

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Theatre, Politics and Dynamics in the Enactment of Funeral Rites in Nsukka Igbo, South-Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the culture re-enactment through funeral rites in Nsukka. It delved into burial/funeral theatre, politics of dominance played by the church which has brought about a new frontier regime of burial/funeral rites. Data was collected through ethnographic method that enabled the researcher to engage and become immersed in the field and observed, participated and learned first-hand the modus operandi in burial/funeral rites in the study area. The study used the descriptive research approach for data illumination. For credibility and to flesh out the narrative and enhance readers' engagement with the paper, photographs have been included. It is noted that Nsukka people stop at nothing to give befitting burial/funeral rites to adults male and female, who died a 'good death,' failure which is calamitous and that changes have occurred in the enactment processes caused by modernity and the over bearing influences of Christianity. It also noted that aside from honouring the dead, funeral ceremony serves as a platform for group cohesion and social support.

Keywords: Theatre, Politics, Dynamics, Enactment, Funeral, Rites, Nsukka Igbo.

1. Introduction

This study provides insightful reading of burial/funeral rites in Nsukka towards understanding the theatre, politics and dynamics in the enactment. Ikwuemesi (2016) has asseverated that every people have their common heritage which derives from their history and identity. He argued that if by heritage we mean tangible and intangible resources deriving from tradition and the past with which the present can be buttressed, then, heritage becomes the datum with which the present can engage the past and the future in a meaningful conversation. Art as part of cultural heritage "has been located not in the fringes, but in the centre of various areas of human endeavour; politics, education, religious, culture, fashion, communication, the environment, and so on. These constitute the very fabrics of society and art has evolved as their life

force" (Ikwuemesi and Agbo 2012, 408). Ikwuemesi and Onwuegbuna (2018) noted that "as a domain of creativity, art has found expression in a manifold of media, which includes but not limited to music, dance, drama, poetry, performance, images and imagery" (p. 6). In Nsukka, burial/funeral rites are replete with this manifold of media. For this study, burial/funeral rites, as well as ceremonies entail physical occurrences whose inherent meanings are derived from cultural heritages of a people. It also includes all the appurtenances that are used during cultural and tradition re-enactments. According to Ezugwu and Agbeze (2017) "there are dominant cultural manifestations in Nsukka, namely, *Onunu*, *Omabe* and *Ama*" (p. 2). Rites of passage for the deceased parent(s) who is deemed to have died 'good death,' is also among the cultural manifestations performed in Nsukka.

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Oraegbunam and Udezo (2012) identified and attributed changes that constitute a major threat to African traditional institution to the wind of socio-religious changes blowing across Africa today. These have brought about significant transformations in funeral rites. Funeral custom has been branded fetish and idolatrous. The politics played by the Church to dominate traditional institution is nothing to write home about. For example, Opata (2011) notes: “Parish Priest announced in the churches at Lejja that no Lejja Catholic should attend the funeral ceremonies of my late parents scheduled for November 27, 2010, because the funeral ceremonies were being done in the traditional customary manner” (p. 16). This succinctly captures the problem Christianity has brought to bear on funeral rites in Nsukka. This brings about the jettisoning of the traditional method of giving befitting funeral rites to deceased, thereby, causing division amongst family members, kinsmen, and the community at large.

Several studies (Katsumi Shimare, Mussayev, and Zhumashov (2020); Ikwemesi and Onwuegbuna (2018); Aniakor (2013) have been carried out on the Igbo memorialization of the dead, interface of visibility and performance through calamity and creativity, social bonds with death, and the concept of funeral rites in the social-humanitarian science. This paper examines the aspects of theatre, politics and the dynamics of funeral rites in Nsukka. Relying on broad, open-ended research questions during fieldwork (Brymah, 2012), the following research questions help in the understanding of the dynamics of burial and funeral rites: What processes are involved in the enactment of funeral rites in Nsukka? What theatrics are in funeral enactment before and now? In what ways have the church and modernity transformed funeral rites and in Nsukka? Why perform funeral rites for the deceased? Is there any danger not performing funeral rites portends and are there spiritual, physical and socio-economic implications of performing funeral rites? These questions form the basis for the qualitative data analysis. The study anchored on the multi-level perspective (MLP) that explains outcomes “in terms of event sequences and the timing and conjectures of event-chains” (Geels, 2011, p. 34). This study would be helpful in understanding the spiritual, socio-economic significance associated with the funeral rites, experiences and views of those who have performed these rites for their deceased parent(s). The results of the analysis provide answers to the questions, so as to prove beyond reasonable doubt, the significance of this study.

2. Culture Re-enactment through Death in Nsukka

In his definition of culture (Tylor, 1871) stated that “culture... is that complex whole, which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society.” Cole (2019) opines that culture refers to a large and diverse set of mostly intangible aspects of social life. She cited sociologists as saying that culture consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language, communication, and practices that people share in common and that can be used to define them as a collective. Culture as a domain in African traditional religion (ATR) is re-enacted through many ways, including rite of passage in Nsukka. When a man or woman passes on, the *mmachi enya* that entails and approximates ‘packing up’ the dead in medical parlance is performed by adults. The relatives and natives gather at the deceased compound to perform the first wailing ritual for the dead, immediately canon gun shots are fired. In the case of the demise of a man, a sacred cultural music commonly called the *Okobonyi* slit drum ensemble will be played (Figure 1). Played with giant and medium wooden slit drums (*ushue*), small wooden slit drum (*agbarada*), and open-ended membrane drum (*ogwe-al*) carved with hard wood by traditional carvers, *Okobonyi* is an age old cultural music ensemble played only for married men at death in Nsukka.

A follower of ATR, Okoro (personal communication, November 4, 2016) explained that in the olden days, *Okobonyi* was played only for warriors, who have fought, and brought home, human heads from both intra and inter town wars. This is the reason behind producing sound like *igbugwomed* (have you killed?), whenever a warrior dances to the sound. This sacred music for the dead is only played whenever a man dies in Nsukka so that the dead man ‘dances’ before being committed to mother earth.

During the wake, young and old women, sing different dirges and ululation in order to “alleviate the pain of loss; underscore the futility and tragedy of human life and to renew the hope of survivors who invariably are potential corpses, through the logic of ancestry or eternity as the case may be” (Ikwemesi and Onwuegbuna, 2018). After the construction of coffin by a carpenter, follows the burial process for the deceased the following day in the evening. It is a moment, of wailing and singing of dirges by the bereaved. His surviving sister performs medley dance while exclaiming *onwu fọọ! onwu fọọ!* (Go away,

death). Procession with the coffin will be made by the children of the deceased to the *Obuama* for the *Okobonyi* rite. The sons of the deceased will carry machete with fresh banana stem stuck on their sharp

end to indicate that *Okobonyi* is for the warriors. The daughter(s) will hold crafted hairs from the mane of a ram called *nza* (Figure 2).



Figure 1. *Okobonyi* music ensemble. © The author



Figure 2. Procession to the *Obuama* for *Okobonyi* dance. © The author

After the sons have taken turns to dance the music, the four men carrying the coffin on their shoulders will dance the four stanzas of the *Okobonyi* music. The players of the music are given money, kola nuts, a rooster and two gallons of palm wine. The rooster is slaughtered and the blood spilled on the giant slit drum.

To avoid pollution and toxicity, grave is dug six feet below by young boys, who also lower the coffin in north and southerly directions. This is because in Nsukka belief system, the ‘world’ of the ancestors is located at *Amala Egazi*, a town in the northern part of the Nsukka cultural zone that share boarder with northern Nigeria. When laid, the relatives of the deceased take turns to pour sand into the grave and bid farewell to the deceased.

At death, a woman’s body lies in state in her bedroom surrounded by her cloths displayed on the hangers to show that she was adequately taken care of while alive,

failure which prompts the relatives stage a workout from the compound by her relatives. All things being equal, the council-of-daughters (*Umụada*) sings dirges and watch over the dead as it lays on the bed till the evening of the following day. Announcing her burial, Cannon gunshots are fired amidst wailing and crying by her children, relative and sympathizers. Her children pour sand inside the grave one after the other and bid farewell by saying farewell mother (*Mama ladao!*).

3. *Manya Tebru*: Alcohol Drinking Rites

Manya means alcoholic drink and *tebru* is the corruption of the word, table. There exists a high sense of communality and conviviality in Nsukka during the alcohol drinking rite commonly called “*Manya tebru*.” This is best captured in the saying that “*anyuko nwamunyi onu, ogbo uhuhu*” which Aniakor (1995) has writes approximates the “collective foam that pierces the earth with its liquid thrust when many

people urinate together” (p. 5). This alludes to the gathering of natives in the *Obu ama* on the following day of burial of a deceased man or woman to enact the *Manya tebru* rite. On that day, Cannon gunshots are fired on air early in the morning. Every male and female adult converge at the venue to each contribute an amount of money agreed upon. Every woman comes along with a plate of choice food, which is served alongside the palm wine, bought with the money so contributed. The nomenclature of this rite, “*Manya tebru*” according to Erua (personal communication, March 4, 2022) “is because the village register, with which all contributions made for the buying of alcoholic drinks are recorded, is kept on a table.”

During this rite, *Onyanwunyanwu* masquerade (Figure 3) that the creation/designing of its costume arose



Figure 3. *Onyanwunyanwu* masquerade during *Mmanya Table* outing. © The author

After the enactment of *manya tebru* rite the bereaved family quarantines themselves to observe three native weeks (*izu eto*) of mourning. According to Agbo (personal communication, June 26, 2022), “they must remain within the family compound throughout the mourning period of three native weeks.” They are provided with food items by friends and well-wishers during this period. Shaving of hairs of the first son and daughter of the deceased and the presentation of palm wine as dismissal rites are enacted on the last day of the three native weeks. Married daughters of the deceased presents two gallons of palm wine each to be served together with pounded yam and okra soup to everyone present. It is an opportunity to give words of consolations to the bereaved, reminding them that death is inevitable and that all metal must go to the forge (*igwe lile jeko n’uzu*), therefore, they have the fortitude to bear the irreparable loss.

4. Theatre and Rituals in Funeral Rites

Before the advent of Christianity, funeral ceremonies in Nsukka Igbo did not take place on the same day of

from the aesthetic sense of the devotees in alliance with the traditional artist/designer Umunengwa village “equipped with the inspiration and knowledge of a variety of traditional legends, folklores and mythologies” (Fosu, 1986, p. vi), appears in company of men with long sticks. They sing songs to wit: *Ogerewu n’eti emidi igwe! mmidi igwe mmidi igwe!* (The brave chimes the iron rattles! The brave wears the iron rattles!). In conformity with the rhythms of the songs, *Onyanwunyanwu* performs and “when in performance, the dexterity and the effects of the precision or improvised movements (dance step) can be perceived as the aesthetic provisions that the audience enjoy” to borrow from Okweku and Ophori (2020, no page number).

burial. Rather, it happened years after, to enable the children of the deceased save money. Funeral was a costly venture that required saving of money and meticulous planning. Note that except for posthumous second marriage ceremony and the symbolic ritual of carrying back of a dead body of a woman to her father’s village as will be discoursed later, all other funeral rites and ceremonies were performed for both deceased men and women.

According to Klaudia Sekulska (2019, no page number), “funerals are the focal point for family member to gather. They strengthen the community in remembrance of loved ones. Immediate and extended family and the community are expected to pay these high cost.” When the bereaved becomes fully ready to embark on the funeral rites and ceremonies of their deceased mother, they go to their mother village to meet with her family, kindred and the village people to perform her posthumous marriage ceremony. They present kola nuts and palm wine. It is after this that they are at liberty to fix dates for the funeral rites and ceremonies of their late mother, involving *iku-egor*,

ushu-aji and *uru-onwu*, and *ohu-egba*. As Mussayev and Zhumashova (2020) observes, “When the death of a closed person occurs, the relatives of the deceased feel the need to perform a series of rites in preparation for the funeral. Therefore, death is accompanied by the performance of funeral rites that connects the dead and living people” (no page number), such as the *Iku igor* rite that entails the calling of in-laws for a meeting by the sons of the deceased to inform them of their readiness to begin in earnest the enactment of the funeral rites and ceremonies.

It is in the meeting that dates for the funeral rites are fixed to suit their convenience. The funeral rites and ceremonies usually hold in three consecutive days and to ensure that rains do not disrupt it the dates are usually fixed dry season. The in-laws are told to present a cow on *oshue-aji* day. After other deliberations, the in-laws are served with pounded yam and okra soup with two pieces of sizable meat each and palm wine. They are shared lumps of pork each from the waist region to the legs. It is of note that the practice of taking the corpse of a dead woman to her father’s village compound for burial is no longer in practice. It has been modified in such a way that women are now buried in their husband’s compounds to avoid inconveniences involved. Rather, *nvule onwu* (carrying back the corpse) ritual is enacted. It has been stated (Checinska, 2018, no page number) that “cloth plays a significant role in ritual whether everyday or ceremonial, secular or spiritual. It becomes saturated with cultural meaning and memory as crafting techniques and family keepsakes are passed from generation to generation.” In the enactment of *nvule onwu* rite, a cloth (*George*) symbolizing the corpse is folded and carried on the shoulders of two able bodied men. And in company of the children of the deceased relatives, friends and well-wishers, they troop to the woman’s village amidst fanfare and local music such as *Ikorodo* and *Adabara* ensemble. Her female children dress gorgeously, tying around waists, folded cloths that cascade down behind, wearing rattles (*Izere*) around their ankles, holding long tail of cow (*Nza*) and moving with gait, while continuously exclaiming *Mama alaaa!* (Mother is gone). On arrival at her village, the eldest surviving son in her family is handed over the symbolic cloth. The live cock, goat, and cow are handed over to the eldest son of her kindred, who in turn hands same over to the *Onyishi*.

In the morning of the following day, council of titled men (*Ndoha*), other kinsmen and eldest man (*Onyishi*) gather in the *Obuama* for the slaughtering of the cow

and goat. In slaughtering the cow, its eyes are covered with a piece of cloth before a sharp knife is given to the *Onyishi*, who pantomimes the slaughtering of the cow before handing over the knife to a younger person who slaughters the animals, allowing their blood to spill on the ground. When this ritual has been performed, the deceased finds rest in the world of the ancestors. In this regard, it has been noted Opata (2011) that the “killing of a cow is not meant to the deification of the deceased. In all cases, it only enables the deceased to take his or her seat among his ancestors, being that it is a completion of a needed ceremony in the transition of a man or woman to the ancestral home” (p. 31). The cow, goat and cock are cut into parts and shared accordingly. Arumona (personal communication September 3, 2021) noted that while the eldest man collects the heart and the hand, the bereaved son who presented the cow collects the skin, the leg, the head, the neck, part of the waist region and part of the ribs region, the titled men collect *abọ eho* and *ekpru ewaga* (the stomach), *Umuada* (married daughters) collect part of the waist, the woman following the eldest daughter collects the remaining parts of the waist region and the *ishi ikorobia* (young men) collect the remaining parts belonging to the ribs region. The kindred that the cow was slaughtered in their *Obuama* collect part of the remaining hand. Egor (the in-laws) are handed over the neck part in appreciation of their contributions to success of the funeral ceremony. If the cow is slaughtered during the funeral of a woman, one of the legs is given to the bereaved family who presented the cow to their mother’s village. The entire ritual is called *itụ ochor*.

Note that during a man’s funeral, the slaughtering process takes place in his kindred’s *Obuama*. There, a cow and two he-goats for the appeasements of god of farming (*ewu-shuajoko*) and the village square (*ewu-otobo*) are slaughtered. It is pertinent to mention here the danger of one not performing the funeral rites of one’s deceased parent(s). Those who have not performed it must not eat cow meat used for another person’s funeral rite, knowingly. Eating it knowingly results in sudden death. Even being present, where such cow is tethered or having contact whatsoever with it, is also believed to be calamitous. In 2015, for example, a certain man in the kindred of Umuogadzi who having not performed his mother’s funeral rites after fifteen years of her demise ate the meat of a cow used for the funeral rite of a deceased woman. The outcome was fatal because immediately after eating the cow meat, he vomited blood and died instantly.

Unconfirmed report showed that his death was as a result of eating of the meat of a cow used for funeral rite, when he has not performed that of his mother. In the same vain, a certain man from Umaashi who has not performed his mother's funeral absconded from a get-together party that was organized by an association he belonged to simply because a cow was tethered on a tree at the venue of the party. And knowing that the cow was to be slaughtered and the meat served during the party, he left the place immediately.

Other underlying consequences of not performing funeral rites for deceased parent(s) include but not limited to inability to get married, divorce, spiritual haunting, and unidentified sickness, problem in human endeavor, death of livestock, and death of members of the family to social relegation (Aneke, 2015). Corroborating this, Nwankwo and Anozie (2014) agree that the dead would be unleashing bedlam to the family such as strange illness, business failure, carrier failure, and even untimely death. The pandemonium in the family continues until the surviving relatives carry out this act to grant the dead the eternal rest.

It has been hypothesized (Uzoagba et al. 2018) that *Oshue-aji* is a social-cultural funeral outing which comes up on the eve of interment by the deceased's daughter in the company of their husband relatives... the condolence trip, which showcases expensive ceremonial cloths and other paraphernalia worn by

the daughters of the deceased and her entourage, superficially serve for ego and social conveyance. However, there is need to put things straight regarding the above hypothesis. And this is that *Oshue-aji* coming up on the eve of interment nowadays is due to politics by Catholic Church which has prohibited its enactment, terming it 'second burial'.

Of note is that *Oshue-aji* took place years after the interment of parent(s) in Nsukka. Then the daughter-in-laws of the deceased, travelled to their respective father's houses. Along with live cows, they were accompanied by her relatives, friends and well-wishers and traditional musical troupe back to the venue of the funeral ceremony. It was a rowdy procession. The wives dressed gorgeously by wearing iron rattle on their ankles and holding *Nza*. Punctuated intermittently with free-medley dance steps, they cat-walked (Figures 4) which for Ikwuemesi and Onwuegbuna (2018) are "a culturally codified means of denying the reality and pain of death among the Igbo and rekindling of hope and courage in the living." Onlookers threw money at them in solidarity. When they arrive at the venue, the cows were handed over to the first son of the deceased. But nowadays, *Ushue-aji* is performed immediately after interment, not on the eve anymore. In a nut shell, in Nsukka, *Ushue-aji* was performed during the funeral(s) of parent(s).



Figure 4. A woman on blue top in company of her relatives, friends and well-wishers during *ushue-aji* rite. © The author

Uru-onwu means a watch or vigil held for a dead person which is accompanied by ritual observances. In the night of the day of *Oshue-aji*, married women converged on the compound façade of the deceased and sang *Ukwu ejie anyi n'egwuzooo, anyi ji ejeje s'anyi ja alaaa!* Through this song, they informed the children of the deceased that they were tired, having been standing on their feet for a long time. And because their legs were weak, they wanted to go home. It was the song that made the deceased children to officially usher them into the seats. A basketful of rapped balls of pounded yam, big pot of okra soup, wrapped pieces of meat and four gallons of palm

wine were presented to them for entertainment which energized them to sing different songs that were laced with folktales till dawn. In one of the songs, *Bìagden naa naa!* (Be coming to see us one by one) the children of the deceased were called upon one after the other to come and drop money. And if any of them delayed in heeding their call, the person was cajoled with a song: *I ñone ìme ulò egwu or'h, me nee g nwur!* (You are inside the room having sex while your mother is dead!). In the morning, the women were given a live goat before departure (Okoro, 2022). Other side attractions such as the singing and playing the *Ogele* music ensemble took place during *Uru-onwu*.

It is important to mention that *Uru-onwu* like *Ushue-aji* rite now happens in the day time after interment as will be discussed. Immediately after *uru-onwu* and *ushue-aji* the sons and daughters of the deceased occupy different spaces within the compound to observe the *ohu-egba* final rite. Friends and well-wishers give them money to show solidarity. They sit together with the celebrant and the ushers known as *nd' nso*, serve them food and drinks. It should be noted here that it is those who the celebrants attended their funerals that reciprocate the gesture by attending theirs. In this regard, "a funeral attended is a negotiation of one's own funeral since human beings are potential corpses and death has the capacity to level everyone and all in the cycle of being" (Ikwuemesi and Onwuegbuna, 2018, p. 4). An Nsukka adage says: *boshi onye kwar madu bu okwar onwonye* (One performs his/her own funeral, while attending others).

5. Politics of Dominance

The politics of dominance being played by the church in Nsukka during and after funerals triggers off conflict between the church and traditional institution in Nsukka. Through continuous announcements in all parishes and stations in Nsukka Dioceses, warning of suspension from receiving the Holy Communion is being issued to worshipers who would offer cows to be slaughtered in a traditional customary manner during funerals. The Catholic Church in Nsukka forces the bereaved to present funeral cows to the parish priests for slaughtering and sharing of the beef among laities. Also, attendance at the funeral ceremonies organized in a traditional manner has been prohibited. Reacting how the Catholic Church at Nsukka ordered members not to attend funeral ceremonies organized by his family for their deceased parents, Damian Opatá (2011) writes:

On November 24th 2010, my brother Hon. C.U. Opatá received a telephone call from Mr. Alphonsus Ozo, the Catholic catechist at Lejja that the Parish priest, Fr. Asadu, announced in the churches at Lejja that no Lejja Catholic should attend the funeral ceremonies of my late parents scheduled for November 27, 2010. The reason given was that the funeral ceremonies were being done in the traditional customary manner. This singular act made some of the adherents to abscond attending the funeral (p. 60).

He laments that when his family took a live cow to her mother's village in line with custom, the eldest

of them without mincing words told them that the Catholic Church had forbidden the acceptance of such cows. Out of frustration, they tethered the cow to a tree in the man's compound and was about to leave, when the members of the extended family saw the danger this was capable of causing in future and offered them seats and pleaded with them not to leave in anger. Because of this, the parish priest later asked them to kneel down in front of the altar as a punishment for accepting the cow.

This development has changed the old narrative to a new regime. Two funeral live cows are now being provided, one for the church and the other for the village to cleverly avoid being sanctioned by both sides of the divide. To give an instance, Ugwueke (personal communication, May 25, 2022) explained that before his mother was buried, the parish priest in charge of St Peter's Catholic Church at Nsukka where she worships insisted that the church be given a live cow. Following this development, he bought two cows, presented one to the church and also presented secretly the other to her village elders for the funeral rite.

In another vein, the Anglican and Pentecostal Churches forbid firing of cannon gun during funerals. This is causing disharmony among 'Born Again' Christian brothers and sisters and other relations who are traditionalists. This often disrupts funerals, leading to family members conducting concurrent separate funerals ceremonies in both Christian and traditional ways at different venues. In spite of the fact that "Pentecostalist movement has dealt a *coup de grace* on traditional institution and uprooted the very soul of Igbo cosmology",¹ Igbo funeral, noted Nwoye and Stevenson (2012), still retains some of its creative and traditional essence in spite of the influence and challenges of Christianity in eastern Nigeria.

6. New Frontiers in Burial and Funeral Rites/Ceremonies

Globalization takes its toll and the world changes.² Cultural and traditional practices in Nsukka Igbo has become bastardized. Some authors have pinned these to the unprecedented effects of Christianity and globalization. For example, Ugwu (2011) has identified that the original roles of Nsukka Omabe are influenced by social change and driven by such factors as urbanization, the introduction of the Western-style forms of the government and justice system, Western education, Christianity, mass media (local and international), travels abroad of some Nsukka

natives, and sojourning individuals that have become part of the mix of the of the population of Nsukka.

Agujiobi-Odoh (2018) noted that the effects of this social change can be seen in the transformations that have occurred in the communal or village centre of Igbo village settlements. She pointed out that a pathway that initially passed through a village square has transformed into a major high way, thereby exposing the village square to other processes of social change. She further observed that new symbols have displaced the older tradition symbols, namely: the patrol station and the post office, a mechanics workshop and other modernizing symbols such as hotels and commercial stores, subjecting them to the effects of social change, resulting from different processes of modernization. She observed that most aspects of Igbo arts have undergone total displacement if not extinction, citing the displacements of earthen bowls and clay pots with imported plates and cooking pots, men's title regalia consisting of metal staff, ankle tassels and woven cloths with modern regalia consisting of long gown and government approved insignia, modern crowns and other imported paraphernalia of office as useful examples.

It is obvious that most African rituals swayed due to western cultural infiltration. The extent to which the autochthonous African rituals at funerals had changed is amazingly shocking, not minding the unchanging need to maintain the link between the past and the

present (Ameh, 2013). In view of this, funeral rites in Nsukka have witnessed a lot of transmogrifications which is noticeable in the provision of sun shade during funerals, sewing of solidarity uniforms attire, caskets, pallbearers, firing of cannon guns, funeral rites/ceremonies, dismissal on three vernacular weeks, mourning cloth, the burying of a married woman in her father's village compound and so on.

In the remote past, young boys climbed palm trees and cut down palm leaves with which they built shades under which visitors sat during funeral ceremonies. Chairs were brought from different homes within and around the village. These have become obsolete, given the fact that the uses of tarpaulin canopy and plastic chairs are in vogue. The wearing of solidarity uniform attire is alien to Igboland. It is a borrowed Yoruba culture termed *Aso ebi*. *Aso* is cloth and *ebi* is family. Read together, *aso ebi* mean family cloth. The *aso ebi* uniform attire is worn to enhance visual aesthetic and quality to the burial and funeral and parties, *et cetera*. In view of this, the children of the deceased wear white cloths (Figure 5) because identifying those who are bereaved is no longer by the folded cloths tied around the waistline which connotes "getting prepared to face up to emotional stress associated with bereavement" (Uzoagba and Nwigwe, 2018, p. 50). Other relatives, friends and well-wishers, who wish to commiserate with the deceased children, wear *aso ebi* solidarity uniform attire (Figure 6).



Figure 5. Sons and daughters of the deceased on white uniform attire. © The author



Figure 6. The bereaved and friends on *aso ebi* uniform attire. © The author

In the past, when an adult died, a coffin was built by hand with wood by local carpenters. A piece of white cloth was used as its cover. These days, there are show rooms where readymade and lavishly decorated caskets are sold. Established funeral service businesses abound. Pallbearers are paid to carry casket from mortuary to the compound of the deceased, appearing in different uniform attires and moving in company of a music band, displaying with the casket. In view of this, Ikwemesi and Onwuegbuna (2018, p. 6) note: “the pallbearers in their dressing in traditional regalia are miscegenation of culture in a modern Igbo funeral.” When the corpse of the deceased arrives in the compound for lying in state, the casket is placed under mini canopy decorated with silk linen. These were not so in the remote past in Nsukka. By on the spot appointment or by volunteering, some able bodied young men served the purpose of carrying the coffin for burial.

Before the advent of mortuary practice, the dead were buried within forty-eight hours in Nsukka. Now dead people are embalmed at the morgue, so as to enable their children prepare for befitting burial and funeral rites and to also enable the children, living abroad to return. Today, if anybody dies in Nsukka, the family must conduct the burial within two weeks as instructed by the Catholic Dioceses of Nsukka. If it extends beyond the time frame, the Church declines the burial and also places sanction on the family.

As pointed out earlier, the dead body of a married woman was buried in her father’s village compounds. But due to inconveniences and other exigencies, it is abolished by custodians of culture and tradition. The dead body is replaced with folded rapper cloth, usually held at both ends by two men during the enactment of *nvule onwu* ritual as earlier explained. Currently, there is a modification in this regard because the cloth is now rapped and put inside a polyethylene bag and handed over along with the cow, goat, and cock to a surviving son in the deceased woman’s family. *Uru-onwu* (wake) no longer takes place on the eve of the day of the interment but few hours after interment, because some unscrupulous individuals commit all kinds of atrocities during wake.

Ikwemesi and Onwuegbuna (2018) noted: “in recent times, both Westernization and advancement in technology and cyber-technology have influenced the nature of funerals in the world” (p. 14). Of course as a university town, Nsukka is not exception of this influence. Obituary announcements, is through

posters, flexes and the media. The organization of remembrance ceremony has become an annual event. During the event, brochures are given, souvenirs or memorabilia such as printed vests with text like “Forever in our heart” “Papa lives on,” “Celebration of life” among others is worn by the bereaved, their friends and well-wishers. Also, towels, handkerchiefs, plates, mugs and trays printed on with pictures of the dead are sheared for commemoration. Again, busts of the dead are installed in a well decorated tomb to immortalize and commemorate the dead. Commemoration of dead alludes to the Igbo saying that remembering is the best attitude in one’s life. Therefore, it is in the saying that commemoration of the dead is derived.

In the past, women referred to as *nd’h nso* helped with the cooking food served during the period of funeral events. Young boys helped out with the pounding of yams. Plates with which food was served were collected from the various homes within and around the village, after which they are collectively washed by women and returned to their owners. Today, catering service providers are engaged to cook food, provide plates, and spoons during burials and funerals in Nsukka. Musical bands, master of ceremonies, photographers and video men are also engaged to document funeral ceremonies.

It is important to state that during Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, a twist to the changing nature of death, dying and mourning in Nigeria and other countries of the world occurred. There was a government guide lines which affected social gatherings. In this regard, the modus operandi of burial and funeral ceremonies was affected. This caused a tricky situation as the bereaved were forced to make very difficult, very expensive decisions within a matter of days all while dealing with their grief (Slomniski, 2020). The dead were buried by only few family members who adhered strictly to wearing of face masks and maintaining social distancing. This caused the bereaved to be unable to give befitting burial and funeral rites to their dead ones, thereby, making them to mourn almost in isolation of which the negative effects were source of worry and panic.

7. Conclusion

In this study the researcher made a frantic effort towards bringing to the fore the re-enactments of culture through death by examining the theatre in funeral enactment, politics of dominance over traditional institution by the church, transition and

changes in the enactment of funeral rites in Nsukka. In addition, the study looked at the *Okobonyi* music played for the dead before internment, drinking of alcohol for the dead after internment and the appearing of masquerade and the conviviality that exists between natives during the dismissing rite which marks the last respect to the deceased and provides a platform where the bereaved are consoled and reminded that death is inevitable. It also delved into funeral rites of passage, namely; *Iku-Egor* (summoning of In-laws), *Iru-Onwu* (Wake), *Usue-Aji* (Tying of Cloth), *Ivule-Onwu* (Carrying back the corpse) and *Owhu-Egba* (Entertainment of empathizers). The study establishes that there exists conflict between the traditional institution and the church which perceives traditional funerals as fetish and idolatrous, terming it 'second burial'. In examining the above, Nsukka native dialect is used and interpreted in a manner that would make it readable and easy to understand, thus, agreeing with Eric Hobsbawm (2008) assertion that "history is a discourse best understood when the language in which a people think, talk, and take decision is used" (p. 49).

Notes

1. Krydz Ikwemesi was making a proposal for the rescuing of the *mmanwu* tradition and theatre from imminent extinction during the 2010 *Mmanwu* Theatre and Cultural Carnival held in Enugu, Nigeria.

2. During his solo art exhibition with the title *The Village Square*, held in Abuja, Nigeria, from May 7 to 27, 2015, Krydz Ikwemesi in respect of how globalization has reduced the world into village, complained of its attendant effects on cultures and traditions, especially those of Africa.

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