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FUNERAL MATERIALISM AND THE EXOGENEOUS CHANGE AMONG THE URHOBO PEOPLEAgbamu, Etakpobunor Mercy¹, Onwordi, Temishi Mary², LilianOghenenyoremeItoje-Akpokiniovo³¹Ph.d, Department of Sociology, faculty of Humanities, Social and Management Science Edwin Clark University, Kiagbodo-Delta State Nigeria²Ph.d, School of General Studies Unit Delta State School of Marine Technology, Burutu-Delta State.³Department of Sociology, and Psychology, Faculty of Social Science, Delta State University, Abraka-Delta State Nigeria**Corresponding Author***

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Abstract: This paper aimed at examining the financial involvement and exogenous changes associated with funeral ceremonies among the Urhobo people in recent time. It argues that over a period of time, from the era of colonialism in Nigeria, social change factors and processes such as urbanization, modernization and globalization have introduced continuous changes in the Nigerian culture of which the Urhobo culture as regards to funeral ceremony have greatly been affected. This paper observed that, due to response to new technology, innovative ideas and evolving values from home and abroad, special traditional passage rite for the dead have given way to mega parties for celebrations and show of affluence to friends and social clubs members. It is now difficult to see the tears of children and family members at interment venue rather, they are more concerned about entertaining their friends and associates in reception venues. Some problems generated by this modern trend are highlighted by this write up as; financial crises, stress and ill health, marital problem/divorce, drunkenness and high crime rate among others. This paper therefore concludes that this trend is posing serious threat to the unity, economic growth and development of the Urhobo Nation. It recommends among others, that Urhobo People should be re-socialized properly to imbibe the traditions and values of their culture.

Keywords: *Funeral ceremony, materialism and Exogenous change.***INTRODUCTION.**

Human societies are characterized by patterns of relationships between individuals who share a distinctive culture and it is this culture that clearly differentiates one society from another. However, in spite of these diversities, culture is learned, shared, dynamic, symbolic, universal and particularistic. This is why a particular element of some cultures is practiced, transmitted from generation to generation with modifications depending on the levels of cultural assimilation and transfusion. It is also important to note that every culture is distinct, with its own history and adaptive features which it respond to societal need and environmental changes [8].

The Urhobo nation like any other societies takes care of their deceased members by burying them so that they will not cause a menace to the living. Burial ceremony and passage rites is an aged long tradition of the Urhobo people because of their belief that the departed properly buried according to the tradition and given the required passage rites are happy in the “Great Beyond” while those not were buried according to the custom and tradition suffer humiliation and personality devaluation among the dead in the life after death [1]. This is why they take out time to plan for a well-organized burial ceremony for their dead loved ones or family members by constituting different committees that handle the various aspect of the exercise on behalf of the larger or extended family.

In the days of old, the death of a loved one, family member, or community person call for a sober reflection or mourning period were members are prohibited from playing music, singing, and dancing in the community. Children and wife or wives including kinsmen of the deceased are expected to cry aloud to show their love for the deceased. The local music and traditional dances are only allowed on the fixed day for the burial ceremony with great caution. There is a strong belief that anyone who eats of the proceeds from the contributions towards burial ceremony is liable to ancestral attack, so transparency and credibility was the ‘rain coat’ of such exercise.

The Urhobo man holds family ties in high esteem, and they are known for the practice of the polygamous family system. They help one another especially the issue of ill health and other cases. In planning for the funeral of a family member, every kinsman is expected to contribute, no matter how little to share in the burden of closed relatives as well as given the deceased the required rite of passage to the ancestral home. The family youths are charged with the responsibility of clearing surroundings and building tents from palm fronts collected from the forest, while food is cooked by family wives (Eghweya) and women (Emete).

Exogenous factors are by definition one of those values that is wholly casually independent from other variables in the system [9]. With reference to culture, exogenous changes refer to changes mounted on a particular culture from other culture. Over the years, specifically from the colonial period in Nigeria, exogenous factors and processes like urbanization, modernization, and globalization have continuously influenced the Nigerian culture of which the Urhobo culture is not excluded. The Urhobo culture changes as it responds to innovative ideas, technology, and evolving values from other tribes [3].

In recent years, with modernization, the trend has totally changed from what it used to be. So many resources are now committed to burial ceremony in the Urhobo land to buy uniforms popularly known as “Asuebi” hire canopies, undertakers, caterers to mention but a few. Rites of funeral passage are now turned into mega parties to show affluence and fame to friends, social clubs, and family members. People now prefer to contribute only towards burial ceremonies than to contribute to save the life of relation. The arrangement which is supposed to be directed and managed by designated family members according to the Urhobo custom and tradition have been transformed into celebration parties by hired party planners. The economic conditions are presently very bad and are likely to get worse if the present trend is not halted. This is why this paper attempt to examine materialism associated with the modern funeral ceremonies among the Urhobo people especially in this era of economic recession. It will also highlight some of the problems generated by modern funeral ceremonies in our locality.

Brief History of the Urhobo Nation

The Urhobo nation forms one of the major ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and stands out among the five ethnic groups of the present Delta State of Nigeria (Ogiris i, 2015). Administratively, ten of the twenty-five Local Government Areas that constitute the state regarded as the “Big Heart of the Nation” are located in Urhobo territory. The nation geographically lies between Latitude 6° and 5° 15' to the North and Longitudes 5° 40' and 6° 25' to the East. It consists of about one hundred communities with a population of two million (Eruvbetere, 2003). Otor- Urhobo is bounded in the North by Edo state, on the East by Ukwani-Ndokwa and Isoko Ethnic Nationalities, on the South by the Ijaw or Izon Ethnic Nationality, and on the West by the Itsekiri Ethnic Nationality [2].

There are so many versions about the origin of the Urhobo people. Some Scholars traced it to Bini and Ife in Nigeria and beyond to Sudan and Egypt (Ogiris i, 2015). What is most important in the history of the Urhobo people is that they migrated to this part of the world in search of the evergreen forest and savanna for hunting and crops cultivation, the mangrove swamps and rivers for fishing and other activities. Urhoboland in the words Jike (2017) is divinely and elaborately endowed. It is the modern-day equivalent of biblical Goshen. God gave us the very best land, the very best culture, the very best personality traits, the very best vision, and the very best mission. No wonder the major occupation of the Urhobo people is Farming, fishing, and hunting.

The Urhobo nation is made up of twenty-three kingdoms namely; Agbarha- Otor, Agbarho, Agbon, Arhavarien, Abraka, Evhron, Eghwu, Idjerhe, Mosogar, Oghara, Ogor and Okere- Urhobo. Others are; Okparabe, Okpe, Olomu, Orogun, Udu, Ughelli, Ughelli-Urhie, Ughievwen, Umiagha, Uvwie and Ughwerun. Even with the multi-clan traditional political structure, the Urhobo people as noted by Darah (2016) for the sake of their common interest and growth as well as sustainability, formed the organization known as the “Urhobo Progressive Union” in 1931. The Urhobo Progressive Union and its precursor, the Urhobo Brotherly Society as noted by Jike (2017) were specifically intended to nurture and sustain the biblical ethos of brotherliness among the Urhobo people [5].

Urhobo is currently organized as political kingdoms, gerontocracy, and plutocracy. Gerontocracy is the government by elders based on the age grade system in the community while a plutocracy is a government by the rich and wealthy, an evolutionary state but retaining the elements of gerontocracy (Oghojafor, 2017). The king (Ovie) is the highest political figure in the Kingdom and the symbol of his kingdom, culture, and royal predecessors. His traditional Counselors are the speaker (Otota) and council of Chiefs (Ehovworen). Traditionally, society revolves around the social groups namely; the ‘Ekpako’ which are the elders, the ‘Egweya’ and ‘Emete’ the women folk, and ‘Ighene’ known as the youths [6].

Urhobo Funeral Traditional Belief

The Urhobo people believe that the universe is made up of the known Earth (Akpo) and the unknown spirit world (Erivwin). The distinction between the Akpo and Erivwin, and the complex relations between them, dominate Urhobo cultural consciousness. Living people inhabit Akpo and control its affairs; while the Erivwin is peopled by the spirits of the dead. Those among the departed who have been properly buried, and for whom prescribed rituals of passage have been performed by their living relations, will

leave in peace therein. Until the dead achieve such status, their spirits wander in strange places awaiting admission into their final resting places [4]. There is also the belief that the dead when properly buried can be reborn into the family or community (Reincarnation).

This hemispheric division of the cosmos influences the way that the living people relate to the world and conduct their own affairs. Every cultured Urhobo person lives in perpetual dread of Erevwin and its limitless powers because they strongly believe that Erevwin is the home or source of those born into the world. Every time a new human being is born, it is assumed that the world of the dead or Erevwin has lost one. Similarly, when a human being dies, it is lamented that Erevwin has captured a victim. When an old, successful and morally upright person passes away, the transition is often referred to as having gone home or returned to the place of ultimate origin [1].

The Urhobo people have so much respect for the dead hence the body must be treated and buried with dignity, because they believe that even though a person is dead, to the living, he or she is alive somewhere else, watching over and protecting his/her descendants. This partly explains the elaborate funerals ceremony to honour the souls of departed relations [7]. The Urhobo hold the dead in very high esteem, particularly because of the awesome power and authority over the living. This reverence partly accounts for why distinguished Urhobo persons are interred in homes rather than open cemeteries where their graves would be exposed to the elements. Only those who died of abominable diseases or as a result of shameful accidents such as suicide were buried in forbidden bushes [1].

Problems Associated with Current Funeral Ceremony in Urhobo Nation

Over a period of time, from the era of colonialism in Nigeria, social change factors and processes such as urbanization, modernization, and globalization have introduced continuous changes in the Nigerian culture of which the Urhobo culture is not an exception. The culture is changing as it is responding to new technology, innovative ideas, and evolving values from home and abroad. These changes are now reflecting in Urhobo basic orientations of life, that is social values and customs [3]. Some of the problems generated by modern funeral ceremonies are as follows;

i) **Deeper Financial Crises-** In this era of economic recession, people still commit so many resources to burial ceremonies just to show off to friends and club members. Some seek for loans no matter the interest rate or even sell off properties such as lands, houses, cars, gold, and other valuable items to generate funds in order to organized mega parties in the name of the funeral ceremony. Extended family members and friends are also deeply involved since they have to cough out some reasonable amount of money for the purchase of burial uniforms (Asuebi), usually given out at a higher price to generate fund by the bereaved. The use of uniforms in burial ceremonies is totally aliens to Urhobo culture. You may call it innovative ideas but the truth is that it is money extortion and closely related to corruption.

ii) **Stress and Ill Health-** There are situations where children and relatives of the deceased collapse before, during, and after funeral ceremonies dues to financial stress. Some develop high blood pressure and other complicated sickness and eventually dies before the dead are buried.

iii) **Marital Problem/ Divorce-** There is a role specifically performed by the Son-in-law of the deceased popularly referred to as In-law Greetings “Ogo Esho” where the son-in-law’s and his family and friends

are required to pay a condolence visit to his wife and her family. In the days of old, Son in-laws are to do it according to their ability and choose a date convenient for him and his family. It may take up to three months, six months, or even a year to enable him to prepare adequately. In this recent time, as a matter of compulsion, a condolence visit must be done on the general funeral day. Husbands have to look for funds to provide for different attires for the wife. There is now competition among sisters and in-laws in funeral parties' display. The inability for husbands to meet up with burial ceremony demands has led to marital crises and divorce.

iv) **Drunkenness and Deviant Behaviour-** Some people because of access to free drinks, will consume excessive alcohol in funeral parties. Drunkenness according to Federal Road Safety Corps accounts for most roads accidents in Nigeria. Some married women after taking some bottles of alcohol will begin to dance to any music without control and caution. Funeral parties are now venues for all sorts of immoral behaviour. This is not healthy for the socialization of our young ones.

v) **Insecurity and High Crime Rate-** Burial Ceremony days in recent times are characterized with criminal activities ranging from breaking and entering into homes and cars, to theft of mobile phones, cash, and other valuables. Some criminals rob people of their valuables when dancing and jubilating in parties.

vi) **Traffic Jam/ Accident-** Our roads are now characterized with Traffic jams and accidents on Fridays and Saturdays where most burial ceremonies are slated. You have to stay long hours on the road, burning fuel, especially at Soldier cheek points. Even to get transport vehicle on these days is so difficult. It is also common to see large numbers of vehicles breaking down along the roads.

Theoretical Framework- The funeral ceremony is embedded in the culture and tradition of the Urhobo people. In recent years, as a result of cultural assimilation and modernization, the culture has been subjected to so many changes. So, the most appropriate theoretical explanation to this paper is the Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura. Albert Bandura is considered the leading proponent of this theory. Social learning theory focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context. It considers that people learn from one another, by way of observational learning, imitation, and modeling. The general principles of social learning theory include;

i) People can learn by observing the behavior of others and the outcomes of those behaviors, this is referred to as modeling.

ii) Learning can occur without a change in behavior.

iii) Awareness and expectations of future reinforcements or punishments can have a major effect on the behaviors that people exhibit. Reinforcement and punishment influence the extent to which an individual exhibits a behavior that has been learned and the expectation of reinforcement influences cognitive processes that promote learning. Bandura suggested the term vicarious learning to explain that people observe and learn from others' behaviour through modeling and the environment also reinforces modeling.

By implication, the modern way of organizing burial ceremony is alien to the Urhobo culture. For example; buying of uniforms, use of Undertakers, party planners, and the new pattern of in-laws greetings

are all copied or learned from other cultures through long contact, cross-cultural marriages, and urbanization. The show-off and praise from family members and associates help to reinforce the modern pattern of burial ceremony in the Urhobo nation. This trend is likely to persist if a re-socialization mechanism of the Urhobo man is not put in place. In other words, this generation needs to be exposed to the danger or disadvantages associated with the new style of performing burial ceremony in the Urhobo kingdom. The huge resources committed to the funeral ceremony no doubt have a negative influence on the financial status of the bereaved.

Conclusion

The dynamic feature of culture influence the norms, values, and age-long traditions of any given society. With the influx of modernization, urbanization, and globalization, most traditional practices are given way for new practices which are alien. The funeral ceremony in the Urhobo nation is one of such tradition that is gradually been eroded by borrowed ideas. This paper argued that the present-day burial ceremony organized by the Urhobo people have lost the traditional values and meanings. The task of setting local tents using palm fronts and bamboo trees by family and village youths is now taking over by party planners where canopies, chairs, and tables are hired at an expensive rate. In some cases, big hall and venues are rented for the ceremonies. The cooking is also contracted out to caterers instead of using family wives and girls.

Some of the major problems identified include; quarries among children and family members, financial crises, health challenges, drunkenness, accidents, stealing, and lost of valuable assets. Some of the bereaved children are made to pay debts incurred in the funeral ceremony for their late father or mother for years. Also identified is the problem associated with the urgency of in-laws greeting by sons in-laws which some time need to marital problems and divorce. This paper, therefore, recommends that the Urhobo people especially this generation should be re- socialized on the values and traditions of the Urhobo people.

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