these scholars are exemplified in the burial practices of different groups across the globe. The Indians cremate their dead; the Chinese bury their emperors in suits of jade before interment; in parts of Indonesia, new born infants who die are buried in the trunk of giant trees (<http://www.about.com/od/...caringforDead.htm>). Among Africans, bodies are usually interred as soon as possible because of the putrefaction of corpses in hot countries (Parrinder, 1975) and chiefs are buried more elaborately than commoners. Accordingly, every society throughout history is imbued with inherent funeral practices that mark them out from other groups. The Calabar society is not an exception. It has undergone a great deal of metamorphosis right from the pre-colonial era through the colonial and the post colonial period. These three eras will be highlighted presently. Before doing that, it is important to do a sketch of Calabar, our area of study and the cosmology of its people which informed their funeral practices.

Calabar; Its People and Their Religious Cosmology

Calabar, the first capital of modern Nigeria is one of Nigeria's cities located on the coastal region of West Africa. The history of the city was shaped to a very major extent by centuries of trade with European nations. K. O. Dike maintained that it was trade and commerce that linked Calabar with the rest of the world (Dike 1956). This trade was facilitated by the Calabar Sea Port which linked the city and the outside world. Indeed, through its sea port many trade goods, both human and material found their way to Europe especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. Calabar's strategic



location, by the Atlantic Ocean made the city one of the first regions to embrace Western European influences and education in Nigeria.

Over the years, the city has functioned as a major centre for immigration, an important trade emporium, a missionary and educational centre and an administrative capital during the colonial period. From 1968 to date, it has equally served as the capital of Cross River State of Nigeria.

The city of Calabar is home to three ethnic groups – Efik (the most prominent of the three groups that exerted linguistic and commercial influence over the lower Cross River Basin in the 18th and 19th centuries), Qua and Efut. Over the years, Calabar has received an influx of migrants from within and outside Nigeria. Some of these include Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Ghanaians, Lebanese, Liberians and Indians.

The people of Calabar refer to their supreme God as *Abasi*. *Abasi* is believed to be the Creator of man who dwells in the sky and administers the universe. He is worshiped through the various deities in the land some of which include *Ndem Efik*-Efik titular sea deity, *Esierebom*, *Anansa*, *Akpa Uyok Iboku Anwan* and *Afia Anwan* (Aye, 1967). Although different families and Calabar communities had their own deities, once a year, they all came together and sacrificed in union to *Ndem Efik* at Uba near Parrot Island. On the day of the sacrifice, the priests and priestesses carried along with them a white cow, goat or fowl and the Deity's plate- *Usan Ndem*- which contained ground white chalk (*Ndom*) and yellow chalk (*Uto*) and proceeded to the spot of the sacrifice which was usually in a thick forest or in the river. Before the year 1850, annual worship of the *Ndem* was rounded off by sacrificing an Albino to the deity. With the arrival of Christianity in Calabar which prompted the abolition of human sacrifice, this custom was replaced with the use of cows.

The belief in re-incarnation is very strong among the people. If a child resembles a deceased relative, the family considers the child to be a reincarnation of their relative (Forde, 1956). In addition, kings and nobility were to be buried with their goods luxury items and slaves, to enable them use the items in the next world. These beliefs go a long way in affecting the treatment of the dead in Calabar especially during the pre-colonial era as highlighted below.

Pre-Colonial Era

Funeral practices in pre-colonial Calabar took various forms. Firstly, the burial of those suspected to be witches/wizards or criminals; secondly, persons who died of bad diseases such as small pox; thirdly, the burial of commoners; lastly, the burial of kings, the royalty or nobility.

Witches/wizards were thought to be evil and earned no honorable funeral rites. Since they were believed to use their evil machinations on the less powerful, it became imperative to

immobilize their potency in the event of reincarnation. This became mandatory in order to stop them from haunting the living. Their eyes, were gauged out to render them completely blind while their corpses were buried with their faces to the ground. (Forde,1956). In order to protect members of their families from any harm, native pots made of clay were used in covering their heads. On the alternative, their corpses were burnt. Those who died of contagious diseases like small pox, were thrown into the forest or tied with heavy stones/ iron rods and sank into the river (Akak, 1982). The death of witches and those who died of bad illnesses neither earned the sympathy of the people, nor attracted weeping and wake-keeping. Commoners were thrown into the bush or buried within their compounds, usually in one of the rooms of the house to prevent enemies from cutting off their heads for use in magical portions (Forde, 1956). Mourning of the dead was usually done for about a month and the mourning house known as (*Ufok Ikpo*) consisted of family members and friends who sleep on mats in the deceased house, usually wailing at dawn before dispersing. Within the one month of mourning, cooked food is sent by friends and relatives to feed the guests (Forde, 1956). This event was closely followed by the display of various "plays" or masquerades. The pounding of the grave or *Utim Udi* was next. It was described as follows:

This consisted of excavating the grave to a depth of three to four feet. Friends and relatives assembled about ten o'clock in the morning and danced on the excavated portion of the grave to the accompaniment of songs and the beat of drums. During the day, the earth which had been dug out was put back into the grave a little at a time and trampled by the dancers. The ceremony, which is still observed, usually ends in the late afternoon when the grave is completely refilled (Forde, 1956).

Finally, the king, his family, and other noble men and women of royal birth enjoyed the benefit of being honoured with a befitting burial. At the interment, goods like food, jewelry, utensils, clothing, weapons, and money were buried along with them. In pre-colonial Calabar, as in ancient Egypt their belief in life after death or reincarnation necessitated the noble class, especially kings to be buried along with their goods, luxury items and slaves. Amidst panic, the immolation of several of the deceased wives, slaves and ordinary people was carried out. According to Geoffrey Parrinder, these are meant for the use of the deceased on his journey to the world beyond, and so that he should not appear before the ancestors empty-handed (Parrinder, 1975). Robert Hertz (1907) has in this regard pointed out that social and emotional reactions following death are culturally determined by such variables as the deceased person's gender, age, social status and relation to power.

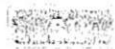
In pre-colonial Calabar, burial was an honour granted only those considered to be of high social standing. In few cases, "head slaves", the king and the nobility or people considered as "gentlemen" were buried but denied this honour if they happened to be accused of witchcraft or killed as criminals (Waddell, 1863). This was the situation missionaries like Hope Waddell and Anderson met when they brought Christianity to Old Calabar in 1846.

Women and slaves bore the brunt of this practice as the king's wives were expected to accompany their husband to the next world. This was simply done by asking them to "chop nut," that is, prove their innocence in his death by swallowing the poisonous Calabar bean, "*esere*", or by calling each of them up and strangling them. The Efik believed that the *esere* bean was a perfect way of exposing guilty persons involved in the death of another. Accordingly, "a suspected person is given eight of the beans ground and added to water as drink. If he is guilty, his mouth shakes and mucus comes from his nose. His innocence is proved if he lifts his right hand and then regurgitates" (Forde, 1956). This method, "chopping nut" always often led to the death of so many innocent victims as very few could survive this ordeal. Generally, it was believed that no one died a natural death, as such, once a king dies, his wives, slaves and close associates must swear an oath in order to declare themselves innocent of the monarch's death. Ironically, women were most hard hit in this practice. For instance, during the death of King Archibong in 1852 (Waddell, 1863), many lives were lost especially women. His mother, Obuma, also called Mrs. Archibong, a very influential woman accused her son's wives of witchcraft and complicity in his death. She subjected them to the *esere* ordeal thereby leading to the death of almost all of Archibong's wives (Marwick, 1897). Obuma also forced his slaves to "chop-nut". This resulted in hundreds of deaths, not because they were guilty but because of the bean's poisonous nature which many could not survive.

The death of a king or noble man in pre-colonial Calabar was kept secret for a time as this often elicited great fear and pandemonium to his wives, slaves and even ordinary people. Hertz rightly noted that, at the death of a chief or a man of high rank, a true panic sweeps over the group while the death of a stranger, slave or child will go almost unnoticed and arouse no emotional display (Hertz, 1907). Accordingly, in 1847 when another King, Eyamba died, his death, which could not be concealed for long diffused terror through the town and many fled to different directions. His brothers and nephew, Egbo Young, Antera and Archibong with some of the Kings palace officials, marched into various houses, closed their gates and strangled its inmates (Waddell, 1863). They also killed whomever they found on the streets and ensured that no one escaped to the farms. Only very few could escape such massacre.

The King (Eyamba) was interred in his house. Here, a deep pit with very wide and deep depth was dug with two sofas placed inside it. His body, dressed in royal apparel was laid on the sofa with a crown on his head. His personal belongings- food, trade goods, copper, weapons, umbrella and sword – were placed inside the pit. Some virgins, his snuff box bearers and personal attendants were killed and buried in the grave too. Rev. Hope Waddell maintains that thirty of Eyamba's numerous wives and concubines were "honoured" to accompany him to the great beyond on the first day in a characteristic ritual where they were each called upon and strangled (Waddell, 1863). Supervised by the king's brother and nephew, each woman, on hearing the message, "the king calls you", adorned herself, drank some rum (this gave her some courage to face the fearful ordeal) and followed the king's messenger (Waddell, 1863). Without regard for life, at the burial site, she was quickly strangled by the executioner with a silk handkerchief.

The death of Eyamba brought pandemonium as the young and old of both sexes were killed on the streets, others were drowned in the river, slaves were slaughtered in farms, people were waylaid on bush paths and corpses littered the town. Schools remained shut for weeks as parents were too scared to send their children paraventure they failed to return home. Missionaries, particularly, Rev Samuel Edgerley and Jameson made several unsuccessful appeals and further rebuked the executioners to end these senseless killings. Some of the initiators only gave weak promises to desist from such acts, while others, bluntly rebuffed them, claiming that the white man had no right to interfere in their customs. In spite of the fact that women suffered these travails, some women encouraged these acts. For instance, Offiong, the daughter of King Eyamba was one of the arrow heads of these murders. She had earlier accused the executioners for not killing enough people in honour of her departed father (Waddell, 1863). Men of high social standing were also "honoured" in death with the execution of women, slaves, and the less privileged as in the case of a Calabar gentleman John Duke who died unexpectedly in 1846 after a large doze of rum. As soon as the event was announced many of his friends (whom he drank with) fled for fear of being accused of witchcraft, and complicity in his death. This happened when Duke Ephraim, another royal died. Fifty persons were accused of witchcraft and made to "chop nut", of which more than forty person died (Waddell,1863). In the case of John Duke, a number of women and girls were killed, and five girls were seen dragged along the road shrieking as they went, to be killed and buried with him. His mother concluded, "he has left no children, kill the half of his slaves." It was a common practice for friends of a deceased person to kill their slaves in honour of their departed friend. Several of John Duke's friends in town murdered their domestic slaves in his honour and even went ahead to haunt for more in their plantation ((Waddell,1863). Similarly when one Antica Cobham lost his eldest



daughter, inspite of pleas from missionaries against this custom, he killed a number of slaves in her honour (Waddell,1863).

These inhumane practices continued unabated as exemplified by the death of Efiang Bassecy and Erem Cuffy (Edem Kofi) both of whom died in 1850 and were buried with their unwilling wives (Marwick 1897). That year, Rev. Hope Waddell and William Anderson, after much persuasion held a meeting with the Calabar gentry on the 12th of February. Both the local representatives and those of the European side attended. After much discussion, an agreement to abolish, by law, the custom of burying slaves /women and other funeral customs was signed with the nobles (Waddell,1863). In spite of this however, there were cases of violation of this law and the continuation of this practice. Total freedom only came for the oppressed in 1878 with the signing of the Hopkins Treaty which imposed a death penalty by hanging on anyone willfully causing the death of another. (Akak ,1982).

The Colonial Era

The Calabar society gradually began to be transformed especially through contact with the European world. Much of what Hope Waddell described as Calabar's "black records of the past" no longer held sway in the society. The efforts of Mary Slessor and David Hopkins in prohibiting strange funeral practices were gaining grounds during the colonial era as Christianity was consolidated in the area. The Church of Scotland Mission arrived Calabar in 1846 and the Roman Catholic Mission came in 1903. More churches, schools and health centres were established and the civilizing mission of the British began to witness success. European diets, customs, dressing and other habits took its toll on the indigenous population, and by extension, the indigenous Efik people of Calabar adopted the Christian way of burying their dead. In some cases, there was an assimilation of both the traditional and the western. It is the fusion of these two cultures that has given rise, today, to an Efik culture that is partly Efik and partly European in outlook. (Akoda, 2003).

During the colonial era, the major causes of death included illnesses and natural causes. The royal family made up of the king (*Obong*) and his family members enjoyed more befitting burial rites than the common people. The *Obong* and heads of royal families (*Etubom*) were buried overnight, yet the public announcement to intimate the town about the death of these royalties was done after one year. This revelation, locally called (*Uyara Ikpo*) was usually characterized by *Eyet Anwa* or public crying whereby professional women mourners were hired to weep for the demise of the *Obong* or King. Ballads were recited in honour of the *Obong* showcasing his ancestral lineage and the great achievements of the departed. The King's first daughter (*Adiaha*), adorned in a royal robe led the procession with a chicken tied around her neck and walked the major streets of Calabar

announcing her father's demise. Although these events started during the pre-colonial era, they dovetailed into the colonial and post-colonial era.

The use of cemeteries for burial in Calabar belonged to the colonial phase. Strangers who had no entitlement to land were buried in cemeteries. In addition, the Europeans, attempted to stop individuals from burying their dead indiscriminately, especially at the back of their houses, and in bushes. This necessitated the establishment of the Hawkins road cemetery. Archival sources reveal that although this cemetery was not yet declared a public burial ground, yet fees for grave spaces had been collected since 1926 (C. 8/27: Cadist 3/1/71 (1927), NA/C). An Order in Council was passed by the colonial government declaring it as such from September of that same year (C. 8/27: Cadist 3/1/71 (1927), NA/C). It was after the development of the Hawkins cemetery that other cemeteries like Goldie and Big Qua cemeteries emerged. Again records from the Calabar Archives confirm that other cemeteries, particularly that of Goldie emerged because of the deplorable state of the Hawkins road cemetery which made a Senior Health Superintendent of the Ministry of Health to suggest the opening up of another cemetery at Goldie Street. In a letter dated 5th July, 1966, the official wrote to the Senior Specialist in charge of hospitals, stating that the Hawkins road cemetery "is quite inserviceable for its purpose. It lacks water supply, its door is off its hinges... I therefore recommend that a public cemetery be built in the Goldie street, made of fly proof, provided with water and a door securely fixed (with lock) Cadist 1206, 3/3/997 NA/C)". At the time of writing this letter, the cemetery at Hawkins road had been partially closed down and only broad pathways were permitted to be used for grave spaces at the cost of ten pounds (£10) each. Permitting its use would only amount to burying corpses in old graves which could amount to incessant exhumation of corpses.

Although the opening up of cemeteries was meant to discourage people from burying the dead in bushes and within housing premises, some prominent people were still buried within their premises. Upon application to the Senior District Officer, who in turn sought advice of the Ministry of Health, permission was granted relations of the deceased only if they adhered strictly to the Births, Deaths, and Burial Ordinances (Section 4) part of which stated that "the body should be buried at a depth of not less than four feet from the surface" (Cadist 1326, 3/3/1001, 1952, NA/C).

Between 1950 and 1967, there were several letters of request made by individuals who lost their relatives and these relatives had, before death, expressed their wish to be buried in their premises. On the other hand, family members usually decided where to bury their dead as in the case of one Princess Awatt Archibong, the daughter of a King, whose family requested that she be buried beside her father within their household. (Cadist 1326, NA/C). In most cases, those usually buried within their family premises were usually very advanced in age and this kind of burial was carried out as a



way of doing honour to the deceased. Expatriates working in Calabar had their own cemetery known as the European Cemetery although some of them were buried outside it. Some were buried in the premises where they worked, for instance James Macgregor a former principal of the famous Hope Waddell Training Institution was interred within the school premises as well as some teachers of European origin who worked and died in the school. Ida Timmons, an Irish graduate who worked for six years in the Holy Child Secondary School, a Catholic Institution, was buried in the premises in 1964 (Cadist 3/3/1001). It was customary also for traditional rulers to be interred within their domain. However, before people were buried within their homes, an inspection of the location by the Ministry of Health was carried out after permission was sought by relatives of the deceased. Permission was only denied if the burial site was located near water supply or next to other people property.

Embalment (with the use of injectable needles) was also introduced by Europeans in order to preserve the dead for few hours/ days to prepare the family of the deceased for burial. Perfumes were sprayed in the room where corpses were kept to reduce the foul smell produced from them. The preservation of dead bodies for longer periods in order to source for funds for more flamboyant burial rites gradually crept into the Calabar society when it was discovered that with modern medicine, bodies could be maintained for longer periods and would still remain intact. During colonial times, elaborate burial rites were limited and money was only spent on hiring grave diggers and procuring caskets, usually local caskets made from plywood. Corpses were washed, dressed simply and conveyed by means of carts to cemeteries amidst singing by the church choir with a procession of family members and well wishers in tow. Black clothes (*akwa*) were adorned by family members and friends of the deceased during the obsequies which usually commenced with the opening of the mourning house on a Monday. The opening of the mourning house was characterized by the loud wailings of sympathizers especially early in the mornings and late in the evenings. Both funeral and memorial services were held simultaneously in honour of the departed. During such occasions, there was usually no large entertainment of guests although drinks and rice was the main items of entertainment. No souvenirs were distributed. The program of events for the obsequies was usually made simple with the indication of hymns to be sung, and Bible verses to be read. This simple form of obsequies gradually assumed a much more sophisticated one in the post-colonial era as demonstrated in the next section.

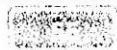
The Post Colonial Era

From the 1970's when Nigeria became more economically relevant as a result of the oil boom and its attendant consequences, much prosperity and advancement began to be displayed and funeral patterns assumed much more flamboyance. This is the situation in Calabar where the death of an individual, especially one that died of natural causes, meant the celebration of life. Aside death by natural causes, illnesses like AIDS, cancer, kidney failure, typhoid amongst others are responsible for many deaths. In addition, death by road accidents, sea and air disasters as well as political violence have reared their heads during the post colonial era. In spite of the above, Calabar has witnessed several modifications in the funeral patterns of its indigenes, both royalty and commoner. These changes according to informants are in order to give a befitting burial to the departed.

The funeral obsequies of a royalty usually attract the adorning of the family members in royal apparel and the erection of a traditional hut (*mkpoto*) in honour of the deceased. *Mkpoto* is usually erected for title holders like the (*Etubom*) or heads of houses or the *Obonganwan* (a titled woman). *Mkpoto* is erected with materials like wooden sticks and finished with wooly cloth, usually purple in nature.

Paraphernalia of royalty, brass basins, cups, plates, precious ornaments, a bible, a staff (*esang*), miniature masquerade (*ekpe*) statue, wrappers, coloured head ties, (in the case of a titled woman), two swords (in the case of a male titled holder), and the deceased picture among other items are displayed in front of the very colourful but empty royal seat in the traditional hut. These are usually displayed during the seven- day duration of the mourning. On the seventh day of mourning, a native cow is usually slaughtered and shared among the major Efik royal houses. A royalty is usually buried within the premises of his/her home except in few cases where the corpse is buried in the cemetery.

In most burials, the wealth of the offspring's of the deceased person usually determines the kind of burial he/she would get. As the tastes of the indigenes have assumed an air of sophistication, casket makers have also improved on their skills and are producing caskets of greater quality and much more beautiful designs. In the 1970's and 80's a casket of \$407 (₦80,000) was meant for the affluent but today an average casket is sold between \$1,273 (₦250,000) and \$2,547 (₦500,000) while the much more expensive ones reserved for the wealthy are from \$3566 (₦700,000) and above (prices are based on the current exchange rate of February 2015: \$1 = ₦196). Yet there are people who choose to import their caskets from overseas to mark the difference. These imported ones are combined with synthetic materials and their ornamented handles made of either gold or silver adds more beauty and flamboyance which increases their value. Some are made with a combination of



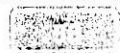
glass and wood. Those who cannot afford to import these caskets have a choice of quality but locally made caskets from cedar woods or maxonia while lesser quality caskets are made from plywood or mahogany.

Other areas that have witnessed changes include the preservation of corpses for months before interment because of the need to prepare for very elaborate funeral ceremonies. Corpses which were usually preserved for a week or two are now being kept for months before burial to enable family members source for funds and to await the arrival of relatives from within Nigeria and beyond. Members are fined various sums of money to meet up the rites which usually takes place on weekends especially Fridays and Saturdays.

In a bid to discourage elaborate spending spree, some churches like the Catholic and the Presbyterian Churches have prohibited their members from keeping their corpses beyond two weeks. However, this is usually not adhered to. The draping/decoration of mourning houses and adorning the dead with beautiful laces, silk or linen materials of various colours have also been incorporated into funeral practices. These days, the dead are dressed flamboyantly complete with make-up (for women) so that corpses look appealing to the eye and very beautiful. It is as if the dead person is sleeping. Painting of mourning houses in order to receive guests into a cleaner and more attractive environment is also part of the preparations made for the obsequies of a deceased person although incessant crying during the opening of mourning houses has ceased because of the influence of Christianity.

One of the major changes witnessed in the burial obsequies of a departed one is in the dress code. The black cloth (*akwa*) has given way to the use of white materials especially lace by the family members. This is significant because of the belief that the departed one has ended all sufferings in this "wicked world" and is on his/her way to a place where no suffering or sorrow exists. Hence the wearing of white colour implies the joyous mood instead of a mourning one which black had represented. The introduction of uniform attires, usually African prints, for those who cannot afford the white lace is also an added development. The 1990's witnessed a lot of these changes especially with regard to the dress code.

Unlike during the colonial era where carts were used in transporting the dead from the church to their final resting place, this era continues to witness the use of ambulances to convey the dead with sophisticated pall bearers in tow. Wide media publicity on radios, televisions, newspapers and posters also intimate the public about the death and burial rites of the deceased, opening of mourning house, church service and date of burial. In addition, more colorful funeral programs cataloging the



biography and pictures (in chronological order) of the deceased person from birth to adulthood along with his family is printed.

In post-colonial Calabar, as in many other Nigerians towns, the burial of any citizen is usually marked with the entertainment of guests and sometimes the distribution of souvenirs. Affluent families usually come up with more elaborate entertainment ceremonies complete with live band shows and assorted delicacies like fried rice, pounded yam, salad, and plantain porridge (*ukang*). Canned drinks are a common sight at these occasions and the slaughtering of live cows further adds grandeur to the celebration. At the end souvenirs like food flasks, handkerchiefs, trays, bags, umbrellas, plates and towels are usually distributed among guests as a sign of appreciation for attending the event.

The city of Calabar houses several cemeteries, the most important and popular being the Hawkins road cemetery. Others include Goldie, Big Qua and Ikot Ansa cemeteries among others. The Hawkins cemetery consists of two sections – the Old Hawkins and the new Hawkins (Eyo Ita Axis). When the former (old Hawkins) was filled up, the new Eyo Ita axis adjoining it was opened up for use in the 90's. Within the Eyo Ita axis exists three sections for the upper class, middle class and the lower classes. In the upper class section, a portion of land is sold for \$2,038 (₦400,000) and above and is usually patronized by affluent families. The middle class section is sold for between \$760 (₦150,000) and \$1019 (₦200,000) while the lower class section goes for less than ₦150,000. Indeed, choice places for burying the dead has become fashionable in Calabar as families try to distinguish themselves by burying their loved ones in prestigious burial sites along with the erection of outstanding tombstones built with marbles.

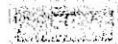
In all these, it is important to note that one of the striking effects created by the very elaborate funeral practices in Calabar has been the rise in small scale businesses. Accordingly, from the ordinary casket makers whose businesses never run dry through the printers of programs, the grave diggers, enthusiastic photographers, pall bearers, cooks, designers of funeral parlours, souvenirs suppliers, ambulance providers, canopies/generators/chair rentals and other events managers, thousands of naira is spent on these individuals who rake in so much in this lucrative venture. This is an affirmation of the fact that material and economic concerns play greater roles in funeral practices than emotion. This spending spree by families of the deceased during funeral rites is a custom that has become part of the Calabar lifestyle, and has also caught up with other Nigerian ethnic groups particularly the Yoruba and Igbo of Southern Nigeria. It is not out of place to maintain that, the loss of an individual is the profit of many others.



In spite of the harsh economic conditions, a situation Nigerians often complain about, families indulge in this practice to give their departed members, what is termed a “befitting” burial. Many families, in spite of their financial situation, attempt to go on with very elaborate obsequies in order to appear better off than they really are. The effect of this is usually catastrophic and better witnessed than imagined.

CONCLUSION

Calabar society has evolved over the years from a simple to a complex one which has also affected its funeral practices over time. This research agrees with Kroeber’s conclusion (1927) that material and economic consideration has a greater effect on funeral practices than emotions. One fact remains, however, and that is, after an ostentatious outward display of wealth, many families become chronic debtors thereafter. It is the opinion of this writer that, although, departed relatives should be given befitting burial rites, yet the excessive flamboyance and wasteful spending that is associated with these lavish funeral practices leaves much to be desired and should be discouraged.



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