

# SOCIAL SOLIDARITY IN TRADITIONAL FUNERAL RITES OF CONTEMPORARY ORUK ANAM LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF AKWA IBOM STATE

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## Abstract

*This study focuses on the community solidarity behind the traditional funeral rites of Oruk Anam Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. It has been observed that whenever death occurs in the community, whether of a young or old, male or female person, but more especially the aged, it paralyses the religious, social, economic and even cultural activities of the community of our research. The research examines the various types of deaths and their traditional funeral rites, the rituals used in various burial processes of the traditional Oruk Anam, especially the massive involvement of the entire community which actually captured the attention of the researcher. The study utilizes a number of methodologies, both oral and written materials on related topics to this study. The research uses Emile Durkheim functionalism theory to examine how funerals create social solidarity and collective effervescence, as well as Durkheimian and Arnold Van Gennep's sociological theories to show-case the unique ways in which community solidarity in traditional funeral rites empower the Oruk Anam people to conceptualize and perceive burial and its funeral rites in African societies. The study finds out that death and funeral rites are not individual affairs, but the entire community affairs, hence elaborate funeral rites involve entire community because a member of their community has passed on to the ancestral world. Just as an individual when alive belonged to the same community, when dead the individual is not abandoned by the community. It also finds out that modernity has affected much of the traditional funeral rites of Oruk Anam, but the essential parts of their rituals are still zealously observed by the people. The study therefore contributes to knowledge by bringing to limelight all the traditional funeral rites of Oruk Anam people and their social significance before modernity crept into the system, hence the study recommends that proper documentation such as this study be made available to the present Oruk Anam people, especially the younger generation and the traditional rulers as well as the custodians of Oruk Anam culture so that the authentic Oruk Anam traditional funeral rites and their social importance will be maintained for posterity.*

## Introduction

This paper seeks to discuss the community solidarity in traditional funeral rites of Oruk Anam inhabitants in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria from the good old days and changes it has undergone over a period of times prior to the analysis of this narrative. As a matter of fact, it is significant to prove who the inhabitants of Oruk Anam are. Oruk Anam was one of the areas that constituted the then Ikot Ekpene province during the colonial period of 1903. As time went on, the former Abak division was carved out from Ikot Ekpene province. The whole of Ukanafun and Oruk Anam were in Abak division between 1957 and 1958. Further

splitting of the old provincial areas that formed Abak brought about Ukanafun on 1<sup>st</sup> June, 1976. Oruk Anam remained in Ukanafun Local Government Area until 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1989, when it was separated by the then Federal Military Government of General I. Babangida (rtd). Its headquarters is at Ikot Ibritam. Oruk Anam itself was one of the proliferated geo-political regions of two defunct Local Government Areas of Oruk and Anam.

Oruk Anam Local Government Area is found in the middle of latitude 4° 39'N and 5°N and longitude 7°30 and 7°49'E. It occupied a space of land of

551.727 sq.km. It is limited on the North by Abak Local Government Area, its southern boundary terminates at Ikot Abasi Local Government Area, while on the East Mkpato Enin Local Government Area remain its boundary and on the West Ukanafun Local Government Area shared the landmass in which Imo River takes its course via the margin line of Rivers and Abia State. Its vegetation is luxuriant rainforest zone with ample oil palm and raffia palm excluded the lower parts of Qua Iboe River on all sides of Ika Annang, Ikot Okoro and its streams at Mbiakot and Ata Obioakpa. The lower surface of the land is also found in Ekeffe, Warrife and Ikot Ukpong Obioese.

The climate condition incorporates dry and wet seasons akin to other southern regions of Nigeria. Nevertheless, Oruk Anam records high rainfall that extends to 3,000mm and 3,500mm while the dry season is less severe with mild harmattan. It occupies a suitable ecological belt that favours agriculture. Its location in the delta region accorded it fertile and productive land with geology that is made up of maritime slide, parallel fragments and tracts of sand on the sea-shore. Oruk Anam Local Government Areas is one of the areas that produces palm oil, palm kernel, raffia palm, and palm wine. It also produces food crops like, maize, plantain, sweet yam, melon, yam, cassava and fruited pumpkin.

The inhabitants of Oruk Anam Local Government Area are indigenous to Annang ethnic group. The Local Government is endowed with highly provocative culture that brings about amusement. Such traditional plays include Ekpo masquerades, Ekong, Ntok Ekong, Atat, Nkeme Nkeme, and Ekon for the male initiates. The female initiates take to Ebre, Mbre Uba Ikpa, and Abang. The Local Government celebrates major festival on Awasi day (Ekong Ikot Afanga 15<sup>th</sup> August of every year), Utia Ikut (Nnung Ikot). Petty trading, hunting, fishing, craft making are controlling economic activities of the area.

The most important markets which increased economic activities of the area include Urua Anwa (Aya Obio Akpa), Urua Awak (Ikot Osute/Ikot

Ukpong) Offiong, Etok (Ibesit) Urua Ekwet (Ikot Akpan Essien), Ekenyong Obom (Mbon Ebre/Ntak Ibesit) Urua Edet (Ikot Akpan Eda). Oruk Anam Local Government Area constitutes nine clans. These are: Ibesit, Ekparakwa, Ibesit Nnung Ikot, Inen, Nnung Ita, Ndot, Abak Midim, Obio Akpa, Nnung Ikot. Oruk Anam comprise of one hundred and sixty eight (168) villages. Oruk Anam people share the three predominant religions (Traditional Religion, Christianity, Muslim) in Nigeria. The largest group of religionists are the Christians. This is followed by the traditionalists and lastly the Mohamadants who are just handful due to late entry in this part of the globe.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Scholarly works on death and burial rites have most often centred on describing and analyzing the rites accorded to the deceased and interpreting the benefits which such rites confer on the deceased and the bereaved. Many scholars Robert Hertz (1907), Emile Durkheim (1912), Radcliffe-Brown (1922), Goody (1961 etc) will affirm that the essence of such rites is to usher the deceased to a better and desirable after-life and to assuage the grief of the deceased, for death brings about a lasting physical separation and exclusion of the individual person from his present society. They also posit that of all life crises, death is the most intense emotion in the bereaved.

An interesting aspect of the works of these scholars is the attention they draw to the relationship that exist between funeral rites and community solidarity and participation. For these scholars, death is considered as something contra-social. Death constitutes a partial destruction of social cohesion which the normal social life is disorganized and social equilibrium disturbed. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown in his *Andaman Islanders* (1922) has rightly pointed out that after the death, the society has to organize itself anew and reach a new condition of equilibrium.

The problem this study sets out to address, therefore, is how the Oruk Anam people show solidarity in the face of devastating impact of death, not only to the deceased but also to the bereaved. As we shall see in the study, funeral rites in Oruk

Anam, have a socially cohesive effect, that is, they serve to restore and protect the overall cohesion of society and its structure. When death occurs of a member of Oruk Anam community, the people show solidarity by putting their behaviour in line with those of the bereaved.

One of the ways this solidarity is expressed is in mass attendance by the community members to the funeral. If, in the face of no justifiable reason, one chooses not to attend, this is seriously viewed as a breach of social relationship and attracts a stiff penalty. Two fundamental questions this study seeks to provide answers are: Why does Oruk Anam show such solidarity during funerals? To what extent have agents of modern change eroded some of this spirit of solidarity among Oruk Anam people? These two questions will lead to other detailed ones which will enable us to achieve this objective of our research focus here.

### **Aims of the Study**

The primary aim of this study is to describe, analyse and interpret the traditional heritage of beliefs and practices relating to community solidarity in traditional funeral rites in contemporary Oruk Anam communities before the incursion of agents of modern change.

### **Methodology**

Data for this research were collected from two principal sources; Primary and Secondary sources. Primary sources (interviews with Oruk Anam traditionalists across gender). Secondary sources (printed materials). The work employs qualitative techniques to describe and analyze the data. The use of phenomenological method enables the researcher to present the data as they were without forcing meaning into them.

### **Levels of Community Involvement in Oruk Anam Funeral Rites**

Funeral rites in Oruk Anam are tagged as community affairs, one does not exhibit non-chalant posture in participation as death from time to time claims the life of human being and nobody is granted immunity from it. This necessitates the people's adage that affirm: *agwo aka ikot okpo bak usen ake amo* meaning one takes part in the death

of others as it will also occur to him. From the look of things, funeral rites attract the services of everybody in Oruk Anam locality. When death strikes in traditional Oruk Anam, children, young people and adults are involved in the burial process.

As the dead is about to be interred, children will be sent to fetch water from the stream, bring firewood from the farm, sweep the homestead and run short errand of calling grown up individuals that could assist in the funeral rituals. Children too join their parents to weep whenever death occurs in the community.

While it is getting to the time that burial will commence, young men in the community clear the compound of the deceased in readiness for burial. Equally, young women will bring cassava and yam from the farm of the deceased. The cassava would be processed into gari and foofoo that will be used in the funeral. The clearing of the compound of the deceased is not done any how. It is a part of the ritual of path finding way for the departed to reach the other world without hitches. The rituals that go with clearing of the deceased compound include the provision of palm wine, native gin (*kai kai*), packet of cigarette, ground snuff for elders that are there to direct work, edible food like cassava, gari, rice with palatable soup.

Infact without the involvement of the community, the burial process of a departed individual will be cumbersome. For instance, erection of traditional shade for visitors both seen and the unseen is done by the community. The unseen visitors are the dead that have come to take part in the burial. In Oruk Anam, materials use in erection of burial shade includes palm fronds, rope, bamboo poles etc. The community that performs the task does not go just like that at the end of the work. The community collects ritual objects from the bereaved for erecting the traditional shade. These include schnapps that will go round those that did the work and the good for nothing people who are to amuse the men at work. Native gin that will reach everybody, cigarette, ground snuff, kola nut, alligator pepper, bitter kola and garden eggs. Edible food are offered and at the end, a packet of

schnapps is hung under the shade. This shows that work was done according to tradition and for the dead to see that the living are putting things in order for the burial.

After the burial of the deceased, the debris of the shade are not thrown away just like that. If the burial ceremony attracted a cow, the ritual animal that will be used to clear the debris is going to be goat. However, if goats were used in the funeral, fowl is accepted by the community in clearing the shade. The implication of the above practice stems from the belief that the world of men is populated by the spirits of the dead people. Every action in the physical realm must be done to appease them. Before a departed person is inhumed in Oruk Anam, the community would gather in the house of the dead to collect donations and gifts materials that will aid the bereaved to perform funeral rites and the interment of a fellow member of the community whose life was claimed by death. Those that are directly involved in this meeting are sons of the deceased, married daughters of the dead, in-laws, relations, friends and welwishers. Prior to the date of the burial; a day will be set aside for them (the above mentioned persons), to come to the deceased's compound with either cash or material donation that aid in the funeral rites and burial of the deceased. The community chooses who will be there to carry out the rite. Preferably, community leaders are often chosen to head the committee. Other members are drawn from the bereaved family (family head), community, friends from elsewhere and sympathizers.

When everything is ready, a table will be placed in a strategic position in the deceased's compound for members of the committee to sit and carry out the ritual function of collecting gift and donation for the burial. Anybody that wants to present his boon or cash is allowed to do so after he must have dressed the table. The ritual items needed for dressing a burial table constitute four bottles of native gin *kai kai* for the four legs of the table *ukot okpokoro inang*, a sum of money not less than five thousand Naira, a head of tobacco with lime stone *itong ike ye akang*, kolanut, alligator pepper, bitter kola, garden eggs etc. The above mentioned items

are given to the community members that carried out the ritual of gift or cash presentation. As this is done, he is permitted to present what he has to offer.

Indeed, another aspect of community involvement in funeral rites in Oruk Anam is the arrangement of seats in the deceased's compound on the day of interment. It is the duty of the community to assign seats to *ekpo* drummer group, cultural groups like hunter's association and wrestling personnel, guests and friends of the deceased.

Moreover, the entertainment of *ekpo* masqueraders, different cultural groups, inlaws, guests, friends of the bereaved, sympathizers and welwishers rest on the shoulder of the community. These acrobats are not jam-packed in one place. *Ekpo* masqueraders are not camp in the deceased's compound. Their encampment is at isolate area that will give them freedom to put on their garb. Other cultural groups are equally given locations that suit their plays. It is in where they are staying that entertainment is given to them.

As a matter of fact, it is the responsibility of the community to select individuals that will dig the grave of the dead, as sons of the departed do not dig the grave of their late father. Before a grave is dug in Oruk Anam, ritual objects that are collected include cash ranging from one hundred Naira to one thousand Naira, being the cost of the land. A cock is given if the deceased is a man, while hen goes for a woman, one bottle of native gin and ground snuff. Consumption of the cock takes place when the deceased is finally buried.

Moreover, it is the community that selects and arrange *ekpo* masquerade that will feature in the burial procession. The community looks for the best persons that could beat the wooden gong *aworom*, the leading drum *akpan iwit*, small drums *ntok iwit*, big drums *eka iwit*. This is because the best hands may not be found in the community; they look for them elsewhere so that the burial could be colourful.

Finally, as community takes centre stage in funeral rites and interment of the dead in Oruk Anam,

religious, social, economic and even cultural activities are punctuated on the day that the deceased member of the community is inhumed. There is massive community solidarity for the glorious exit of a fellow community member. Excuses are not readily accepted as to why an individual exempts himself to partake. It leads to infringement of societal norms and customs in which the culprit must be penalized.

In Oruk Anam, the community spells out two outstanding avenues of penalizing a community member who erred from taking part in the funeral rites and interment of a fellow community person. One of the two ways to isolate the culprit is to bar him from associating with other members of the community. The prohibition does not authorize him to get fire from his neighbor's house or drink palm wine on the day that palm wine is free for drinking. These days in Oruk Anam are *Edet* and *Ekeyang*. He is not equally permitted to enter another person's house until the expiration of the period of isolation. The second method of punishment is option of fine. An individual that failed to attend the funeral rites and burial of a community member could be made to pay a fine of a big female goat, 5 tubers of yam, three bottles of native gin, three bottles of schnapps and a cash ranging from twenty to fifty thousand for failing to attend the funeral of a community man or woman. This makes participation in funeral rites and burial a serious matter in Oruk Anam communities.

### Funeral Rites

Funeral rites differed due to the sort of death. For instance, the ones who died of committing suicide and death by accident, morbid enlargement of a part of the body or enchantment of witches and wizards, dead of bondman, individual drown in the water and mad persons were all inhumed distinctly from a person who died a natural death. The explanation offered by Oruk Anam people is that deaths caused by disaster, morbid enlargement, or by suicide is a curse which must be interred in the bad bush (*uduong okpo*) without ceremony.

Before the interment of the people whose deaths come under the ones cited above, propitiatory

rituals are performed. For someone who died of accident to be buried, ritual objects like dog (*ewa*), fowl (*unen*), 1 bottle of locally produced gin (*afofop*), a jar of palm wine (*Ukot mbong*) are produced. After the procurement of the ritual objects, *Awia mfa* (diviner) is looked for to perform the ritual. When the *Awia mfa* arrives the deceased's compound, the ritual items are given to him. He then digs a hole in a designated spot to perform the ritual. He slaughters the dog and the fowl and pours the blood into the hole and invokes the ancestors to thwart future occurrence of such death. However, the sacrificial animals are not consumed by the people that witnessed the ritual rather they are left for the herbalist. The people only partake in drinking the local gin and palm wine for the ritual.

Nevertheless, those who died of morbid enlargement of parts of their bodies, *Awia ibok* (medicine man) would be consulted to ascertain the cause of the swelling. If it is caused by oath taking the *awia ibok* will decide the kind of ritual that will be performed. For somebody that dies as a result of perfidiously taking an oath, especially when the body swells, it does not attract normal burial. For it to be buried, the medicine man often charge money and prescribes the ritual objects needed. Oruk Anam use old climbing rope (*akan ikpo ajop*), coins (*ndianga okpogho*), local produced gin (*afofop*) when they want to bury victim of swelling sickness. As the time for the burial comes, the medicine man uses the old climbing rope and tie round the neck of the corpse so that it could be hauled on the ground to the place where it would be buried by two able bodied males. Those who pulled the corpse on the ground to be inhumed are often strangers as kinsmen are forbidden to perform such ritual. On reaching the spot in the thicket where the corpse would be inhumed, a shallow grave is dug by the two men. The medicine man, first pours libation and calls the ancestors of the deceased not be offended as one of them who erred is to be buried there. He throws the coins to the ground and says that the spot where the grave is dug is for that.

The deaths of young persons who left behind aged parents do not attract burial rites. They are

inhumed like infants as they do not come up age. The death of young person's usually go with cleansing ritual (*unenge usung*) so that untoward happening could be put at bay from the bereaved. Subsequently, the death of an individual in a family, (particularly a father, mother or husband) the living relatives are conceived to have been vitiated with the exasperation that follows extinction of life. A cleansing ritual is needed to renew those claimed to have been hooked by the scourge of death. This ritual of renewal is carried out in the same manner in every part of the communities of Oruk Anam. After the interment of father, those daughters of the departed (*nto iban akpa mkpa*) who are going to stay with the surviving members of the family all through the time of sadness carry out *unenge usung akpa mkpa*. *Unenye usung akpa mkpa* is a ritual dance which is customarily danced at night by the women. In the course of the *unenge usung akpa mkpa* dance, palm wine, local gin, soft drink, basin of cassava, garri, rice, soup, peppered soup are served. At dawn, all daughters that are married provided hens and yam tubers to be cooked and eaten by the singers. When three days have passed from the time of burial, the daughters of the family (*iban ekpuk*), ask the widows of the dead person with their offspring to come for hair cut (*mkpongo iret akpe*). The style of the hair shave is not the same since the work is not done by professional barbers. After the shaving of the hair a token of amount is given to the person that performed the ritual. When the mourners are all shaved, an aged woman throws water on the roof of the house of the deceased for the mourners to rinse and move into the house. (Ikpotu: Oral interview 5:4, 2018).

At the end of this ritual of moving into the house after drops of water from the roof have touched mourner's heads, the wife and the children resume normal life. While the wife embarks on spousal flight to one of her kinsmen for as long as someone from her husband's side would go to bring her back. The ritual of remarriage ensues when the widow finally comes back from her kinsman's residence. The first part of the remarriage ritual is for the widow to have coition with a man once and

never to repeat the act again, if she dares tries, dies instantly. The reason for this rite is for her to break the bond between her and the departed husband. This ritual in Oruk Anam is known as *ukanga ukot ekpo*, i.e having sexual relationship with another man after the death of the deceased husband to sever the link between them. Though conjugal relationship between the widow and her new found lover after the death of the husband never last, she could still have support from him but he must not touch her pudenda for whatever reason.

The second phase of the remarriage ritual is when the 'son' or the 'brother' of the late husband of the widow emerges as her new husband. For the 'son' or the 'brother' of the death spouse to become the new husband of the widow, he must provide a big female goat (*ebod mbo ndo*), five tubers of yam (*ekpad edia ition*), 1 bottle of locally distilled gin (*afopop*), a jar of palm wine (*ofuru atu ukod nwuong*) and money ranging between five thousand Naira and twenty thousand Naira to the kinsmen of the widow. When this is done, the new marriage can now be consumed. That is coition can now take place between the ritualized husband and wife if it is the 'brother' of the deceased that reappears as the new husband. Inversely, if it is the 'son' that takes the place of the new husband, copulatory right is denied, as such act is a prohibited for a 'son' to touch the pudenda of his mother.

### Second Burial Rites

That apart, second burial is one of the most celebrated funeral rituals in Oruk Anam although there is no uniformity in the performance of it in the communities. There is no fixed time for second burial rites. It could last for more than a year. In the nine clans of Oruk Anam Local Government Area, second burial rites featured prominently in three phases. These include *nriok uchan* (to put up ritual plate), *ngie ubok* (the washing of hand), *nkwuoho agwo mme mbop ufok nduong* (ceremonial occasions and erection of ritual houses).

The first part (*nriok uchan*) of the second burial rites is the ritual that attracts the spirit of the

departed person from hovering about to a place that it could have succor. *Uchan* in Annang language means bowl or plate. The plate in this context is made of baked clay. It is an earthen plate that was used in the early days as kitchen utensils. During second burial rites, the traditionalists use it as a ritual object that could hold water for the wandering soul of the departed to start having a place to rest. When the spot designated for the rite of *nriok uchan* is created, the *uchan* (plate) is placed on the ground. Behind it, an old matchet (*ikwaibom*) is pegged to the ground alongside with bamboo pole. On the top of the bamboo pole, a piece of george cloth is fasten on it. A live stick (*itomo*) is also pinned to the ground with manila hanged on the plate.

After the bereaved family has satisfied the stipulation for the first part of the second ceremony, with a bottle of local gin and palm wine poured into plate and place on the ground, an elderly man representing the traditionalists moves to where the *uchan* is kept. He takes a glass for local gin, fills it with the gin and lifts it up and pours it on the ground (libation). He calls on the name of the departed person to come to where his *uchan* is placed so that his spirit could have rest by helping itself with available ritual objects procured. He also calls the names of the ancestors to partake in the second burial rites so that deceased could be received in their midst after wandering and remaining half way to spirit land for so long. He concludes by saying that the ancestors and the gods of the land should help and strengthens them to complete the other phases of the second burial rites.

*Ngie ubok* (Hand cleansing) as the second phase of the second burial rites is marked by the performance of numerous rituals. One of such rituals is the going of market by masqueraders (*ekpo ika urua ikpo mkpo agwo mkpa*). The masquerades that have striking part to play in this phase are *ntok ekong*, *atat*, *nkemenkeme* and *ekpo*. For the masqueraders to go to the market for second burial ceremony of a departed traditional religionist, his social position is considered. If the deceased was a leader of masquerades (*obong*

*ekpo*) different types of masquerades will attend the market.

When masqueraders are going to market for a second burial ceremony, a ritual goat (male) *ebod urua mkpo agwo mkpa* is provided for them to take to the market. In the market while they leap and frisk about to the place in which one of their members is beating wooden gong, they place their right legs on the goat whose limbs are tied and pass to go back to the home of the celebrant. On reaching the compound of their host, five tubers of yam (*edia urua ikpo*), three jars of palm wine (*atu ukot nwuong ita*), local gin (*afopop*) are added to the ritual goat given for the market trip. After the home display of their feats, they settle down to sip, while the goat is slaughtered and eaten with the yam.

The essence of *Nyie ubok* is for the cleansing of the departed whose hands have been soiled by the event of death. Why the hand is chosen to represent the body is because human beings eat with their hands. So if the hand is dirty, one must clean it before partaking in any meal. In this ritual, fowl and goat are offered to the ancestors and gods of the land. At where the earthen bowl (*uchan mbat*) is kept, the fowl and goat are slaughtered. The blood is allowed to drop on the ground and into the earthen plate. Other ritual objects like kola nut, bitter kola, garden egg, and alligator pepper are cut into pieces and thrown on the spot where the earthen plate is placed. Ground snuff is among the ritual objects thrown. The head and bottom of tubers of yam are cut and placed on the spot as well. The head and tail of dried fish are cut and drop there. To crown this phase of the second burial rites, the traditional priest who officiates the ritual, stands up and begins his incantation. He calls the ancestors of the departed to rise and accept one of them into their midst since his children and relatives have performed his second burial rites.

*Nkwuoho agwo* (memorial service) as the last phase of second burial starts with erection of ritual house (*ufok nduongo*). Miniature house for the departed depicts the social rank of its owner. In Oruk Anam, a person who dies without a wife or children no matter his usual religious elevation is

not accorded the same second burial rites as the one that left behind wives children to mourn for him. Although the person that is childless may die a natural death devoid of any attribute of abnormality, yet there are ritual processes that may be skipped because of his sterility. For instance, the miniature house for the dead person without a wife and a child does not face the road rather it faces the bush. The construction of the ritual house is haphazardly done.

The ritual house has no roof, no walls and decoration is not made. In the place of walls, raffia mats (*nkanya*) are bent in semi-circular formation and pegged in the ground to face the bush. A pathetic sight. Oruk Anam people regard a person who died without a child as *mkpa nchiop eko* (i.e. dead without a heir). As such, befitting funeral rite is denied a person of this group as nobody succeeds him. Nevertheless, the ritual house of a person who lived a successful life and died a good death is in similitude to traditional house of a living traditionalist. The 'shape' of the ritual house has resemblance to human house except the 'size'. The dissimilarity in 'size' stems from the fact that ritual house is for spirit being. It is one of the conditionalities for the departed soul to have a settled life in the land of its ancestors (*awio ekpo*). The frontage of the edifice of a person who died a good death is akin to human abode with the entrance facing the road. The roof and the walls take a normal form but in a miniature style since it is not meant to be resided by human or the dead person but symbolic representation of residential home for the spirit beings.

When the ritual house is ready for use, *nkwuoho agwo* (memorial service) for the departed person begins. In Oruk Anam, *Eritaha* is the market day in which festive occasion occurs. *Nkwuoho agwo* which takes place on *Eritaha* is the last phase in second burial ceremony. It is a day that the bereaved celebrate the departure of one of their members in full swing. As is the case in Oruk Anam cow, goat, fowl, edible stuff and drinks are used to grace the event. After the festivity of the first day of the ceremony in which guests are entertained with drinks, food and music, attention is focused on the

departed person whose ritual is going to be performed in the *ufok nduongo* (ritual house). The next market day *Atim* in the celebration of second burial festival falls in the late afternoon. By this time, the ritual house is decorated in readiness for ritual objects to be packed in.

Ritual objects employ in the second burial rites include small stool and table, hoe, matchet, broom, water pot, cooking pot, bowl, basket, etc. The implication of the listed ritual objects is that the deceased used the objects cited above in his earthly life. Since death has claimed his life from the land of the living and there is continuation of life in the hereafter, those ritual objects mentioned would be of help to him. At market time, gun shots alert both human beings and those in the underworld the conclusive part of the second burial ceremony. The ritual objects kept outside the miniature house are taken into the structure by a traditional priest who is accompanied by other traditionalists. In the frontage of the ritual house, earthen plate kept in a particular spot beforehand is brought and placed on the ground at the frontage of the ritual house. Manilla is hung on it. Behind the earthen plate, a sword (*ikwa ibom*) is pinned to the ground. By now, the ritual house is ready for occupation. (The occupation in this sense is not to be occupied by the spirit of the departed person but rather, fulfilling the condition of the second burial rites). The traditional priest then calls upon the name of the departed person to join his ancestors and peers in the land of the ghost (*awio ekpo*) since its ritual house is built and everything that will aid him to live a successful life in the other world is put in it (Okrok: Oral Interview: 1:01:18).

The last ritual of the second funeral rite comes after a week has elapsed. This involves the removal of the palm fronds used as shed (*ndak uchoro*) and throwing of a male goat over the ritual house (*ntop akpo ebod jak afong akom ufok nduongo*). In Oruk Anam, erection of ceremonial shed for visitors during second burial occasion is not merely to provide temporary shed for human being alone but for the spirits of other dead persons that might come to grace the function. In this wise, if the ritual animal slaughtered during the celebration was a



“cow”, a “goat” would be used to take off the shed. Also, if the second burial attracts only goats in ceremonious performance, a fowl is given to clear the debris of the shed.

The belief that life in the great beyond is the replica of the earthly life obliges husband and wife to live together in the spirit sphere. In this wise, women are not single out in second burial as Oruk Anam believe that a successful man has women by his side. This is perhaps the reason why the ritual house of a bachelor faces the “bush” while that of a married person resembles the real house of an individual with the frontage facing the road. An indication that all is not well with him (a man that does not marry). A man without wives and children suffers damnation in this world and in the hereafter as viewed in Oruk Anam traditional religious believers. As they assert, though the man with wives and children lives felicitous life with his family, a bachelor undergoes pain of solitary life in the spirit land.

### **Recommendation**

From the finding of this study, the researcher is disposed to make the following recommendations:

In this era of cultural renaissance the researcher recommends that the findings of this work be made available in the libraries of Nigerian universities and be accessible to both scholars and students as it will help preserve the rich cultural heritage of African people.

The burying of hair from the genital parts of a widow with the corpse of her late husband is a practice that should be discarded. The belief among the Oruk Anam communities, as we pointed out earlier, is that the dead continues to engage in conjugal relationship with his living spouse despite the demise of the physical body. The genital hair that is tied in a piece of cloth and inserted into the coffin of the departed signifies the marital link between the two partners (the widow and the dead husband). To this end, the researcher feels that such relationship is ambiguous and should be done away with

This work strongly recommends the discontinuity of the aspect of the funeral rites in which youths engage in un-wanton destruction of economic trees and crops, especially in this period of economic recession and hardship. This reckless act of the youths amount to waste and economic sabotage to the owners of such plants and crops. Equally worth discouraging is the violent display by *ekpo* at the burial procession of their member.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study contributes to knowledge in the following ways:

1. This study for the first time has been able to collect and collate data and also attempted an interpretation of the beliefs and practices relating to death and burial rites in Oruk Anam. This is significant especially in this era of accelerated change, when values are fast changing and cultural barriers being broken down by agents and forces of modern change. This study, has therefore, contributed knowledge as it has helped to bring to the knowledge of the academia and preserve for posterity this aspect of Oruk Anam socio-cultural heritage which is at the verge of extinction.
2. In line with our theoretical framework, the data from Oruk Anam have reinforced the assertion of Emile Durkheim and recently collaborated by G. I. K. Tasié (1999) that death destabilizes societal cohesion and that some aspects of the funeral rites are geared towards reuniting society and promote solidarity.
3. This study has contributed to knowledge by bringing to the fore one important essence of Oruk Anam funeral rites, which will enrich scholarship in the area of mortuary rites. Our data have shown that some aspects of the rites are meant to assert life and deny death. So in Oruk Anam funeral we see the deceased being buried yet arrangements are in top gear through some aspects of the funeral rites for the rebirth of the same person the tangible, physical world through

the rite of reincarnation discussed in this work.

### Conclusion

Traditional burial rites of Oruk Anam people are no longer the same as in the olden days due to church activities in the area. Changes have taken place as church goers see the pristine ways of inhuming the dead as uncivilized and deserved to be substituted for modern burial. Interment of the deceased reflects its religious affiliation. Christians bury their dead ones according to their tenets. The rituals that accompany traditional burial in which a dead person could be buried in the forest is frowned upon. Scientific explanation is given uncared human predicament that result in death that hitherto was believed by Oruk Anam to be caused by interdicted contact of profane objects.

Rituals as *uliong agwo mkpa* credited to be cleansing rites are rarely obtainable in Oruk Anam as practicable in the remote past. In recent time, people lie concealed under the guise of Christianity to discard what they term as barbaric ritual. The other aspect of Oruk Anam burial mode that has undergone change is the "second burial" ceremony. Instead of paying heed to second burial, people embark upon "memorial service of their loved ones by availing themselves in the church to supplicate for the spirits of their loved departed kinsmen. That notwithstanding, certain individual to this time carry out second burial rite, it has been markedly altered omitting those sides that have been most animadverted.

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