

Continuity and Change in the Funeral Culture of the Umuna People in Nigeria from Pre-Colonial Times to 2000 A.D.

by

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Abstract

This study seeks to look at the impact of colonialism on the people of Umuna, a sub-unit of the Okigwi axis in southeastern Nigeria, with particular attention paid to the continuity and change that colonial rule wrought on the funeral culture of the people. Evidences gathered via secondary sources were thoroughly analyzed, and primary sources were equally adopted to augment shortfall in secondary sources. The study discovered that funeral practices among the Umuna people, before the coming of the Europeans was strictly in four basic categories which held great cultural significance for the people. Therefore, the study concludes that the Umuna people like others within Igbo society witnessed changes in their traditional funeral practices as they continued to hold to certain key aspects of that culture.

Keyword: funeral culture, Igbo, pre-colonial, Umuna

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Introduction

Burial and funeral practices, the world all over, remains an age long phenomenon, cutting across various societies irrespective of race or geographical location. Funeral practices, as a matter of fact constitute itself a fundamental element of cultural heritage practice by all and sundry from ancient to contemporary times. However, a critical point to note herein would be that in spite of the fact that funeral practices has continually remain a universal common, the patterns by which societies conducted their own prior to colonial intrusion seem variegated (Jefferson & Skinner 1974:78-80) owing to societal belief system passed down from one generation unto another.

Therefore, in a typical pre – colonial Igbo society, funeral practices is taken very seriously based on the belief by the Igbo that it is through proper burial and funeral rites that a spirit is properly sent into the abode of the ancestors where it is culturally assumed that the dead solicit on the behalf of the living in numerous issues of life, especially when the deceased is either a renowned warrior, a well celebrated *ofor* title holder, a chief priest, or even an old man (Okafor 2016 & Achebe 2008: 97). Achebe (2008), in his classic, *Things Fall Apart*, gave a lucid picture of how funeral rites were mostly conducted in a typical pre-colonial Igbo society when he espouses thus:

...now and again a full-chested lamentation rose above the wailing whenever a man came into the place of death...At last the man was named and people sighed 'E-u-u, Ezeudu is dead'...the land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals and also when an old man died, because an old man was very close to the ancestors. A man's life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors. [96-8]

Thus, given the foregone background, the people of Umuna in Okigwi Division prior to the intrusion of colonialism, no doubt, had their own unique ways by which they conducted their own burial and funeral rites whenever a member of their community ascend into the afterlife. Notably, the people of Umuna stratified their funeral practices into four classes as according to legends, a man's dealings and class in life will to a large extent determined his burial and funeral rites when he dies.

Hence, this study seeks to reconstruct a history on the continuity and change that exist in burial and funeral culture among the Umuna people of Okigwi Divison from pre-colonial times to 2000 A.D. The study, however, took a panoramic view on how colonialism and its handmaidens such as missionary activities, western education, among others truncated the rich cultural values of the people and replace them with alien culture. Collaborating the foregone statement, John Origi (2011) avers that:

The changes that have been occurring in Igbo society since the genesis of British imperialism gained greater momentum after the Aro Expedition (1901–1902), when the colonial frontier expanded to encompass entire southeastern Nigeria. [161]

In order to accomplish these goals, the study is divided into six sections to help bring the work to life. The first is the introduction which gives a background to the study. The second section takes a critical examination of the origin, migration and settlement patterns of Umuna people. Whereas the third section reports the trends and patterns of funeral practices in pre-colonial Umuna community. The fourth attempts a survey of how some of the agents of change such as missionary activities, and generally colonial rule affected funeral practice in Umuna community. The fifth brings to bear how funeral ceremony is now practice in post-colonial Umuna. Finally, the last section concludes the study.

Umuna: Origin, Migration and Settlement Patterns

Tracing the origin, migration and settlement patterns of any group of Igbo people have always been an onerous task giving the fact that there exist a paucity in documentary evidences stating sufficient details on the history of the group. These challenges are further exacerbated on the ground that the history of the Igbo people is somewhat shredded in mystery and has prompted a plethora of variegated versions of origin of various Igbo communities. In addition, these complexities have continually remain a very interesting point of debate among scholars of Igbo history. Take for instance, on a broader scale, scholars such as Afigbo, Isichei, Uchendu, among others, have through their various studies posit strongly that a primary core of Igbo origin can be trace to the Niger-Benue confluence area, and Nri-Akwa axes, and Isuama-Orlu-Owerri-Okigwe zones (Okpalaeke & Usoro 2017: 31-40). Their submissions point to the fact that the Igbo people never migrated from the Orient or Egypt as had been suggested by scholars such as G.T Basden and M.D. Jeffereys. These Eurocentric scholars favoured strongly that the Igbo people must have come down all the way from the Orient based on the vast similitudes that exist in their cultural practices, which seem familiar to those found among the Orient dwellers. Afigbo surmised these challenges by stating that studying the history of Igbo people is like attempting to tie sands with a rope (*ibid*).

In spite of these challenges, history has it that Umuna origin can be trace to a man known as Una, whom according to the legend had migrated all the way from Uturu, (Chukwulebe 1956) a community situated in present day Abia state in Nigeria. Up till this day, the people of Umuna and Uturu never inter-marry as they are considered as blood relations (Okpalaeke 2017) often called *Onye Umune*, when translated denotes “My Relation”.

Una was said to have migrated out of Uturu owing to many reasons which chiefly among those reasons was to avoid the incessant quarrels which often more than not brew inter-community wars that came with grave consequences for all and sundry across Uturu in ancient times. In pre-colonial era, Igbo societies, irrespective of the size or location, engaged in series of internecine wars in order to resolve their outstanding disagreements. G.T. Basden (1983) in discussing the frequency of warfare in a typical pre-colonial society avers that:

it was a rare thing for towns to remain at peace for a very long [time], and when quietness did happen to prevail for a time, the spell was broken on the slightest pretext and hostilities began again forthwith...during the dry season, fighting was a sort of pastime, either between different quarters of the same town or between neighboring towns. [202]

Though, it should be noted that the intent of war during that period was never to annihilate or to wrought total destruction on one another, as notice of warfare were announced; and series of negotiations employed to possibly avert war. Should it gets to war, a period when the war should be fought was also set aside in order to prevent famine. Thus, wars were fought mostly during dry seasons and not planting period (Isichei 1976).

Whatever be the case, Una, whom was reported to have been a kind-hearted and peaceful young man, who disdained violence, secretly embarked on a voyage passing through the Imo River after several days of sojourning through wide forest. Una, the key progenitor of present Umuna people, settled down at a remote piece of land in a bid to avoid any sort of inter-tribal conflict which often existed around regions closer to bigger communities which were close to the Imo River. The first land which Una settled down is today referred to as Uhiowere (Chukwulebe 1956:5).

After settling down in Uhiowere, Una in order to survive embarked on agricultural practices such as farming and hunting. He carried out these activities with his crude implements which consisted of clubs, swords, bows and arrows, knives among other items, and he chose *Orie* day as the most suitable for his hunting expedition. Upon realizing his need for a helper, Una took up a wife called Lolo, the daughter of a well-respected man called Agnuhruh Nkwuh, a native of Umulolo. Up till this day, the Umuna people are sometimes called “Umunlolo-Agnuhru-nkwuh,” as traces of relationship between the Umuna people and Umulolo subsist in contemporary times (ibid:6).

Una, together with his wife were blessed with many daughters and four sons. The first son was called Uhi, the second was Ezifoke, the third was Diakuwa and the name of the last son was Mburu. Unfortunately, Mburu died young, leaving no successors behind. Note that it was these four sons of Una that necessitated the native sobriquet “Umuna-Orfor-Anor”. As each *Orfor* belonged to each son. Though, that (*Orfor*) of Mburu who died at a very young age was nicknamed *Orfor Mburu-mburu*, but was later destroyed by white ants. Hence, the children of Una would later fall into three distinct but closely related groups making up the three villages of present day Umuna (Lebeanya et al)

The settlement patterns of Umuna people today is consequent upon the advice given by Una to his three sons who survived him. Una pleaded that they should avoid going close to the highway which was then prone of incessant outbreak of internecine wars. However, Uhi, the first son took after Una’s residence, while Ezifoke, whom had since his youthful ages, shown to be fearless moved outward towards the natural inter-tribal war region. Whereas, Diakuwa move inwards as he found a situated settlement southeastern region on a land beyond and around Efuru River. Years after, the three sons of Una intermarried and thus greatly multiplying the descendants of Una whom are today called Umu-una or Umuna which when translated means the children of Una (Chukwulebe 1956).

In today’s Nigerian society, the people of Umuna are situated in present Onuimo Local Government Area, under Okigwi Senatorial Zone, in Imo State.

Traditional Funeral Culture among the Umuna People in Pre-Colonial Times

Generally, pre-colonial African religion was one that encourage Africans never to dwell too long on the issue of death, as there was no elaborate ideas concerning heaven or hell. However, it was generally believed in African cosmology that there exist life after death. Pointedly, there was the belief system that spirit lives after death, though, joining the ancestors, and so those who die are not sent forth out of the world carelessly and casually, particularly by the bereaved and to a large extent the entire community where the deceased had associated with in his or her life time (Jefferson & Skinner 1974: 78). Thus, after burying the deceased, there was need for a proper funeral in order to make the spirit of the dead find peace as it joins the ancestors.

Commenting of the variety that follows in burial and funeral activities across Igbo society in pre-colonial times, Aneke (n.d) posits thus:

Burial, which is the act of interment of the corpse, and burial rites are variously carried out among the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria. The act of burial and the accompanying burial rites are fraught with varieties among the Nsukka sub-cultural Igbo people. The burial of the elderly ones are carried out differently from those of the young ones and children. The burial of men is quite different from those of women. The burial of the titled ones are also different from those of the ordinary person... [75]

Therefore, burial and funeral ceremony among the Umuna people in pre-colonial era was not so much different from what had been reported by scholars to be in practice then. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of Umuna's burial and funeral performance could be seen in the stratification, which invariably contributed partly to slavery. Specifically, funeral exercise in ancient Umuna was rigidly stratified into four classes. Chukwulebe (1956:28) reported that the first and the greatest was that of an *Ozor*-man whose funeral exercise required nothing short of four human heads in order to properly send the dead into the spirit world where it was presumed that failure to meet up to the required four human heads may spell doom for the entire community (Ibeachu 2011). Historically, the funeral rites of an *Ozor*-man in ancient Umuna society precipitated the purchase and stocking of slaves. The consequences of this act was that after sacrificing such slaves to the idol that the deceased *Ozor* –man was worshipping before his demise, the people of ancient Umuna ensured that these condemned slaves were sequestered and forbidden from all forms of communication with the free born in Umuna which practice lingered for years (*ibid*). In addition, Basden (1983) further espouses the position of human sacrifices during the funeral rite of a great man when he writes that:

For the actual funeral of a king or for the second funeral of a chief it was customary to put to death one or more slaves (*ndi iji kwa ozu*) [those they bury corpse with]...whilst the victims at a funeral are put to death solely to provide attendant spirits to accompany the chief into the great beyond. A King or chief must not enter the spirit world unaccompanied by a retinue. He must have his messenger and personal servant and slaves to attend to his needs, sentinels and so forth. The presence of these slaves will demonstrate his rank and dignity to those with whom he will associate in the spirit world, and he will thus be accorded every mark of dignity and respect. The number of slaves (one or more) who accompanied a chief through the gates of death was determined by the resources of the deceased's estate. The initial stage of the proceedings was common to both a King and a chief, and was as follows: A strong lad of fifteen or sixteen years was selected to act as the messenger and personal servant... [122-128]

Exemplifying the burial and funeral ceremony of an *Ozor*-man in ancient Umuna, the case of Ohi, first chief of Umuna, who was also the first son of Una serves as a case in point. Describing this historic event, Chukwulebe (1956:27) recounts how Uhi, while on his sick bed summoned both friends and relations instructing them to bury him with four heads of fat men during his funeral rites; placing two at his right side and two at the left side. In their quest to satisfied Uhi's death request, his sons dispatched men in search of the required number of heads needed for Uhi's funeral rites. Since, as an *Ozor*-man, he must not be buried without his request being fulfilled. Legends has it that Uhi, was buried according to his request. What this practice entails then was what many have mistaken for cannibalism especially with the coming of western values. Many other regions who fell victim of the practice were quick to have concluded that the people of Umuna in ancient times ate humans, whereas, the humans were used for funeral practices. Achebe (2008) threw more light on the funeral of a chief when he espouses thus:

Ezeudu was a great man, and so all the clan was at his funeral...Ezeudu had been the oldest man in his village...It was a great funeral, such as befitted a noble warrior. Ezeudu had taken three titles in his life. It was a rare achievement. There were only four titles in the clan, and only one or two men in any generation ever achieved the fourth and highest...because he had taken titles, Ezeudu was to be buried after dark with only a glowing brand to light the sacred ceremony. [96-98]

Additionally, during the funeral ceremony of a titled man in ancient Umuna, there was a special ceremony which was performed by the appearance of several masquerades at least twice daily (morning and evening). The number of masquerades to appear daily was largely determined by the number of "umunna," that is to say, the heads of different families constituting the clan. Each head being required to provide one masquerade (Basden 1983:124). What normally follows during this period was beating of drums, shout of assembled company, and drinking and dinning as well as firing of cannons. *Ozor* men were practically laid to rest with rough-planed wood and the funeral place for them were a particular room they earmarked prior to their death. The resources kept behind by an *Ozor*-man in ancient Umuna was almost entire expended in conducting his funeral rites. In very rare cases, there were records of wives being buried alongside an *Ozor* titled man (Chukwulebe 1956:28).

The second type of burial and funeral practice conducted in ancient Umuna, before the emergence of colonial rule had to do with that of a man who had no *Ozor* title but was very much famous owing to many factors, which would include among other factors, his bravery in wrestling, great hunting skills, a fearless accomplished warrior, or even a successful farmer, whose accomplished lifestyle must have had a wonderful effect on the entire community. The funeral of such an individual back then would require only one human head, (*ibid*) unlike that of an *Ozor*-man which required four human head.

Such funeral activities required that the wife (ves) of the deceased be confined to a particular room and often more than not treated with awe and misery for quite a long time; their hair shaved as a sign of long term mourning. Legends has it that during the funeral ceremony of a great man without *Ozor* title, there was a lot of funeral dirges and other cultural performances such as dancing, wrestling or operating of cannons in order to entertain the guest who had come to attend the funeral from both within and outside the deceased's community (*ibid*). A source posits that during the funeral of a great man, the family of the deceased, particularly his elder brother (s) may insist that the wife (ves) swear before the corpse that the death of their brother was because of natural causes and nothing more. Sometimes, this practice was taken too far either by placing a weapon beside the corpse asking him to revenge his death (Chimereze 2017).

The third kind of burial and funeral activity conducted in ancient Umuna was the type specially done for young men and women (Chukwulebe 1956:28-29). Deductively, this was merely a burial practices since the deceased, being a young folk would hastily be buried and there was nothing like a second burial (funeral rites). It was during this kind of burial that lamentation and mourning got to the highest level. Such burial activities was mostly dominated by the youth of the community as well as age-grade members who tumbled themselves around in great sorrow and sometimes broke some bones in their body accidentally. During such ceremony, there were burial songs, dances and very hasty refreshment after the burial (*ibid*).

In addition, the dead, under this category was mostly buried with poor bier made out from palm branches and covered with the poorest quality of a fathom cloth. The foregone is suggestive of the fact that much attention was not paid to the burial ceremony of those whom were neither an *Ozor* title holder, a great man nor even married (Igwe 2017). To a large extent, this is still the practice in most Igbo speaking community as young men and women are hurriedly buried unlike the aged, or chiefs whose impact in their respective community had been felt by all and sundry. Further, the last but not the least in cultural significance was the fourth kind of burial or funeral practices observed in pre-colonial Umuna land. This fourth class dealt with burial and funeral rites that involved women, children, and unclean persons. In order to aid proper understanding of this category, the study will attempt to break further, how women, children and unclean people were buried in those days in Umuna.

First, the burial of children in pre-colonial Umuna was not so much a big event since as a child; the baby was yet to fully incorporate with the community. Aneke captures this position more succinctly when she avers that “children and unmarried young ones are rarely accorded adequate burial and funeral ceremonies and are not accorded ancestral position because of their premature death” (Aneke n.d:40). In the same vein, Talbot reported in his studies of the Igbo people of the southeastern Nigeria that “young and unmarried persons, or one who has no house of his own, the burial takes place in a part of the bush” (Talbot 1969:498). Howbeit, when an adult died, “the grave...is dug in the house where the deceased used to live or in the compound, but for a titled man generally in the house” (*ibid*: 495). The foregone statements vividly captures what transpired among pre-colonial Umuna people.

Moreover, collaborating the foregone positions, Ikwunne as cited in Aneke, espouses the view that when a child dies in pre-colonial Obosi society, the corpse “is thrown into the evil forest after performing some rituals on it” (Ikwunne 2005:87). Going further, Ikwunne (2005) avers that

The death of a youth is also regarded as an abomination. The youth is also buried at the evil forest after some rituals have been performed on him or her. No burial rites, no funeral rites, no shooting of gun, among others for the (deceased) youth. [87]

From the statement of Ikwunne, it is apt to state that this was the trend across most Igbo societies in pre-colonial times of which the Umuna people was a sub-cultural region of Igboland. As among the Ezza people of present day Ebonyi state, was reported have been in the cultural practice of denying their youth a proper burial and funeral rites, rather threw the deceased youths into the evil forest, otherwise known as *Ikirikpo* (Aneke nd:63).

Secondly, the burial and funeral ceremony of women (married) in pre-colonial Umuna took a slightly different approach from that of the men. Although, generally across Igboland, married individuals were placed on a higher pedestal in the society than one who is not married irrespective of their age or wealth. And so, when a married woman dies, she is given full burial and funeral rites of which the unmarried ones do not get to enjoy (*ibid*: 63-4). In pre-colonial Unuma, when a married woman dies, message of her demise is sent first to her people from where she had been married. The messenger could either include the husband (if still alive), and some of the husband’s kinsmen. In a situation where the husband is late, the message is carried by the deceased woman’s first son and daughter along with some of their relatives. While going to the deceased family compound, one was not expected to go such errand on empty hands (Emeziem 2017).

Last but not the least was the burial of unclean bodies. During cases of this nature, in which a dead body has been declared unclean, such a body is speedily disposed in the evil forest. It is intrusive to note that what may constitute unclean bodies included but not limited to: one who committed suicide, one who died in an evil way or as a result of oath-taking, or one who died as a result of having committed a sacrilegious act in the community. Such corpse were treated with great disdain (*ibid*). As in most communities across Igboland, such unclean corpse are deposited in the evil forest and no form of funeral rites were accorded such individual irrespective of his or her age, marriage status or even class in the society. Literally collaborating this position, Achebe (2008) reminded us of how men who committed suicide are treated in a typical Igbo society when he describe the following:

Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo's body was dangling, and they stopped dead. 'Perhaps your men can help us bring him down and bury him' said Obierika. 'We have sent for strangers from another village to do it for us, but they may be long time coming.'... 'why can't [cannot] you bring him down yourselves? 'It is against own custom,' said one of them. 'It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it....' When he [Okonkwo] has been buried we will then do our duty by him. We shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land'. [165]

Collaborating Achebe's position, Isichei as cited in Njoku (2003) puts it this way:

Those unhappy spirits who died bad deaths and lacked correct burial rites cannot return to the world of the living or enter that of the dead. They wander homeless and dispossessed, expressing their grieves by causing harm among the living. [121]

The quotation shows how individuals who committed suicide in traditional Igbo land were treated a scenario not so much different from what was obtained in Umuna during pre-colonial era.

British Expeditions in Umuna and Colonial Interference on Traditional Funeral Culture (1906-1960)

The phrase that 'change is the only constant thing' is not far-fetched when it comes to the degree of interference that colonialism wrought across Igboland of which the Umuna people is an integral part of that experience. To this effect, Hobbs and Blank (1978:76) posit that "culture is continuous because cultural patterns transcend the years, reappearing in successive generations...cumulative because each generation contributes to the reservoir". In addition, that culture is dynamic rather than being static. Nonetheless, while culture is very receptive, tradition remains static.

Though, the earliest contacts made by the Europeans with Igboland came in the mid-fifteen century, but by the turn of the twentieth century, this contact would take a different dimension from the previous as during the wake of the twentieth century, most Igbo communities have fallen under British imperial rule when the Aro hegemon was abruptly brought to an end by the British forces during the Aro expedition of 1901-1902.

Further explaining reasons for British intrusion into Igboland, Origi (2011:151), posits that though British colonialism had earlier been felt within the Oil River Protectorate in late nineteenth century, it was however, during the third period of the 'New Imperialism' that the expansion of Consular authority on the Lower Imo River in the 1890s reached its peak, particularly during the Aro Expedition (1901-19012), when the protectorate administration used modern weapons to colonize Igboland.

The coming of British rule into Umunaland occurred in two expeditions. However, prior to these expeditions, there were various stories of how the British were majestically and victoriously submerging many towns lying in southeastern direction. Some versions of the stories hinted that some batches of European explorers and fighters troops were coming from Orka Aguru, Onicha Ibeku and others from Nzerem. However, the first Umuna expedition took place c.1906, when some crop of British officers finally appeared at *Afor Ezuhu* (the biggest market in Umuna) and pitched their tents all-round the market. British soldiers broke forcibly into Umuna town, but were diplomatically dissuaded from causing havoc. The second expedition saw the British colonial officers pitched their tents this time around at *Nkwo Okwe* (a market for Okwe community) for which they only stayed for just three months. Afterward, the cooperation that existed between the British and Umuna chiefs led to the building of a bridge across Imo River connecting various communities within the Okigwi area. The British developed many areas and settled within Umuna for a very long time before moving into Okigwi where they established their headquarters. Thus, from 1914, after the amalgamation process, many chiefs were trained and made viable for indirect rule system introduced by Frederick Lugard (Chukwulebe 1956:31).

Colonial intrusion into Umuna came along with agents of change such as western education, missionary activities, modernization, among others, which all influenced greatly on the overall cultural heritage of Umuna society in almost every aspects. However, the focus of this study will be on ravelling the impact these colonial instruments have on the traditional funeral culture of Umuna people and what is still in continuity even in post-colonial era. Upon establishing British influence in Umuna and its environs, the agents of change, particularly the missionaries began to spread their tentacles across every communities within Okigwi division. Though, the missionary, unlike the British explorers and troops, applied a more subtle way of persuasion and conviction rather than expedition and conquering. Some of the prominent centers where the missionaries settled in those days were called Adazi, Aguleri, Orzouburu, Ikpagu and later at Uturu; all clergymen then were mostly from the Roman Catholic Missionary (R.C.M) (ibid).

It should be noted that the influence of missionary activities back then went hand-in-hand with western education. Thus, within a short while the R.C.M had settled in Uturu, it was only a matter of time before Umuna and her neighbours started to experience the western lifestyle which was being propagated via western education. Upon request for a church, and possibly a school, the Rev. Father in charge (at Adazi) gave the people of Umuna a teacher called Mr. Albert Ikpagu, and a church was situated on a piece of land known up till this day as the Catholic Church Umuna Ezeala.

Around 1923, the Rev. Father in charge of Uturu Diocese decided that a school should be erected in the Catholic Church in Umuna Ezeala (*ibid*:33).The establishment of the school brought a great change in perception of Umuna culture owing to the fact that most of those pupils who attended began to be exposed to western values. The first set of boy to be schooled in Umuna included but not limited to Albert Odemenam, Pius Azubike, Sabastian Okparaeke, Michael Okparaeke, Josiah Emeziem, Andrew Okoroigwe, among others (*ibid*). Thus, many of these young men, whom would have upheld the funeral culture of Umuna people, became those who started to be indifferent towards an age long practice (burial and funeral rites). Those who started to attend the Whiteman school and church began to gradually but persistently rebuff a tradition that has been sustained for years.

Unfortunately, as time flies by, the pattern of burial and funeral rites in Umuna began to be replaced with new ideologies owing to colonial intrusion. However, this is not suggestive of the fact that Umuna people entirely eroded everything that makes their traditional funeral culture unique. Nevertheless, one cannot asserts strongly that the people of Umuna have held unto what was practiced by their progenitors verbatim. In light of these changes, and what continue to exist, Ekwegh (2018) avers, “we would only be liars if we say that colonial intrusion into our communities have not changed so many aspects of our life”. Undoubtedly, this position espoused by Ekwegh would seem to be the reality of things across Igboland. As in contemporary times, most communities, not just within the milieu of the Igbo practices, but across other ethnic groups where colonial vestiges are very much present, the people it would appear have lost a significant essence of their cultural heritages just like in Umunaland.

Further, with western education and missionary campaigns all across Umuna, the issues of human sacrifices during the funeral rites of chiefs ended as it was replace with the use of animals (most especially cow or goat, among others). In addition to the instrumentality of western education and missionary campaigns was the fact that the slave trade which hitherto had been a source for acquiring humans meant for conducting such funeral rites and other sacrifices had been greatly abolished and further given a knockout when the Aro hegemon fell to the Imperial British troop in 1902 (Origi 2011:161 & Chukwulebe 1956:25-6). Hence, burial and funereal rites in Umuna assumed a new dimension owing to colonialism and its handmaidens – western education, missionaries, among others.

Continuity in Funeral Culture of Umuna People, 1960-2000

It should be noted that in spite of colonial influence on the traditional funeral culture of the Umuna people, there still exist to a large extent a great element of their pre-colonial funeral culture found in their post-colonial funeral practices. Put differently, it would appear based on evidences that colonialism and its change agents did not altogether erode all that constituted pre-colonial funeral rites among the Umuna people. Affirming this position, Iwuchukwu F. (2018) posits that:

While it is common knowledge that colonialism brought about so many changes in the cultural heritages of the Igbo people, there is no way one can deny the fact that some elements of Igbo traditional cultural heritages survived to this day. Otherwise, how can one explain the fact that the Igbo people still observe the tradition of libation, Igba Nkwu [traditional marriage], Ekwa ozu [second burial], among others.

Therefore, in the case of the Umuna people, certain funeral culture have continued to exist up to contemporary times. Howbeit, with slight variation. In present day Umuna society, burial and funeral practices still continued to be a vital element of the people's cultural heritage as it were in pre-colonial days. As a matter of fact, just like there were first and second burial (funeral rites initiations) in pre-colonial period, so is it in post-colonial Umuna.

Also, just like in pre-colonial Umuna society where funeral culture was basically split into four major categories, the people of Umuna still practice a system of stratification in funeral rites as the funeral rites accorded a titled man or woman is not the same as what is accorded a youth or unmarried fellow. For that of a titled man, unlike in pre-colonial times when humans were required for successful funeral rites, certain animals are used. More often than not, should a chief or an aged fellow (be it male or female) dies in Umunaland, the funeral customs of the land would demand that either a goat or a cow be used. The use of cow or goat largely is determined by what the deceased had used in burying his own father or mother, which will help his or her children, decides which to use for the funeral rites. This simply establish a historical fact that there subsist some continuity in the funeral culture of the Umuna people (Ekwegh 2018).

Another aspect of continuity in Umuna's funeral culture could be spotted vividly in the area of passing a message across to the family member of a deceased married woman. In other words, when a woman whom have been married from some other places in Umuna dies, her husband (if alive) or children takes the sad message of her demise to her people. This errand just like in pre-colonial times is not to be run on empty hands, as the messengers are by law required to embark on their journey with a goat and some drinks. This practice was in existence back then, and still exists until date (*ibid*).

Further, another funeral practice that has continued to thrive in Umuna despite colonial interference is the belief that there is life after death. Although, this time around, the people of Umuna, upon coming in contact with Christianity through missionary activities changed their perception on where the spirits of the dead transit into (Igwe 2017). In pre-colonial era, the people held strongly to the view that their dead ones enters into the abode of the ancestors, whereas, after their contact with the missionary and Christian faith, they began to dwell so much on death and elaborate further on heaven and hell (*ibid*). So, it would appear that their perception on life after death changed from the abode of the ancestors to heaven or hell. This is without doubt a form of continuity.

Conclusion

The study has shown that burial and funeral practices is no doubt an age long cultural practice that cuts across the length and breadth of Igboland. The study is deemed important as it established a historical fact that the people of Umuna in Okigwi division had prior to the coming of colonial rule conducted a unique pattern of funeral culture in which there existed four categories. While the first category dealing with titled men (*Ozor* titleholders) would be seen to have required human sacrifice, for which the Umuna people in ancient times believed would help the spirit of the deceased pass into the abode of the ancestors as well as provide the necessary assistance for the deceased, the other three categories never required human sacrifices.

However, with the coming of colonialism, an age-long funeral practice would come to an abrupt end owing to a clash of civilization aided by colonial handmaidens such as western education, missionary activities, among others. In spite of these interferences, the study espouses the view that while they may have been significant changes on how Umuna people conducts their burial and funeral rites, there exist a continuity in many aspects. For example, titled men are not buried the same way a non-titled man or woman would be buried; neither would a child nor youth be accorded full funeral rites nor an unclean corpse considered being buried.

In sum then, the study concludes that while colonial rule may have had great impact on the cultural practices of most Igbo communities of which Umuna is an integral part of, the people of Umuna still retains most, if not all of her cultural heritages as long as funeral culture is concerned.

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