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African Existentialism: An Examination of the Role of Women in Burial Rites in Ngbojeogu

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Abstract

The birth of human life breeds death because there would have been nothing like death without life. The death of a human being necessitates burial. This demands the question, "How would a person be buried?" It is this "how" that necessitates burial rites which are common in Africa at large and Igbo land in particular. However, the concern of this study is on burial in Ngbojeogu, which is part of the Igbo race. There are some burial rites in Ngbojeogu that are unique and different from the ones observed in other Igbo cultures. It is for this purpose that this research examines the burial rites and the role of women in Ngbojeogu. It exposes the rich cultural values embedded in Ngbo way of living. . The researchers had to attend burials in Ngbo to take note of the burial rites. Findings

reveal that in Ngbojeogu women play some roles in the burial of their relatives such as shaving of their hairs as a sign of respect to the deceased. Women are not allowed to stay outside and watch their husbands lowered to the grave not because of inferiority or gender discrimination but because they are adjudged weaker in absorbing shock. Some rites are meant to save them from psychological trauma and social vices. This study, therefore, argues and recommends that cultural values or burial rites that do not cause harm to human existence should be maintained, preserved, and respected. A human being is the product of his culture, environment. Thus, the need to appreciate one's positive values embedded in his/her culture.

Keywords: *Burial rites, Ngbojeogu, Women, Deceased, Death, Ancestors.*

Introduction

A human being is brought into existence by birth. A person grows to play their part in the world, and along the line death takes them away from this physical world. Life entails either enjoyment or suffering but most often a combination of both. Most times a person lives in the world struggling to choose the better option of life – enjoyment. However, it has not been established that one can ever live the better option of life without experiencing its bitter side – suffering.. This is because of the existence of death which often is the end point of one's suffering. At times one suffers to the extent of praying for the termination of his/her life. In such a case, he/she sees death as the only consolation, that is to say, death becomes a hope that would redeem him/her from existential agony. Meanwhile, life is so much valued in Africa, especially in Igbo land such that its disappearance is seen as disaster. Life is therefore considered sacred by the Igbo, especially the Ngbojeogu.

Ngbojeogu (also shortened as Ngbo) is a town in Igbo land located in Ebonyi State, South-Eastern Nigeria. In Ngbojeogu, as in other Igbo areas, life is so much valued such that if one commits suicide, it is seen as an abomination and such a person will not receive proper burial rites. Before the burial of such a person, the gods must be appeased; otherwise, calamity will befall the entire community and not just the family of the person. In the olden days such a person would be thrown into the evil forest. Thus, the value attached to life in Ngbojeogu compels respect for one another even at death. This is why they revere the dead especially if the person had lived a good life before his/her death. The Igbo people are

always seen treating the dead with unreserved respect and an uncommon type of complex rituals (Ndukwe et al, 2021).

In the light of African existentialism, this paper not only examines the role of women in burial rites in Ngboejeog but it also to expose the rich cultural values embedded in Ngbo way of life. Generally, in Igbo land, burial rites have common features with few variations. It is these variations observed in Ngbo that necessitate this research work. What the living owe the dead is burial. Burial requires certain procedure(s) as a result of the value attached to human life. This is why funerals are great social occasions in Africa as a whole and Igbo land in particular. This is also because the Igbo people believe that a well-performed funeral guarantees the well-being of the deceased in the spiritual world. The aim of time and financial preparation is to ensure a proper funeral for the departed, so that his or her spirit may be contented in the world beyond, and will not return as a dissatisfied ghost to plague his or her family or society. Funerals are the last transitional rites, introducing a man into the world of spirits (Parrinder, 1976, p. 95).

Funeral is an event that involves the whole community and spirit of dead ancestors; who gather to perform appropriate rites which help in strengthening the bond between the living and the dead. The gathering of people to perform burial rites does not exclude women and that is the essence of this research. The issue of who introduces the dead to the world of the spirits whether the living or the dead themselves remains a puzzle. However, Africans believe that the funeral and its rites do so.

The Existentialist Conception of “Death”

Existentialist philosophers of the West have divergent opinions on the concept of death. Death is the inevitable end of every human being on earth. But the attitude towards death is everywhere ambivalent. The two greatest existentialists in the contemporary era were Heidegger and Sartre. For Heidegger, death is a phenomenon of life and is defined only in reference to life. Death is a way of life for every human, for a person is a being-towards-death, a being who lives every moment of his life towards his/her death. Death is a way to be which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. As soon as a person is born, he/she is old enough to die (Heidegger, 1973, p. 289). Heidegger used Dasein to refer to the fundamental way in which human beings exist in the world. It is used to describe the unique kind of being in which humans manifest. It is, characterized by its existence in a world and its ability to question its own being and meaning

of being in general. Dasein is conscious of his own existence. This consciousness of his existence leads to the awareness of death which is the final fulfillment of Dasein's existence. The most obvious mark of human finitude is death. Death is one's own most possible.

Death is Dasein's own most possibility. Being towards this possibility discloses to Dasein its own most potentiality-for-being in which its very being is the issue. Not only does the reality of death reveal to man his uniqueness, his singularity and his individuality (Heidegger, 1973, p.289).

Existence that is authentic is the existence that has been one's very own (mineness). Death, as the ownmost possibility, isolates Dasein and permits him to be confronted with his true self. Thus, for Heidegger death is not something negative. It is at death that man is defined. It is also at death that man actualizes his wholeness. Therefore, to allow oneself to be overwhelmed by the fear of death is to live an inauthentic existence.

Sartre saw Heidegger's view of death as an idealist theory of death. He contends that death is not part of man's life, and it has no place in man's life. For him, Heidegger is guilty of circular reasoning when he says that death has an individualizing effect on man. Sartre asks, is it death that confers individuality on man or on the contrary, is it man that confers it on death? For him, Heidegger's affirmation that 'to die is the only thing which nobody can do for me' is a gratuitous affirmation. Death is by no means the only thing which nobody can do for me. He also criticizes Heidegger's teaching that death reveals to us our finitude. But finitude does not derive from death nor is it death that constitutes our finitude.

Thus, we shall conclude in opposition to Heidegger that death, far from being my peculiar possibility, is a contingent fact which, as such, on principle escapes me and originally belongs to my facticity. Death is never that which gives life its meaning. It is, on the contrary that which on principle removes all meaning from life. If we must die then our life has no meaning because its problems receive no solution. It is absurd that we are born, it is absurd that we die (Sartre, 1956, p.545).

Sartre's view is far from African concept of death but Heidegger has a related opinion. For Africans, death is not the end of life but a transition from this present earthly life to another life in the land of the spirits. It is a necessary journey which one must make in order to reach the life beyond and continue to live as an ancestor. Opoku summarizes this when he maintains that West African people regards death not as the end of life, but as a transition from the present earthly life to another life in the land

of the spirits (Opoku, 1978, p. 133). Mbiti in his view supported the above when he submits that in Africa, death is seen as separation and not a total annihilation. At death, man is abruptly separated from the physical world and still, the corporate group clings to him (Mbiti, 1969, p. 46). Death does not break the relationship between one and his family but extends it to infinity.

For the Igbo people, death is the passing out of man from this earthly life to another existence. It is the physical separation of the living from the dead. This is why they believe that after the physical departure, man continues to exist in the spiritual world. At death, man moves to join his ancestors and the only major change is the physical decay of the body. The spirit moves to dwell in another state of existence (Ndukwue, et al, 2021). This is why in Ngboejeogu, during the burial of a man or woman, the relatives will always chant “Nnam/ Nnemalagudeoo” (my father/ mother is going/ is going home). This points to the symbiotic relationship that exists between the living and the death as well as the believe that there is another abode for dead relatives.

The ceremonies and rituals are performed by the living for the dead. Both the living and the dead have their part to play in fulfilling family obligations. However, it is the onus of the living to perform the funeral rites for the dead properly and to give them befitting burial. The dead on their part begin to play a larger and more important role in human society in general and in the life of the families in particular because of their infinite powers. This notwithstanding, death is also regarded as a wicked destroyer, a killer and a curse which frustrates human efforts.

Death launches a deadly attack on the society of living men and it not only wrenches but also at the same time dislocates their relationship with one another within the society. Death can therefore be said to be a heartbreaker; those who love the deceased cry, wail, and even beat themselves but none of these actions can bring back the dead. The dead are therefore said to have gone to rest in hereafter (Ugwu and Ugwueye, 2004, p. 57).

Some people throw themselves on the ground rolling and at times attempt killing themselves as a result of the terrible blow caused by death. This is usually the case when the dead is considered the breadwinner and the mourner concludes that all hope has been lost. Thus, he/she sees no need for existing again. Death drives people to sorrow, despair and has no respect for beauty and intelligence.

There are categories of death such as bad death, good death, death of the young and death of the old. Bad death and death of the young are

considered as bad omen and do not receive full funeral rites. They are quickly deposited as soon as possible since they are regarded as bad. Good death such as one who died at his/her old age and those who lived good life before their departure are given full funeral rites. It is this later aspect of burial rites that is the concern of this paper.

Burial Rites and the Role of Women in Ngbojeogu

Burial in Ngbo entails rites/rituals and ceremonies. Ngbo people, like every other Igbo society, have a wide spread belief that unless the proper rites/rituals and ceremonies are performed, the spirit of the dead person may not join the ancestral spirits. Thus, great satisfaction is derived from the performance of the burial rituals/rites. Burial rites are performed in stages. The first stage is announcement. The relatives of the deceased are secretly informed of the departure of their loved one because it has not been made public. The public announcement of the deceased in Ngbo is done through shooting of the cannon (okpol'ali) guns, usually two gun boom. The sound of the gun boom indicates an official proclamation of the person's death which is followed by cries from the relatives. By so doing, those who had no hint of the death will begin to inquire as to know who died in such a village or community. In the olden days when mortuary services were not available, if one die early in the morning, one would possibly be buried the same day or, at the latest, the next day. The announcement entails or signals to the people not to go to farm or market instead they should stay back to mourn the dead. This is because they believe that the spirit of the deceased is still hovering around and may hurt one out there. The announcement is not only meant for the living but also for those in the spirit world. It is a signal to the spirit world alerting them of the coming of a new member.

The second stage of the burial rites in Ngbo is the physical burial of the body (interment). The preparation for this depends on the social and religious status of the deceased and financial strength of his and that of his relatives. The burial usually attracts sympathizers who troop in to console the mourners. This involves the villagers, the entire community and well-wisher from beyond. The relatives, friends and well-wishers of the deceased bring cloths (fathoms of wrapper), money, food, and drinks to express sympathy. Different kinds of music may be displayed including cultural dances while preparatory ceremony for the interment goes on. The guns are intermittently boomed intensively. Digging of the grave may begin early enough depending on the topography of the area. The grave is

usually six by six feet size. It is a house built for the dead, that is, where his/her physical body is usually laid to rest. It is carefully and beautifully made before interment.

In the burial of an Ngbo traditionalist, the last ritual performed before interment is known as “igbaekamme”- loosely translate to mean the “blood ritual” It is performed for both men and women especially those who died in their old age. This ritual is performed with a live chicken, fowl, goat, and cow depending on the financial status of the deceased or that of the children. The ritual is performed by the first son of the deceased under the guidance of the elders. Of all the animals needed for the ritual, it is exclusively the chicken provided by the first daughter of the deceased that is used. The chicken’s head is forcefully pulled off and its blood poured on the body of the deceased in form of libation with the prayers that accompany it. At the end of this, it is dropped inside the casket. Part of the goat’s skin (from its neck) is chopped off alive likewise the tail of the cow is also cut and put into the casket. It also goes with libation and prayers. This ritual is to let the deceased know that all that are required for his/her befitting burial are available. Thus, he/she should happily go home to take his/her proper place in the ancestral world. The blood of the animals used here are symbolic. This is because, at birth there must be a drop of blood and at death a waste of it. Thus, it indicates the blood that connects human existence as it marks the beginning and the end man.

There is a cosmological view which formed the belief of the people that the dead parent(s) whose children have not performed the funeral rites have no place in the ancestral spirit world and out of anger can easily strike the children especially the eldest ones (Ossai, 2016) . Meanwhile, as the deceased is lowered to the grave, the fowl is taken to the entrance of the compound and roasted for consumption by those (only men) who are interested. It must be noted that if the ritual is performed for a man and the man’s wife is still young, all the men who ate the fowl will never have a romantic affair with the woman; otherwise, the person will die. The ritual of “igbaekamme” is meant for both genders. The goat and cow used are kept alive till the next morning for the goat and cow ritual.

In Ngbo, a woman does not sit outside and watch her husband being taken to the grave. Before the casket is lifted up for interment, the deceased’s wife will be taken inside by her close allies. What is the essence of this practice? Is this not one of the subjugations of women in the society? But before we condemn the rite/such practice there is need to examine or probe into the essence of the practice. These thoughts can cause one a psychological trauma. The thoughts of the above usually lead

to shock, pain and horror so crippling and indescribable more especially in the hearts of women who are adjudged weaker in terms of absorbing shock. Thus, one of the reasons for this practice is to reduce the psychological trauma of watching her heartthrob being lowered to the grave. At times, it seems like lowering our loved ones into the grave is same as sacrificing him/her for the termites to feed on. This creates an indelible trauma. A person as an emotional being is always conscious of what it means to lose what he/she cherishes especially human being. It is against this background that Ngbo culture considers it better for women not to stay outside and watch their husband go down the earth.

But one may ask, what of those women who pass through the experience of watching their husbands being laid to rest? Have they all died of psychological trauma or suffered more? To an extent, emotions are environmentally chained. What might cause one great pain or emotional trauma in Africa may not be the same in Europe. Many Ngboejeogu men value their wives so much and as such shower them with much love and care than other men from many other areas. And what women cherish most from men is love and care especially in this part of the world. Thus, any woman that constantly receives her desire from a man hardly lets him go. It is the above experience that must have led to this practice of not allowing the wife of the deceased watch the husband being lowered to the grave. This is because it cushions her against psychological trauma.

The second reason for the practice emanates from the concept of man as the head of the family. While alive, he is in charge of the family and saddled with the responsibility of providing, caring for and protecting the family as a sign of his love. In reciprocation of this, the man expects respect from the wife and his household. At death (of the man) she renders this same respect to him (the husband) by walking inside leaving every other sympathizers outside. It is the last homage she pays to her life partner. This practice has remained till date for both Christians and non-Christians. There are other acts of respect shown by the wife and the immediate family members of the deceased some of which are gradually fading away such as barbing of hair and staying indoors for seven (7) or more days of mourning after the burial day. The barbing of hair in Ngbo is meant for both the males and females of the deceased's immediate family. Currently, it is no longer generally tenable for the greater population of the people. When it was in vogue, it was usually done a day after the burial and in the morning hours. This aspect of respect is rendered for both a deceased man and woman without any form of gender discrimination.

However, the practice of seven (7) or more days of mourning remains sacrosanct till date. This is because of what it stands for. Despite the fact that it signifies respect for the deceased, it is also a period of reconciliation where necessary and time for family meetings. The period of mourning is meant for both men and women. It is also meant for every death. This is why the number of days is dependent on the age of the deceased. If it is a young person it is usually five (5) days while elders are seven (7) to eight (8) days. The last day of mourning is known as “igbakal’uloekwa” (concluding the rites of mourning). The day for this final rite is usually announced on the day of the burial after proper calculation by the elders to ensure the proposed day does not fall on the weekdays that forbid certain actions or ritual activities in Ngbo. There are some expectations required during this period of mourning which are as follows: (i) If the deceased owes anyone, the creditor is meant to go to the family and report it during this period or forget about it. (ii) If one owes the deceased, the debtor is also expected to go to the family and report same or else the person will face the wrath of the deceased as his/her spirit will haunt the debtor. Three (3) days to end the mourning period “igbakal’uloekwa”, all the female children of the deceased and other close female relatives who are married out of the family are expected to return home (to their father’s compound) and stay till the last day. In the olden days, they are meant to return earlier than three (3) days. During this period, there will be family meetings where the following will form the agenda: (1) Reconciliation where there was problem(s)/issue(s). (2) Inquiring on the welfare of each of the family members. (3) Discussion on pertinent issues that have to do with the family progress and how to maintain or take care of the family in the absence of the deceased. The meeting(s) may last for a day or two depending on the issues on ground. All through the period of mourning, sympathizers will continue to visit the mourners.

The day of “igbakal’uloekwa” goes with its own rituals and ceremonies. People also come to pay the last respect to the dead on that day. The number of sympathizers are usually less than the one seen on the burial day. The in-laws to the deceased family are expected to come with their relatives and friends to take their wives home on this concluding day. They will come with drinks especially palm wine. This will also be given back to them for their entertainment. The family in addition will also entertain them with food and drinks.

The ritual of “igbakal’uloekwa” is performed early in the morning before the arrival of sympathizers. If the deceased is a man or unmarried woman, the ritual is performed by the eldest man of the extended family

(umunna) but if the deceased is a married woman, the eldest man from her paternal kindred comes to perform the ritual. The person can also delegate one of his relatives to play the role for him if need be. Whosoever that is saddled with this responsibility is expected to come early to the deceased family. On his arrival, after pleasantries, some of the deceased articles of clothing will be presented to him. He will collect one or two of them for his use (if the deceased is man) and then goes to the entrance of the compound and burns the rest. In the olden days when there was no clothing, the deceased property was used. This act brings the physical burial of the deceased to an end.

After this, he (the old man) would be offered kola nut, wine and food. He takes these things and thereafter goes home for the day without coming back to the venue on that same day. In other words, he does not stay to witness other activities of the day in the compound. This ritual signifies the physical separation of the dead from the living that ushers in the spiritual relationship.

More so, in some kindred, if a man dies and the wife is suspected of having a hand in his death, she will be subjected to face all sorts of ridiculous and dehumanizing treatments. There are certain offences that are considered as taboos in Igbo land. Generally, it is believed that when a woman commits such without appeasing the gods, if she cooks for her husband, the man will die. In traditional Igbo culture, taboos are basically rules that help keep moral values, religious respect, social unity, and cosmic balance in check. According to Nwobodo (2021), taboos are like a set of forbidden actions that bind a community together with morals, and if you break them, you will face serious punishment. The whole point of taboos in Igbo land is to keep life and all its activities in order. Okeke (2017) opines that the Igbo see taboos as norms – if you break them, whether on purpose or by accident, it unleashes mystical punishments not just on you, but on everyone. For instance, it is taboo for women to have sex outside marriage. If a married woman engages in extra marital sex and she fails to confess it for her to be cleansed it will affect the husband. The relatives of the man in this situation, will force the woman to take an oath using water that had been used to wash the dead man's body (by drinking it), swearing that she did never had any extra marital affairs. Thereafter, she will be sent back to her parents' house. Before the oath period will be over, her husband's family may have grabbed all the property her late husband had left behind. Often the wife is intentionally accused by the relatives of the dead to enable them seize the man's properties. In the olden days, men would use the ritual period to lay hands on their brother's properties.

According to (Nwokike, 2017), widows were forced to go through tough rituals, like being isolated, deprived, ignored, and not even getting proper clothes or affection. This practice of subjecting a woman to drinking water used in washing a dead body is inhuman and unhealthy and should be abolished entirely.

African existentialism reflect in the emphasis on proper burial rituals in Ngbo to ensure the deceased person's transition to the after-life and maintain cohesion. This also reflects the existential importance of lived experience and the interconnectedness of individuals within the community. In Igbo culture, burial rites are a crucial aspects of acknowledging a person's existence and affirming his or her place within the community, both in life and death. This recognition of the individual's existence and the community's role in shaping Ngbojeogu identity aligns with lived experience and communal interconnectedness.

Findings on Goat and Cow Ritual in Ngbojeogu

As stated above, this ritual is performed for both the males and females in Ngbo. The killing of goat and cow is usually done a day after the burial. However, if the deceased or the children happen not to be financially buoyant to provide all the items during the burial, it can be done any time the finances of the children improve. Goat and cow in funeral rites are bound up with the belief of the people which point to their conception of the world that encompasses the spiritual and physical world. The cycle of human life becomes complete with the people's belief that the funeral goat and cow facilitate the dead into the spirit world. The cow ritual like any other ritual in Igbo traditional religion unveils the innate meaning of the people's world view and their religious belief (Ossai, 2016). In Ngbo, the goat and cow rites are performed at the ancestral ground of the deceased. If the deceased is a woman, the first son and few of his relatives will go to his maternal home to perform the rite but if the deceased is a man, it takes place in his ancestral compound.

The goat and cow ritual are performed separately. After the goat rite comes that of the cow. The following items are required for the goat ritual: ten (10) litres of palm wine, two (2) kola nuts, a head of tobacco, a reasonable quantity of potash, grounded tobacco, a carton of beer, two (2) bottles of small stout, and small quantity of palm oil. The items required for the cow ritual are double of that of the goat except red oil which is provided in small quantity. The ritual begins as soon as these items are verified and confirmed to be complete. The first son of the deceased is

properly guided by the eldest man from the kindred of the deceased to perform the rites starting with the killing of the goat to that of the cow. This is because it is well known that it is the children of the deceased who are killing the animals for their dead father or mother. The first son of the deceased initiates the killing of each of the animals with prayers/requests that are addressed to the deceased. As soon as the goat is killed, the heart will be cooked for the ritual proper which is known as “ido-ukpara” and as the cooking goes on the cow can then be killed following the same ritual.

The heart of the goat will be divided into two after cooking, half will be used for the ritual (“ido-ukpara”) at the venue whereas the other one will be used for “ido-ukpara” the next morning in the deceased’s compound. The son is given some pieces of kola nut (enyaoji) to pray with by invoking the spirits of the deceased to come eat and also makes request from them. Thereafter, he drops the pieces of the kola nut on the ground (and not before any shrine or oracle). He will be given grounded tobacco to drop a little quantity of it three (3) times on the same spot for the ancestors. The same thing goes with the little pieces of the meat (goat) gotten from the half that will be used at the venue and then he sprinkles palm oil on the same spot three times. Lastly, he will be given a glass of palm wine which he will pour completely on the same spot. He will receive three or four glasses of palm wine to drink as one who has settled his ancestors. The same procedure followed in the goat ritual is repeated in that of the cow without any change. The ancestors are expected to accept the sacrifices at the end of the rituals. The use of palm oil is very significant because it is believed that it softens the sacrifice and makes it acceptable to the ancestors. Moreover, the remaining part of the meat (half meant for the venue) is shared amongst the people present to eat not minding how tiny it might be. But those whose parent(s) have died and have not performed the ritual(s) are advised not to take a share from the meat to avoid their parent(s) striking them to death.

The remaining half of the meat (the heart) both goat and cow are carefully preserved till the next morning for the final ritual of “ido-ukpara”. To perform this rite requires five (5) litres of palm wine, kola nut, small quantity of grounded tobacco, and little quantity of palm oil. The ritual performed at the ancestral ground is repeated in the same manner at the deceased compound.

The sharing of the goat and cow meat (apart from the hearts) depends whether the deceased is a man or a woman. In the case of a man, the meat is shared into two equal parts, the first son of the man and the family will take one part with the heads while the remaining is taken by the entire

kindred and shared among themselves using their existing sharing formula. But if the deceased is a woman, the first son and his family will have no share in the meat. It is rather shared between the deceased parents (in the absence of the father, the son takes charge) with her kindred. It is also shared into two for them and the parents of the deceased taking the heads in addition. But what share of the meat belongs to women? If the deceased is a man, his first daughter has a statutory share of the meat but in the case of a woman, the share goes to the deceased elder sister (first daughter of her parents). In whichever case, their share is the jaw of the animals. However, to collect this requires the presentation of the following: five (5) litres of palm wine, kola nut, and a leave of tobacco to the kindred. In the absence of the person, any of the relatives can use money to settle for those items and collect the share for her. The grand children of the deceased from same kindred also have a statutory share which is meant to be shared among those who are present. The presence of children (grand children) and their statutory share indicates a complete family cycle. It is also good to note that the sharing formula in all ramification ranges from kindred to the immediate family and is dependent on age (from the elders to the younger ones).

The goat ritual is performed first because the people believe that it is the goat that first admits the dead into the ancestral world where the spirit of the deceased joins the spirit of other dead family members in the spirit world. It is believed that the dead whom the goat ritual has not been performed cannot be admitted into the ancestral spirit world. It is the people's belief that the goat ritual is more important than the cow rites notwithstanding the expensive nature of cow. It is the people's strong belief in the spirit world that sustains this practice. The belief in the spirit world is buttressed by Agbegbedia when he states:

The belief that what we referred to as extended family in the mundane community of the people has been pre-existent in the spiritual world. For them therefore, beings are released from there to populate this earth and at death, one returns to it ... we both have one ancestral spiritual world (Agbegbedia, 2015).

It is believed that the dead whom goat ritual has not been performed are kept waiting in the spirit world. When this is performed, the dead parents can stay for a very long time without the cow ritual and yet they don't strike the children unless they contravene the forbidden law of those who have not performed the cow ritual for their parents. The ritual of goat and cow is performed by both non-Christians (traditionalists) and

Christians alike in Ngboejeogu but “igbaekamme” is only performed by traditionalists.

In Ngbo, there is first and second burial as it exists in every other part of Igbo land. The aspect we have discussed above is termed first (physical) burial. The second is what Ngbo people call “ikwaodju” (second burial). The name “second burial” is adopted by European and consequently, to all intents and purposes, there are two burials – the first real, the second by proxy (Basden, 1982, p. 120). Burial by proxy refers to funeral. It must be noted that the children of the dead in performing the funeral rites of their parents clear any impediments that may prevent their own befitting burial. It also brings honour and respect to the children who have performed the ritual. “Ikwaodju” is capital intensive in Ngbo and it is no longer common as it uses to be.

Women are isolated to a great extent in the ritual of goat and cow killing for the dead in Igbo land. It is a taboo for women to bless or pray over, kola nut neither are they allowed to pick kola nut; however, when it is broken and shared in Ngboejeogu. They are also not allowed to kill the cow and the goat. In a situation where the dead man has no male children, the female children will not perform the ritual, rather, any of the man’s relatives will perform it on their behalf. And it is believed that if they fail to perform the ritual it will affect their children. Thus, there is a need for it to be performed on their behalf. This act can be considered discriminatory. Why should women be excluded from these rituals? Men have no tangible or convincing reasons in defence of it if not to show their superiority over women. This calls for re-examination to balance the inequality in the rituals. This notwithstanding, the concern with maintaining cosmic harmony and balance through proper burial rituals reflects an existential awareness of the individual’s place within a larger existential and spiritual context.

Conclusion

It is generally believed in Ngbo that for those who lived a good life and died well, their after-life is pleasant and serene. They are endowed with a never ending enjoyment and bliss. Such a life or bliss is a continuation of earthly life in the company of the ancestors. They become ancestors capable of interfering in human and the family affairs of the living relatives. They can also reincarnate in a child born that is into the family. But for those who lived badly on earth and died “bad deaths”, their after-life is miserable. They are denied the company of ancestors from the

community, hence they cannot reincarnate. Some rituals are performed to ensure that they do not come back into the family. They are not remembered since they cannot become ancestors. The after-life of these kind of people is hopeless and restless. They have no permanent abode but are wonderers and lost souls.

There is need to promote the good aspect of one's cultural values. This research maintains that Ngbo people are still kin in promoting and sustaining some of their cultures as evidently seen in their burial rites. This does not deny the fact that there are few who claim to be more Christian than others and are trying to adulterate tradition but the good thing is that most of the elders who oversee the performance of the rituals will never accept to be part of it if it is not properly done lest they are struck dead by the ancestors. However, if much alterations should be allowed in Ngbo culture (burial rites), generations to come may not experience all the colourful ritual performance accorded the dead. The above however does not limit the dynamism in human culture. Finally, Ngboejeogu culture accords respect to women without much marginalization. It has a culture that is fairly gender balanced for the living and the dead.

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