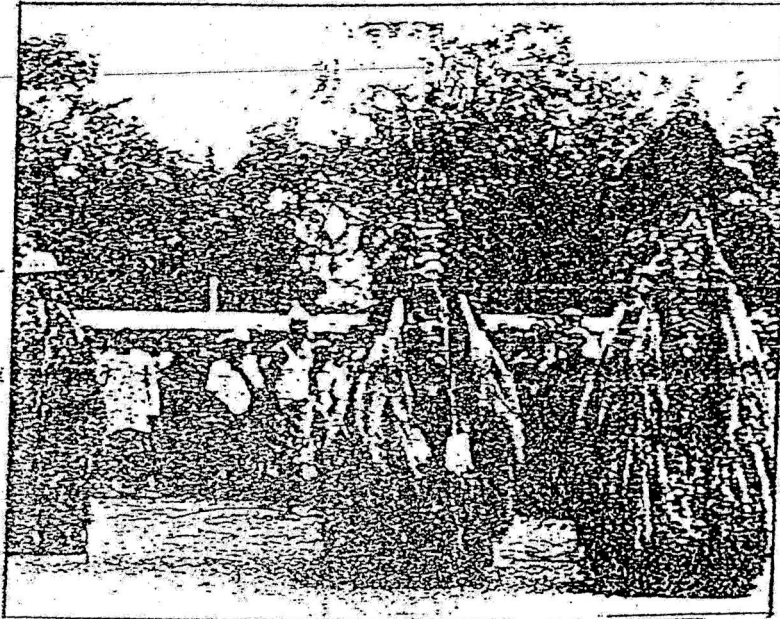


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CHAPTER ELEVEN

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN IBIBIO MORTUARY RITES

Dr. I.V.O. Modo and P.A. Essoh

ABSTRACTS

The Ibibio people are one of the ethnic groups that live in the South Eastern flank of Nigeria. They constitute the most dominant factor in the present Akwa Ibom State.

In terms of linguistic classification, the Ibibio are classified under the Benue-Congo sub-group of the Niger-Congo family of languages. The most authentic tradition of migration of the Ibibio is with reference to the Uruan Inyang Atakpo people said to have migrated from Usak Edet in the Camerouns. Presently, the Ibibio constitute one of the five major ethnic groups in Nigeria and the population is estimated to be 1,328,330 people (1991 census). The Ibibio live in village clusters made up normally of lineages and these lineages live in compounds of extended families.

Our attempt has been to analyse, using the tools at our disposal, one of the most important social rites every living Ibibio must undergo when he dies irrespective of class or creed. While he is alive and active, every Ibibio strives to attain the greatest honour of acquiring titles. The 'ideal man' is a Chief, who belongs to different cults. The ideal man is also one who lives long enough to see his descendants to the third generation.

Burial rites, in Ibibio culture, is regarded as an occasion to honour the 'ideal man' where he would be properly situated in the land of the dead and wish this 'ideal man' to come back as the same achieving person when re-incarnated. The Ibibio are impatient with those who fall short of their 'ideal man' concept.

The mortuary rites therefore can only be understood if the symbols that give meanings of the social actions are clear. Our main thesis is that the Ibibio mortuary rites are based on the idea of social justice and equity. Each dead is rewarded for being an example of what is desirable or denied certain honours in order to prevent a repeat of the displayed life pattern in his re-incarnation.

Introduction

As a people, the Ibibio are one of the ethnic groups living in the South-Eastern flank of Nigeria. They constitute the most dominant ethnic group in the present Akwa Ibom State. The Ibibio ethnic group falls within latitude 7°25' and 5°30' North and longitude 7°30' and 8°30' East. It is bounded by Arochukwa and Ngwa Igbo to the North-West where Obot Nme and Ikpe Ikot Nkoi people in the present Ibi Local Government Area occupy; Ekoi to the direct North in the present Calabar Senatorial District of Cross River State, Ijaw to the West and South West where the Andonis of Eastern Obolo in the present Ikot Abasi Local Government Area; to the East is a common mountainous border with Western Cameroun and to the South is bounded by the Bight of Bonny.

In terms of linguistic classification, the Ibibio are classified under the Benue-Congo sub-group of the Niger-Congo family of languages (Ihekweazu, 1985). The most authentic tradition of migration of the Ibibio is with reference to the Uruan Inyang Atakpo people - a sub-group of the Ibibio though with their distinctive cultural features - who are said to have migrated from Usak Eder in the Camerouns. Presently, the Ibibio constitute one of the five major ethnic groups in Nigeria whose population is estimated to be 1,328,330 people (1991 Census). The Ibibio people live in compounds of extended families. A village has several of these extended family compounds. Anthropologically, a number of related villages (Oduk) make up the Clan (Essien). The Ibibio social functions take place under the auspices of the clan structure which is regarded as the largest grouping.

Our attempt here is to try to analyse, using the tools at our disposal, one of the most important pre-colonial social rites every living Ibibio must undergo when he or she dies, irrespective of class or creed. While he is alive and functionally active, every Ibibio strives to attain the greatest honour of acquiring titles. The 'ideal man' is a Chief, who belongs to different cults like Ekpe (Uruan Iboku, Oku Iboku, Itu urban), Ekpo (Oku Uyo, Ofot Uyo, Ibesikpo, Ikono, Nsit, Iman, Ubium, Itam, Okon Eket, Eket, Awa, Oniong, Ibiono, Mkpai Enin, Ikot Abasi, etc.), Ekpong (Ibiono, all of Ibibio). The 'ideal man' is also one who lives long enough to see his descendants to the third generation.

In the Ibibio culture, burial rite is regarded as an occasion to honour

the 'ideal man' where he would be properly situated in the land of the dead (known in the Ibibio dialect as Obio Ekpo) and wishing this 'ideal man' to come back as the same achieving person when re-incarnated.

The Ibibio are impatient with those who fall short of their 'ideal man' concept. Such are treated shabbily and with disdain in the hope that they will be better when re-incarnated, for, the Ibibio belief in re-incarnation is as incontrovertible as among the Jews in life after death.

The mortuary rites can only be understood if the symbols that give meanings to the social actions are clear. Turner (1959) Rosman and Rubel (1989) assert that analysis of symbols deals with the meaning of things in a culture - the meanings of words, the meanings of actions and the meanings of objects.

Objectives

The central theme that runs through the paper is the Ibibio mortuary rites are based on the ideal of social justice and equity. Each dead is rewarded for being an example of what is desirable or denied certain honours in order to prevent a repeat of the displayed life pattern in his re-incarnation. It is further believed that in the culture of the Ibibio that the voice of the people is also the voice of the collective dead ancestors.

It will be explained later how the honour done to the dead (Nme Mbukpo) is accepted in the land of the dead or world beyond (Obio Ekpo) and this helps to situate the dead properly in Obio Ekpo (the world beyond or land of the dead).

Beside the above, the objectives of this paper are mainly to

- (i) describe the Ibibio mortuary rites
- (ii) explain the social justice in the rites and
- (iii) attempt an explanation of the effects of such rites on social justice, social functions and social order.

The chapter is the outcome of interviews conducted by the authors with four research assistants in four local government areas of Akwa Ibom State. The Ibibio people are believed to have a common culture with little variations here and there throughout Ibibio land. In this study, we decided to choose four out of 14 Ibibio speaking local government areas of Akwa Ibom State. As far as possible, we selected four local government

areas that are far enough from each other in order to allow room for little variations in culture to be seen or felt. In each local government area, a minimum of two villages were involved. They are as follows:-

- (i) Nung-Obong and Ikot Ukap ye Ireto Nsit in Nsit Ubium L.G.A.
- (ii) Ikot Odiong and Idung Udofa in Eket L.G.A.
- (iii) Oku Iboku and Ikot Ayan Itam in Itu L.G.A.
- (iv) Afaha Oku, Atan Offot and Afaha Etok Ibesikpo in Uyo L.G.A.

The research assistants were instructed specifically to go to village Heads and members of the Village council for information. Others interviewed included Church Leaders who are believed to hold contrary views about the dead and the Youth Leaders in each Village who may be influenced by other methods of disposing of their dead. The study was carried out between June and December, 1995. About ten persons were interviewed in each of the nine villages in the four local government areas under our study.

THE IBIBIO MORTUARY RITES

Among most Southern Nigerian tribes, the proper carrying out of the burial ceremonies is the most important duty in life. Unless a person is buried with the due ceremonies, it is thought that he will be unable to go to 'heaven' and will therefore wander about desolate (Talbot, 1926: 469-470).

The funeral ritual is the most potent symbol of the actual life pattern expected of the Ibibio. There is an abrupt break in social relationship when someone dies. The dead is however most often believed to have gone on a journey. The mortuary rites are performed in order to facilitate his smooth arrival at his destination (Obio Ekpo) and to pave a way for his return (reincarnation) into this world. The rites further serve the functions of re-ordering the society to enable the living replace the departed in those societal activities that must be carried out as an on-going process in the Ibibio society. Since life and living are seen as an on-going process, the Ibibio believe in a transcendental link between the dead and the living. Thus life is seen as a cycle of endless chain of activities in both worlds -

world of the living and of the dead.

This belief is typified in the table below:

Table 1: Status change from the living to the dead.

The Living	The Dead	Status of the Dead
1. Chiefs	Chiefs	Spirits
2. Chief's wife	Chief's wife	
3. Ordinary (free-born) citizens	The dead youths, (death through pregnancy; bad diseases, etc.)	Ghosts
4. Stranger elements	Servants	Spirits
5. Slaves	"	"

Source: Pieced together after Interview

The Death of a Chief

In Ibibio land, the central goal of every individual is to live a respected life, attain the highest chieftaincy level and die at a very old age, leaving behind sons and daughters of repute in at least two generations. There are however different kinds and categories of chiefs. We have the family chief, who becomes family head by virtue of the principle of primogeniture; we have also the Village chief, who becomes village head, coming as he does from a ruling family and through the consensus of all the family heads and village council. We also have the Clan Chief who is designated in governmental parlance as the Group Head or Clan head, who himself as a Village head, becomes the choice of other Village Heads that make up the Clan. Besides, there are Chiefs of Cults such as Ekpo (Obong Ekpo) that is the masquerade chieftain; Ekpe (Etubom or Obong Ekpe), etc. The family chief, village chief and clan chief must of necessity and requirements of his office be an initiate of all available cult groups in his cultural world. With reference to the Ibibio land, the chief with the highest traditional title is the Oku Ibom - who is the most revered just like the Obong of Calabar. The last of the Oku Ibom of Ibibio land was His Royal Highness Thompson Akpabio and the last Paramount Ruler of what was Eket L.G.A. now Uquo Ibeno, Eket and Onna with Onna being actually where he hailed. It

is only proper and just that such a Chief who has accomplished all earthly responsibilities should be accorded dignified transition rite so as to facilitate and enhance the assumption of his rightful position in the land of the dead (Obio mbukpo/obio ekpo).

On the death of the Chief, all efforts were made by his relations, next-of-kin and close associates to get him buried within three days. Since the embalming technology was rudimentary, the body was guaranteed for just about three days. Lemon grass was pounded and rubbed round the body after it had been sprayed with the local gin - 'khaikhai'. Some others did not worry about embalming the body. They used cotton wool to block the nostrils, the mouth and the ears in order to prevent unpleasant odour from oozing out. Lemon grass was constantly burned on fire in the room where embalment is conducted in order to prevent flies from coming into the room.

The information given to people concerning the Chief was either that he went on a far distant journey or that he was indisposed and would not want to entertain visitors; or that it was necessary to allow a free atmosphere for the Chief's burial. There was also the need to prevent evil people from knowing the site for the burial which was either in the Chief's bedroom or the thick bush beside the house. This secrecy was necessary for some reasons, for example, it was believed that wicked men could perform certain rites on the grave to prevent him from re-incarnating and coming back to contribute again to the development of his place as he had done in the 'present' lifetime. If he was a powerful chief, medicine men would want to visit the grave, take some sand there to prepare some medicine which would make them as powerful as the chief. They could even attempt to exhume the body for ritual purposes.

Additionally, by distracting the attention of the community from his death, certain rites that ought not be denied him by virtue of his position could be better performed. For instance, he needed assistants in the land of the dead (obio ekpo/obio mbukpo). Hence, all lonely paths had to be combed in order to trap unsuspecting stranger elements who would be buried along with the chief as personal assistants. About two of his active slaves would also 'go with him' to serve him in obio ekpo. In addition, the most loving of his wives would be prepared to accompany him since he was to assume his full status at obio ekpo (see Table above).

After the Chief had been given a cold bath, to allow him full rest, he was rubbed with calmwod and other traditional ointment including vegetable dye. He was then clad in his best wears, and tied up in a mat or in woyen palm fronds or raffia palms and lowered into a deep grave that was heavily congested with his personal assistants. The relatives and other lesser chiefs would emerge with smiling faces after this burial for the simple reason that the dead chief had been given his due regard.

The Official or Open Burial

The death of the Chief was announced days after he had been traditionally buried. The announcement was to come only after the immediate and extended family members had prepared properly. This preparation was necessary since as a great chief, he had belonged to different societies and cults while alive. Each cult chief would pay homage and respect to their departed leader with gifts while the family had the obligation to entertain such cult members. Such burial rites lasted between 4-6 weeks depending on the number of associations he belonged. In the case of Oku Ibom, he belonged, of necessity, to all. Soon after the death was announced, wailing and weeping rent the air. Relatives, wives, servants and slaves would naturally weep aloud.

The Chief Mourner (Akpan Ufok Ikpo)

The first son (Akpan) of the deceased was the central figure in such mortuary rites. All attention was focused on him and all responsibilities fell on him. He became the yardstick for measuring the level of success of his departed father. He however was often assisted by close lineage members - his junior siblings and cult members who were anxious to see to the success of the rites of passage accorded the chief. All information and messages emanated from him and his associates to all groups that his deceased father had belonged while alive to the effect of the death of his father. Such information or message was usually accompanied with some gifts such as goats, khaikhai, yams, palm wine for consumption by such groups before their decision as to their role during the final transition rites.

The death of the Chief was an occasion for great joy. The children, led by the senior son cum Chief Mourner, were always well dressed. Cooking

was centrally done to serve all and sunny throughout the period of the 'celebration'. A giant-sized pot ('abang isong') of palm wine was centrally placed and constantly topped for the entertainment of visitors. The first son or Chief Mourner was held responsible and accountable for all ceremonies connected with the proper burial rites of the Chief. The celebration featured performances by cultural troupes such as Ekpo, Obo, Atar Ibom, Akpa Akpa Ekpo, Ebre dancers, amongst others. Firing of dane guns was done at intervals and, more especially, in the evenings when it would sound and inform the people far and near, of the movement of the great Chief to the land of the dead (obio mbukpo/obio ekpo) where he was to be well received. For such a Chief, death was a permanent journey to the land of the dead to take his final place of honour for all his achievements on earth. He would later re-incarnate into the world again - this time, to encourage others and to relive his former glorious life. Some cults could confer Chieftaincy title on the first son or Chief Mourner after a successful burial of his father.

The First Daughter (Adiaha Ufok Ikpo)

Another key element or figure in the mortuary rites was the first daughter. She sat in the general mourning room throughout the funeral period with other women who co-mourning the Chief. She had her bath very early every morning and very late every night throughout the duration of the mourning period. She was decorated with white clay (Ndom) and red clay (Iduot) all over her body and feet, respectively. She received gifts from people, received visitors and replied to enquiries. She never strayed away from the house, and before moving even to the next room, she left her wrapper on the mat as an indication that she was very much around. She used dry fish torn into pieces and soaked in oil to entertain visitors. Early every morning, as a mourning rite, she and other women would cry in commemoration of the dead and extolled his sterling qualities, till the eve of the burial proper and during the final rite of passage and committal to mother earth.

The eve of the final rite of passage and committal to mother earth was always set aside as the Vigil Night - which is a very important event in burial arrangements in Ibibioland. Relatives and sympathisers, cult groups,

etc, etc; kept vigil, singing traditional songs and recounting the achievements of the deceased. At this occasion, many are attracted to the scene especially young men and women in the hope that a union between opposite sexes would result or facilitate the deceased's rebirth.

Folding of Mourning House

The most significant event to mark the mortuary rites was the visit to the market. Market houses the living and the dead. It was believed that some spirits and ghosts joined human beings in buying and selling at the market. Market was, therefore, the ideal place to announce the end of the burial. The spirits around would also carry the information that would facilitate the final placement of the Chief in Obio Ekpo. The Chief Mourner led the group to the market in procession of dancers and drummers. The first daughter with 'ndom'-rubbed-over her body, would carry a bamboo basin containing a red cock, a goat, yam, etc. which she prepared for consumption in the market. The appearance in the market, for the dead chief, was a declaration to the living and the dead that the chief had been duly honoured. The return journey from the market was marked with great rejoicing. Gun shots were fired, trumpets blown while all danced.

At the end, plantain stem, shaped and decorated, representing the dead chief, was buried inside a coffin in front of the house. The head of the goat, cock, etc. earlier slaughtered in the market were deposited on the grave as a sign of fulfilling all rites of passage in respect of the departed chief, to give room for any positive step towards replacement.

The Cult Hut (Nwomo)

Every chief of the highest grade 'Oku Ibom' was expected to belong to all cult groups as earlier alluded to by virtue of his position. Originally, the graveyard of 'Oku Ibom' in Ibibioland is regarded very highly. Such a grave is marked and identified with white cloth securely pegged over the centre. The Ekong cult's practice of 'Nwomo' was a special hut erected near the Chief's grave. Nwomo was a hut to accommodate the spirit of the dead man. The house contained the deceased's favourite belongings such as drinking calabash (ukpok), climbing ropes (Ikpo), tools. Ekong cult's 'nwomo' is triangularly shaped. Nwomo is a special hut that satisfies the

yearnings of the dead to visit his people. As a mortal being he lived in the physical house but as a spirit, the old house was no longer suitable. He needed this 'nwomo' where his spirit was specifically prepared for - both through prayers and incantations. It needs however be stressed further that every action, word or object used so far had its symbolic meaning and relevance in the Ibibio mortuary rites.

The Mortuary Rites of Cult Chiefs

Cult members had their peculiar way of burying their dead members. If for example, he was a member of the Warnor Cult (Ada Ubong), he would not be embalmed and his death was equally unannounced. He was buried in the night, a few hours after his death, after a series of sacrifices including the slaughtering of goats, red cock, dog, tortoise. The rituals included pouring of libation by using khaikhai to invoke his soul to a respectable resting place. The ability to ascertain or believe that the soul was resting created confidence among cult members.

The Ekong cult members had also their peculiar and unique symbolic test for acceptability of members by their dead counterparts. The corpse was usually installed on a chair in a room whose roof had been partially cut away. A goat was slaughtered and placed under the legs as footstool while a gong (ekere) was affixed to his left hand. Round the right wrist, a long strip of white rope was tied. This was fixed to the roof beam and also to the thigh of a life cock. Whenever the cock moved, the 'ekere' struck and it appeared as if the dead man was hitting the gong. On hearing the sound, people rejoiced. The meaning was that the chief had entered successfully into the spirit's world and had assumed his rightful position as a chief. Again, in the grave, Ekong members lay flat back while their right arms were raised or stretched up at right angles to the body. The meaning of the action was that the hand pointed the way back to life. It made re-incarnation and the spirit's visit at the 'nwomo' very easy.

Social Justice

All these anxieties being expressed through the burial rites only reinforce the belief that it was only proper, just and good, that a man who had made inputs into life should on his death be well situated in the land of the dead as a reward.

This theme is better understood as we go through the burial rites of other compeers who were regarded as having contributed very little or nothing to the development of the society. It must be stated from the onset that life's achievements, the age at death, place and manner of death - determined whether a person had been a blessing to humanity and should therefore be buried properly in order to allow him his proper place at obio-ekko and a chance to reincarnate as his usual self. The manner of death could show that one was a curse to humanity. It was therefore assumed that the gods and ancestors had rejected the person. It was only part of justice that such a dead body be repudiated and rejected through the manner of its disposal. This was also a warning to him to choose a proper and normal way of re-incarnating and conforming with the goals of the society in his subsequent coming. A few of these examples discussed under bad death are necessary to sustain this argument.

Bad Deaths

The first of the bad deaths considered here is that caused by the idol 'mbiam'. 'Mbiam' is an idol whose appearance is in liquid form and at times muddy in nature. It could afflict someone if it is directed by an enemy. It was believed also that an innocent individual who was after the progress of all, might not be inflicted with a deadly disease like 'mbiam', no matter how hated by others. Its disease manifested through the swellings of the body especially the stomach. It was a disgraceful death. The people believed that anybody inflicted with the 'mbiam' disease was guilty of one crime or the other against the land.

Special rituals were therefore performed to clean up the land. The dead body was punished in the process in order to appease the idol and to stay back its hands from relatives and the re-incarnation of the culprit. The dead body was dissected into parts and buried during the night in a boundary between two junctions. This was a way of disowning the corpse because the body could not claim to belong to any of the two pathways. Another option was to bury the body in the evil forest. Such a forest was meant for the burial of the rejected and abominable. Such treatments were meant to warn the living to resist the ways of life exhibited by the dead. The relatives of the dead man were forbidden to cry in order that the anger of 'mbiam' might not descend on them. The saying goes

The gods reject him

The land rejects him

The evil forest is forced to accept him!

Indeed people who performed this burial have to ritually wash their hands off the evil or the calamity before coming out of the bush.

Another bad death was that through child birth. The belief was that the woman who died during child birth must have been evil. Either she was unfaithful to the husband or was so rewarded by the gods of the land for her evil ways, - witchcraft, wickedness of different forms. Such a woman was operated upon and the child brought out and buried while the woman herself was tied to a tree with pointed objects - piercing her body. Incantations were pronounced on her in order to prevent her from re-incarnating - for the community would not want a repeat of that event again in future.

Death through drowning was also abominable. Such dead bodies took about three days to re-emerge to the surface. Some concoctions were made and incantations said, after which the grave was dug in the mud near the river. The corpse was normally buried without a coffin. The incantations were meant to stop the dead from re-incarnating with the same bad destiny to cause sorrow once more for the family.

One death considered very disgraceful to any Ibibio household was that of dying by suicide. This type of death was dreaded and taken seriously in Ibibio land. The mystery behind the death was discovered through divination and after that the body was burnt. This treatment was to serve as a deterrent to those contemplating death through such means or act. Also, certain sacrifices were offered by the family to prevent a recurrence. The dead would certainly re-incarnate in a better form and destiny, since his previous evil body had been gutted by fire.

Another disgraceful death was one through adultery especially since two people (or families) were involved. The sin of adultery was very heinous. There was a spirit that took vengeance against the adulterers called 'Ekpo Nka Owo'.

If a married woman committed adultery with a man, she must confess quickly before the spirit would arrest and kill her. If she died of adultery, the ekpo masquerade came at night to carry the body away, with no

physical trace of the grave. In most instances, the unconfessed adultery affected the husband of the woman. His hairs would begin to fall off day after day until his head became bald. If the woman did not confess to the husband, and the husband confessed to the land on behalf of his wife, he might die ignominiously and the ekpo cult would decide on what to do with his body. The force with which punishment was meted out on the dead body of the culprits by the community was a significant enough warning to the body and its spirit never to reincarnate with the destructive spirit it had before. These accidental deaths and deaths resulting from heinous sins were inimical to the welfare of the community. Some of the dead must be stopped from re-incarnating while others were purged of their evil plans before being allowed to re-incarnate.

Death of the Aged

Unlike those who died abominable death, the death of the aged - man or woman - was an occasion for joy. The aged were the favourites of the ancestors and were closer to them than any other group. Many of those aged had a slight idea of when their deaths would be. They will therefore proceed to make their burial arrangements in advance. Such deaths were buried in a bamboo made coffin and inside the room or outside. The head and feet were exposed, as both ends of the coffin, were never covered. People would be seen crying and mourning and wishing him safe return to earth again.

A dead old woman's household utensils - pots, plates, cutlerys, etc; were buried along with her. She needed such pots, etc; in order to be able to resume cooking once settled at obio ekpo; to prevent her from starving. For the man, a small hut - 'nwo' - was erected near the grave. In the hut were handy property the man could easily require to start life in obio ekpo. Such a man took his own time to re-incarnate for it was known that he would come back to bless his people as in his previous coming.

It would be necessary here to contrast the treatment or honour done to the matured dead with that of the child. A dead child that was a day to about a week old was wrapped with banana leaves and put in a pot. A hole was made at the bottom of the pot; while the pot was placed inside an anthill. The meaning of all these was that the child had been rejected but

was wished a speedy return with better destiny. The banana leaves were significant in the sense that culturally the little banana ought not to die before its mother. The pot stood in for the request for the potter (gods) to remake the child while the anthill stood for consistency whereby a child would always come as a child and not as another thing. Sympathisers were closely monitored during such rites in order to prevent any foul play on the family. For instance, if an enemy tied two separate plants together across the path to the burial site, the child was blocked from coming back.

Some children however, were at times rejected in their families outrightly. If a particular child was observed to have come and gone several times (re-incarnation) as a child, such a dead body (child) would be dissected and buried. The burial of the dismembered parts was to prevent it from coming back again. If a child of about a year old died, it was buried in the bush in a coffin made of plantain stem. It was wished speedy re-incarnation but reminded that like plantain, it should not die again earlier than its parents. There were young boys and girls who died at the prime of their lives (between 20 and 40 years). They were evil and heartaches to their parents. They died mysteriously. Some of them were very rich. Their ghosts were believed to be hovering around for their property. In Ikot Ukap ye Itreto Nsit and their neighbours, such dead were burnt to ashes as a lesson to others.

Conclusion

--The Ibibio, like other ethnic groups in Nigeria, have their societal goals in life, which every member strives to achieve. Every body is encouraged to be orderly, marry, reproduce, accumulate wealth and obtain/attain the highest title of the land and die at old age. Justice demands that anyone who perverts these societal goals, through anti-social behaviour such as adultery, fornication, stealing, early deaths, death from curses, etc. etc., be punished whether alive or dead, as a lesson to others.

The Ibibio mortuary rites are occasions for rewarding the dead who fulfilled their destiny on earth, dishonouring those who fought against the noble goals of the society and encourage those who were on course but could not fulfil their destiny.

Certain changes have however taken place of recent within the Ibibio

mortuary rites - as a result of the acceptance of the christian doctrines by many Ibibio leaders and the need to respect the fundamental human rights of people as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and as emphasized by the United Nations Organizations. For those families that embrace christianity, the death of children, pregnant mothers, youths, etc. are regarded as the work of the devil. They bury such dead with coffin and request God Almighty to grant them the fortitude to bear the irreparable loss. Even those who insist on the Ibibio cultural methods of disposing such dead are gradually succumbing to modern ways of burying the dead around the homes or cemeteries in a well made coffin.

On the burial of a dead chief along with some slaves, strangers and the chief's favourite wife (wives), the government now protects the fundamental human rights of every citizen including rights to life. Besides, no person nowadays would allow his mother, niece, daughter to be buried along with a dead simply because she was a beloved wife. For those who insist on the fulfilment of the traditional mortuary rite, and who believe that unguarded strangers could be captured for such rites, they would be charged for murder if apprehended for such an act which is now a criminal offence under the Rule of Law in Nigeria.

The treatments given to the dead as exemplified by discriminatory or preferential burial rites have gone a long way in helping to institute order in the Ibibio society. People follow the forms and values religiously in order to live well and long - for the final respect of a man is determined by his mortuary rites.

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